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Indeterminate Governmentality:

Neoliberal Politics in Revolutionary Iran, 1968-1979

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Political Science

by

Arash Davari

2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Indeterminate Governmentality:
Neoliberal Politics in Revolutionary Iran, 1968-1979

by

Arash Davari

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Kirstie M. McClure, Co-Chair

Professor Mark Q. Sawyer, Co-Chair

This dissertation situates the emergence of revolutionary resistance in Pahlavi Iran in parallel with the emergence of neoliberal political rationality in the Middle East. In the process, it theorizes neoliberalism anew. Through an engagement with archives of social practice in Iran and its diaspora between 1968 and 1979, neoliberalism is presented as a political rationality that involves rhetorical disavowal at root — what I refer to as indeterminate governmentality. The study employs parallelism as a theoretical construct reflecting the logic of the revolutionary transformation and periodic shift at hand. The disavowals considered include renderings of a collective on individualist terms; formations of solidarity through empathy; and orientations toward order in the production of disorder. The archival material considered includes state documents; activist records, ephemera, and publications; theoretical texts; literature; popular cinema; periodicals; and ethnographic interviews. In sum, I argue that an event variably labelled Iranian or Islamic may just as well be understood as the first neoliberal revolution.

The dissertation of Arash Davari is approved.

Ali Behdad

Joshua F. Dienstag

James L. Gelvin

Mark Q. Sawyer, Committee Co-Chair

Kirstie M. McClure, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| INTRODUCTION The Existence of Non-Existence..... | 1 |
| Introduction | |
| I. The First Neoliberal Revolution? | |
| II. An Outline of the Argument: Theorizing Neoliberalism as Emergence | |
| III. Scope and Method | |
| CHAPTER 1 Iran '68..... | 25 |
| Introduction | |
| I. Embedded State Power | |
| II. Neoliberal Resistance | |
| III. “Non-Political” Associational Activity | |
| IV. Islam and Politics in a Neoliberal Period | |
| CHAPTER 2 A Return to Which Self?..... | 76 |
| Introduction | |
| I. The Ummah and its Imam | |
| II. <i>Bāzgasht</i> , or Imagining the Universal as Particular | |
| III. <i>Shahādat</i> , or the Political Ethics of Action-Provoking Thought | |
| IV. <i>Ummat</i> , or the Articulation of an Indeterminate Collective Subject | |
| CHAPTER 3 Neo-Individualism..... | 122 |
| Introduction | |
| I. Neo-Individualism as Narrative Dissensus | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| II. <i>Qaysar</i> and the Limits of Interpellation | |
| III. <i>Qaysar</i> and Narrative Dissensus | |
| CHAPTER 4 Auto-Empathy..... | 162 |
| Introduction | |
| I. A Revolution’s Own Laws | |
| II. The “Non-Political” Politics of Fortieth-Day Commemorations | |
| III. Husayn, or the Uprising’s Political Subjects | |
| IV. Zaynab, or the Uprising’s Non-Political Subjects | |
| CHAPTER 5 Narrative Revolts..... | 217 |
| Introduction | |
| I. Refiguring the Hedgehog: A Collective Will as Narrative Effect | |
| II. The End of Narrative? | |
| III. Revolutionary “Non-Politics” | |
| IV. Neo-Individualism in Narrative Care | |
| AFTERWORD..... | 267 |
| Introduction | |
| I. Creating Order | |
| II. Founding Indeterminacy | |
| III. Iran’s Constituent Moments? | |
| APPENDICES..... | 287 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 295 |

LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES, AND APPENDICES

Chapter 1

Table 1. Translation of list of religious associations. Originally published in ‘Alī Asadī and Hurmuz Mihrdād (eds.), *Naqsh-i Rasanihā dar Pushtībānī-yi Tawsi‘a-yi Farhangī* [The Role of Media in Cultural Development] (Tehran: Communications and Development Institute, 1976/1355), 161-63.

Chapter 3

Figure 1. Screen shot from *Qaysar*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsMED4BWn68>.

Appendix A

Poster proclaiming Gholāmrezā Takhti’s death a suicide. Reproduction of original copy. Author’s personal collection. Accompanied by translation.

Appendix B

Poster calling for a mourning commemoration of Gholāmrezā Takhti by youth from Khāni Ābād. Reproduction of original copy. Author’s personal collection. Translation included in Chapter 4.

Appendix C

Poster commemorating Gholāmrezā Takhti and lamenting his death, signed by “the personnel and workers of the Pirouz institute of printing and publishing.” Reproduction of original copy. Author’s personal collection. Accompanied by translation.

Appendix D

Kayhān, Special Supplement, no. 10047, 1 Dey 2535/22 December 1976, pp. 1. Accompanied by translation.

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

I have used two systems of transliteration throughout.

For all proper nouns, I have used the system employed in common spellings of popular names: Pahlavi, Khomeini, Tehran, Qom, Shi‘a, Shi‘ism, Shari‘ati, Golesorkhi, Qaysar, Ashura, etc. I have amended this system to include a hatted “a” (ā) for less common names when and where necessary in order to account for long vowels: Hedāyat, Tāsu‘ā, Tāleqāni, etc.

For words that are not proper nouns and/or when I have transliterated directly from Persian, I have used the system found in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*). These words are presented in italics.

When presenting direct quotes from interviews, I have included transcriptions in Persian alongside English translations so that, in cases where readers do not have access to original texts, they may nevertheless make an informed judgment with respect to my translations.

All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

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VITA

Arash Davari received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Comparative Literature from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 2003. He graduated Magna Cum Laude, with College and Departmental Honors, and completed minors in Political Science, French and Francophone Studies, and Near Eastern Languages and Cultures. He earned a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) in 2008 and a second M.A. degree in Political Science at UCLA in 2012. He has completed Arabic language programs at Columbia University (2012) and the American University in Cairo (2013) as well as Persian language programs at University of Tehran's Dekhoda Institute (2009) and the University of Texas, Austin (2013-14). He co-founded B|ta'arof Magazine in 2011 and served on its editorial board between 2012 and 2014. He attended the Oral History Institute at UC Berkeley in the summer of 2013 and was employed as a researcher with UCLA's Center for Oral History Research in 2014. He received UCLA's International Institute Fieldwork Fellowship in 2014-15 and a Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship in 2015-16. He will be an assistant professor in the Politics department at Whitman College beginning in 2016-17.

INTRODUCTION | THE EXISTENCE OF NON-EXISTENCE

A wife says: If there is no oil, what are we supposed to do in this cold? The old man says: Well, it's a revolution. A revolution has this too. Everyone must endure [*tahamul*]. Tolerance [*tahamul*] too is a kind of participation ... Let us laugh at the strikes, the lack of work, the lack of electricity, the lack of oil, the lack of gasoline. These are all our will [*mayl*] now crystallized. When electricity is non-existent, when oil is non-existent, when gas is non-existent, when newspapers are non-existent, when banks are non-existent, when radio is non-existent, when television is non-existent ... it means that we exist, that we resist. That we are alive. That we do not accept all things. That we ourselves wish to determine our fate. So let us smile. Let us tell others what meaning these non-existences hold, the existence they denote: our existence and their non-existence. The old man was right. This is a revolution. A revolution has these things too. Let us appreciate their value.¹

- *Hambastigī* [*Solidarity*], 3 December 1978

In the late Fall of 1978, a general strike threatened to paralyze the Pahlavi state as Iran teetered on the edge of revolution. This parable, published in a liberal samizdat at the time, articulated a notion that stretched beyond everyday peoples' solidarity. Or rather, that solidarity signifies more than just support for the general strike or even the revolution itself. The 1979 revolution in Iran declared the "existence" of large swaths of the Iranian population through the "non-existence" of a determinate collective will. That non-existence, moreover, was the condition of the revolution's appearance as a mass event. In other words, unlike other revolutionary subjects — most famously, the proletariat of Karl Marx's projected communist revolution — the 1979 revolution in Iran did not follow a teleological script. In asserting its

¹ *Hambastigī*, n. 1 (12 Āzar 1357/3 December 1978), 4.

existence in this fashion, Iran's revolutionary subject asserted the existence of a new kind of social movement predicated in terms of non-existence.²

Indeterminate Governmentality: Neoliberal Politics in Revolutionary Iran, 1968-1979 situates and theorizes this phenomenon in light of a broader global and regional historical context. It is my contention that the negative features of the 1979 revolution in Iran (i.e. the existence of non-existence) reflect a parallel between the revolution's emergence and the emergence of a neoliberal political rationale in the Middle East. On these terms, revolutionary discourse between 1968 and 1979 involved what I call an indeterminate governmentality. The existence of this phenomenon allows us to wonder whether or not an event variably labelled Iranian or Islamic was in fact the first neoliberal revolution.

I

The First Neoliberal Revolution?

Drawing on Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality, Timothy Mitchell has defined the modern state as an effect of disciplined social practice.³ In this light, efforts to proclaim the presence of determinative structures — whether of the state or as the state — are nothing more than the proliferation of metaphysical constructs masquerading as foundational truth. Mitchell's work has cut across debates concerning the relationship between structure and agency.⁴ His

² Michel Foucault and Charles Kurzman have articulated this dynamic albeit on different terms. See Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits II*, 694, 790-94; Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 5-6, 142. I discuss both arguments in detail below.

³ Foucault, "Governmentality"; Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, x-xiii; Mitchell, "The Limits of the State"; Mitchell, "Society, Economy, and the State Effect," 179-80. In lectures first published after Mitchell's intervention, Foucault himself similarly suggests thinking against a theory of the state precisely because that kind of theory presumes its essence. See Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 76-77.

⁴ Against voluntarist notions of agency, Theda Skocpol describes revolutionary change through structured social patterns while accounting for contingency by "bringing the state back in" as an autonomous institution. See Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 17-18; Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In," 20-21, 28-29. For William Sewell, Skocpol's analysis does not adequately consider ideology as a separate cause in the conjectural unfolding of revolutionary events. Where Skocpol takes ideology to be the result of "people's conscious intentions" (and hence a matter of voluntarism), Sewell understands ideologies (and culture more broadly) to be the anonymous and

account presents state formation as the product of colonial designs forced upon the colonized while nevertheless gesturing at the agency of the colonized in its perpetual reproduction.

What Mitchell captured, like Michel Foucault in a different context before him, was an epochal shift to modernity in the Middle East. Unlike Foucault's later work, however, Mitchell's account did not appreciate the quality of periodic shifts within the ambit of that broader epoch. The recent occurrence of the Arab Uprisings has occasioned revisions to the historiography of the Middle East on these terms. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, parts of the Middle East began to undergo a periodic shift to a neoliberal discursive order, followed in 1976 by the introduction of neoliberal political-economic reforms.⁵ Whereas the establishment of modernity involved a fundamental transformation of the reigning social and epistemological framework, this shift did not. It instead extended potentialities inherent to modernity while nevertheless producing markedly unique modalities of state power and resistance to it.

Where Mitchell's definition of the state as effect highlights the agency of everyday people in accordance with a pre-determined plan, neoliberal (state) power and modes of resistance revolve around the ideal of unregulated self-determination. In other words, with the

impersonal products of an interrelationship between "semantic items" and "social forces." They are, in other words, structures unto themselves. He accordingly breaks with Skocpol's "far too reified conception of social structure," defining agency in a non-voluntarist fashion as constituent of structure. The statements and actions of a group of willful actors, acting within the parameters of pre-existing structures, produce (in cases of transformation) and reproduce (in cases of stasis) an ideological structure against their stated or desired intentions. Hence ideological structures — like *all* agentive actions — are "anonymous" and "collective." See Sewell, "Ideologies and Social Revolutions," 60-61; Sewell, "A Theory of Structure," 8-9, 20. While he recognizes that agency is shaped and defined by the structural circumstances within which it occurs, Sewell identifies genuine agency beyond any structural framework — a scepter that perpetually haunts the stability of whatever structures may exist. In this respect, he seems to agree with Skocpol's rejoinder, which posits agency against structure. See Skocpol, "Cultural Idioms and Political Ideologies," 86-96. Mitchell takes Sewell's critique of Skocpol one step further, refusing any separation between structure and agency. For Mitchell, these divisions are not real but rather "appearances" created "internally, within the network of institutional mechanisms through which a certain social and political order is maintained." See Mitchell, "Society, Economy, and the State Effect," 174-75.

⁵ See Gelvin, "American Global Economic Policy," 199-206; Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings*, 16-19; Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, 259-70.

latter, the principle of governmentality transgresses the bounds of what it itself prescribes without affecting a radical (or epochal) break that would defy the logic of governmentality as such. Instead the implementation of governmentality issues from the self-conscious social practices of its subjects. The ensuing model of state formation has since exacerbated potentialities inherent to the ideal of self-determination. In a neoliberal state, we are all perpetually “self-determined.” Our disciplined social practices are projected as the products of self-designated programs, deriving on their own from the private interests, actions, and whims of atomistic individuals.⁶

Neoliberalism is, of course, a contested term. This study argues for an understanding of neoliberalism as a discursive shift within modernity that occasions policies for institutional change predicated on “disembedding” capital from the nation-state.⁷ My use of the term discursive is deliberate. Following Foucault, I invoke discourse as a reference to disciplined and

⁶ My point takes inspiration from Khaled Fahmy’s critique of Mitchell’s *Colonising Egypt*. According to Fahmy, Mitchell’s identification of the repressive features of modern discipline and order obscures his appreciation of the often disordered and messy ways in which structures like the state come to appear, thereby presenting the actions of everyday people as homogenous and automatic. See Fahmy, *All the Pasha’s Men*, 30-32. Extending Fahmy’s argument, we might say that Mitchell’s work focuses on the emergence of *the* modern state to the detriment of analyzing differences in practices within and between various states. We are left to wonder how various types of states — including post-revolutionary states within a modern epoch — reappear.

⁷ My definition of neoliberalism integrates a number of potentially conflicting perspectives. In the first instance, I borrow from David Harvey’s account of neoliberalism as a transformation in global political economic norms and practices. See Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2. As others have noted, however, Harvey is overly concerned with elite intentionality — a tendency that borders on characterizing neoliberalism as a conspiracy of global proportions. To attenuate the reductionist implications therein, I follow Terry Flew in describing neoliberalism as “a project for institutional change grounded in particular ideas about the social and the nature of liberal government.” See Flew, “Six Theories of Neoliberalism,” 67. Flew re-frames neoliberal reforms in terms of historical particularity, as a potential program pursued by certain states only when and where their “path-dependent” institutional trajectory could occasion and benefit from the reforms in question. Flew, however, repeats the same metaphysical conceit found in Skocpol’s account of the state: he too readily attributes a Foucaultian interpretation of neoliberalism to the lectures delivered at the Collège de France in 1978-79. There, Foucault engages Max Weber’s work on institutions, but also delimits his remarks in general to “the art of government.” See Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 2-3. Flew’s historical institutionalist approach grants institutions otherworldly powers — insofar as they are understood as autonomous and hence impervious to radical change from beyond the framework afforded by the institution. As Mitchell’s critical account of the establishment of the modern state demonstrates, these institutions only appear in and through consistently reproduced (i.e. disciplined) human action.

routine social practice. In this sense, I adapt Wendy Brown's definition of neoliberalism as a political rationality that converts of "all aspects of existence" (most notably the political) to "the economic" (or the social). At root, I argue, neoliberalism is a political rationality predicated on disavowal.⁸ In this regard, before we may lament and critique the conversion — in fact, to better understand its particularity — we must understand the contingent events through which it occurred. What are the disciplined social practices that make neoliberal institutional changes appear as they do? How did those social practices emerge from below?

In order for technocratic institutional policies from above to take hold, these discursive changes must first take place. "Shifts," however, never occur in all places at once; nor do they happen in a teleological fashion. Instead, they emerge with fits and starts and in accordance to the specificities of lived experience in each locale. This study first outlines and then theorizes the historical parallels between a global discursive shift to neoliberalism and the emergence of Iranian resistance to the Pahlavi state. In so doing, in at least one context, we can see how non-state actors began to adopt practices that could eventually accommodate and reproduce its institutional policies.

Following World War II, industrialized states driven by shared social objectives reached a compromise concerning international monetary policy and domestic economic sovereignty. That system, later referred to as "embedded liberalism," struck a balance between the extremes of economic nationalism (limited via multilateralism in trade policy) and free trade (limited by

⁸ See Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 9-11, 17. Jodi Dean contests Brown's characterization; in place of political rationality, Dean sees ideology, pointing to the fact that a separation between the political (i.e. the state) and the social (i.e. market forces) actually grounds the operation of neoliberalism (i.e. the state bailing out banks). See Dean, "Neoliberalism's Defeat of Democracy." We may, however, redefine the political rationality of neoliberalism as disavowal, thereby accounting for the exercise of state power for the purposes of establishing the conversion without reverting to a framework of ideology. Elsewhere, Brown also considers the separation between the political and the social; Jackson further examines the point with reference to the Pinochet regime in Chile. Brown, *Edgework*, 43; cf. Jackson, "Not Yet An End."

the unhindered ability of states to intervene in their domestic economies as they wished).⁹

Neoliberalism promised to abandon embedded liberalism in favor of a new mode of political-economic practice where “human well-being” would be secured by unlimited or “free” economic activity in the market. In a reduced role, the state would simply secure private property rights.

1968 was pivotal to making this institutional policy discursively viable. That year, social movements in a number of cities — including Paris, Prague, Mexico City, and Chicago — threatened existing state power through mass-based urban protest. The protests derived their appeal from a tenuous combination of individual freedom with collective justice. In their immediate moment, each movement failed. Yet the ramifications of the event were felt across a number of social domains. On the one hand, existing neoliberal theory began to strike a chord among entrenched elites; these elites sought to co-opt the appeal of the 1968 protests by isolating individual freedom from collective justice claims.¹⁰ On the other hand, the same year marked a transition in the modes of resistance available to social activists, manifest in the rising relevance of transnational guerrilla warfare and human rights discourse. In their wake, some social movements turned to more radical techniques, channeling the spirit of ‘68 into violent actions meant to overcome resistance to the protests. For others still, the failures of 1968 fostered a turn away from collective action. Instead, individual human rights became the language of social justice, replacing the utopian models that defined liberation movements during decolonization.¹¹

⁹ Ruggie, “International Regimes,” 393-398.

¹⁰ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 41-42.

¹¹ Moyn characterizes this transition at the level of ideas: a general loss of faith in collective utopian ideals gave way to anti-political and individualist principles, i.e. the “last utopia” available to social actors. See Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 1-10, 88, 141. His emphasis on interpreting this transition as intellectual history, however, overlooks the role of state actors while over-generalizing with respect to the consciousness of non-state social activists. For an alternate, political history, see Mazower, *Governing the World*, 306-347. As an antidote to the limitations in both Moyn and Mazower, this study presents an historical account of the lived social-cultural transformations that occurred in one non-Western context.

Changes in the immediate strategies adopted by popular actors occasioned a broader discursive shift to neoliberalism where the modern state-as-effect could appear anew. What was the specific nature of that discursive shift? How did it come into being? How might an appreciation of these changes at a discursive level (i.e. in how emergent norms of power were embodied) augment our understanding of the modern state? In short, how did a periodic shift to neoliberalism alter processes of modern state production and reproduction?

The answer to these questions — the questions animating this dissertation — brings us back to Foucault (theoretically), the Middle East (geographically), and 1968 (temporally). May '68 had an enormous impact on anti-foundationalist French thinkers seeking to open new horizons for political action and intellectual inquiry. Not one to shy away from contemporary events, its effects informed much of Foucault's writings in the years to come. His interpretations of the Iranian Revolution ten years later — when and where he claimed to have rediscovered on even better terms the spirit of revolution briefly witnessed in 1968 — were not immune.¹²

In the late summer and early fall of 1978, Foucault made two trips to Iran as the uprising and general strike against the Pahlavi regime reached their heights. As evidenced by the various articles and interviews he produced in response, he was the first to catch a glimpse of the revolution's historical particularity. He identified an “irreducibility” among Iran's revolutionary masses despite an array of factional difference. The observation of “irreducibility” — predicated on a shared negation of the existing order as opposed to any affirmative political agenda — led Foucault to describe events as the emergence of a non-statist and non-teleological “collective

¹² Foucault wrote that the “collective will” in Iran was a bit like those of European students in the 1960s. Instead of a “liberation of desires,” however, it was marked by emancipation [*affranchisement*] from the presence of global hegemony. Elsewhere, Foucault contrasts the varied objectives of 1968 with the singular focus of 1979. See Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 715, 701. Yet despite these differences, as Ghamari-Tabrizi argues, a similar “spirit” of revolt existed for Foucault in both events. See Ghamari-Tabrizi, “When Life,” 285.

will.” In Iran, he had found a revolutionary experience in and of the present, unfettered not only by the determinist promise of the past but also by any sense of causality projected onto the future.¹³

Despite (or perhaps because of) its ingenuity, this framework seems to have prevented Foucault from considering the broader historical implications of the event unfolding before his eyes: he attributed the irreducibility of the moment to a “political spirituality” characterized by Shi‘a mourning practices and a non-scriptural interpretation of Islam. This rhetorical move was not atypical. Across the corpus of his work, Foucault identifies modes of resistance predicated on forces that lie outside of an otherwise all-encompassing relationship between power and knowledge. The “living being of literature” in *The Order of Things* becomes “bodies and pleasures” in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* and then finally, in Iran, a “political spirituality.”¹⁴ Each of these constructs signal un-ordered aspects of contemporary life that may at any moment foster resistance to management within disciplinary regimes; the all-pervasive nature of those regimes necessitated the a-historical nature of resistance to them. This feature of Foucault’s writings certainly may have occasioned his perspicuity in identifying a non-teleological collective subject — a subject *not* determined by the progressive unfolding of

¹³ Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 714; cf. Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 220. For interpretations of Foucault’s Iran writing along these lines, see Honig, “What Foucault Saw,” 310-11; Ghamari-Tabrizi, “When Life,” 276-79.

¹⁴ In his earlier work, literature presents a “counter-discourse” that allows us to appreciate the absent presence of the forgotten yet primal being that language referred to in pre-modern times. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 42-44. By pursuing this “raw being,” we may take a critical posture against the systems of discourse that define the modern. Similarly, towards the end of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault suggests that modern, bio-political forms of power can only be resisted through recourse to the experience of bodily drives and urges that rest beyond discourse. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 150-57. What Foucault calls “political spirituality” is similarly predicated on a notion of “the living” over and against petrified legalistic norms, rules, and doctrines. He accordingly embraces aspects of Shi‘a Islam that refer to Sufi resistance against the codification of religion as law. These challenges (worked into later forms of jurisprudence) invoked the importance of the spirit and ethos animating Islam at its founding moments as a guide for action in the present. We might say that Foucault found a reflection of his critique of modern law within this tradition.

historical events. By necessity, however, that very sensibility also prevented Foucault from situating Iran's collective revolutionary subject in relation to a parallel historical moment.

The problem extends beyond Foucault's reliance on specificity. Where Foucault attributes the "irreducibility" he saw in Iran to "political spirituality," Charles Kurzman's 2004 book *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* presents the indeterminate quality of collective belief as a general construct. Extrapolating from the Iranian case, Kurzman argues that the only viable explanation for the occurrence of mass-based revolutionary action is an "anti-explanation." Social scientific attempts to retroactively predict and make sense of events like 1979 by investigating logical developments within the fabric of existing structures — from the state to networks, economics, culture, and the military — inevitably fall short of a very simple fact: masses decide to participate in a revolution only when they believe the revolution will succeed. This collective belief can never be planned or predicted.¹⁵

While all mass-based revolutions certainly involve an element of indeterminacy, not all modern revolutions present themselves on these terms. In this respect, questions about the place of the event in global history remain unanswered. What was it about the 1960s and 1970s when Iran's revolutionary resistance to the Shah took form that makes the 1979 revolution such an appealing case for discussing "irreducible" and "unthinkable" social change? How might we describe the relationship between the 1979 Iranian Revolution and a periodic shift to neoliberalism in the Middle East? How does a neoliberal political rationale — an indeterminate governmentality — make the appearance of revolutionary change "unthinkable"?

¹⁵ Kurzman's argument extrapolates from the Iranian case to formulate a broader interpretive principle regarding popular revolutionary change (specifically, our inability to explain it). See Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 9, 170-71. His efforts to respond to social science, however, lead to an inversion where that which cannot be universalized (e.g. collective belief) becomes a universal principle (e.g. an 'anti-explanation'). Here, "belief" replaces the "state" or "structure" as an ungrounded metaphysical construct. By necessity, then, it too removes the Iranian Revolution from the specificity of its immediate historical context.

II

An Outline of the Argument: Theorizing Neoliberalism as Emergence

This dissertation argues that neoliberalism is at core a mode of governmentality based on disavowal and that the emergence of this governmentality paralleled the emergence of revolutionary resistance in Iran. In this respect, the emergence of neoliberalism and the emergence of revolutionary resistance in Iran, while historically contingent, were not unrelated. Rather, it is because of their distinctly parallel historical relationship that the Iranian Revolution of 1979 is the first, and paradigmatic, neoliberal revolution. Just as the irreducibility and unpredictability of the Revolution derives from a collective belief in the refusal, or negation, of the Pahlavi regime — a collective “no” — neoliberalism too is a system of negation, deriving its force and identity from that which it rejects more so than the affirmation of any tangible program or action. Neoliberalism uses state power to undermine states even as it requires the state at all costs in order to survive; it similarly advances its political agenda in terms that are avowedly “non-political.” In short, it does what it does by saying it is not that which it is. The act of saying is not so much an untruth (or matter of false consciousness) as it is a constitutive and performative part of the phenomenon.

Woven through this study’s five chapters are three interrelated themes and sub-arguments. The themes are: (1) the relationship between the individual and the collective; (2) solidarity; and (3) aesthetics. My sub-arguments in relation to each are: (1) that the assertion of individualism may occur despite and even through collectivism in such a way that the collective is rendered in terms of an uninhibited individual; (2) that a rise in “non-political” politics as the primary form of political action may produce solidarity in a collective subject without compromising plurality; and (3) that narrative may function as a form of dissensus, in the process

disrupting sharp conceptual divisions between ordinary and extraordinary politics. In what follows, I present the sub-arguments in detail before providing a chapter outline.

(1) This study emerges in response to historiographical insights produced by the incidence of the Arab Uprisings in 2010-11.¹⁶ Against depictions of Iran as exceptional or an outlier, the archive of the 1979 revolution presents a site where the historiography of the Middle East and the changing character of social movements since 1968 converge.¹⁷ The tenor of popular movements in the region from the Iranian opposition onward has increasingly emphasized the sovereignty of individuals beyond the jurisdiction of nation-states. Since 1968, the figure of a rights-bearing and autonomous individual has become a central trope of resistance in the region, shaping the language of even collective social justice claims. The archive of the Iranian Revolution allows us to peer under the hood, so to speak, where we may better discern the logic underlying the trope.

(2) Similarly after 1968, various factors have given rise to “non-political” politics as a prominent form of activism both globally and in Iran. Rather than understand “non-politics” in opposition to the political, this dissertation explores the ambiguity within the formulation. “Non-

¹⁶ Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings*, 28-30; Gelvin, “Was There a Mandates Period?,” 429-30; Mikdashi, “Neoliberalism’s Forked Tongue.”

¹⁷ As soon as 2011 occurred, many reflected on similarities to and differences with 1979. An informative roundtable in *IJMES* is representative. For hints of similarities in mechanism between the two events, see Kurzman, “The Arab Spring,” 163-64. For an account of ideological similarities and differences that posits the presence of ideological factions in 1979 against the so-called “postideological phenomenon” of 2011, see Amanat, “The Spring of Hope,” 147. For a related contrast between an ideological (1979) as opposed to a non-ideological (2011) revolution and a separate discussion of similarities in a shared demand for freedom, see Kashani-Sabet, “Freedom Springs Eternal,” 156-58. For distinctions drawn between a revolution with a charismatic leader (1979) and a leaderless revolution (2011), see Nabavi, “The ‘Arab Spring,’” 153-54. For a loosely related caution against comparisons that take 1979 as blueprint for 2011 and a call instead for “detailed and comprehensive histories” of each event separately, see Keshavarzian, “Beyond 1979 and 2011,” 159-60. This study partially takes up Keshavarzian’s call. Instead of comparison, however, it attends to new historiographical perspectives introduced by recent events, turning the arrow of influence around to point from 2011 to 1979. In this regard, insofar as “the social scientific literature on revolutions in the past three decades has increasingly stressed the unpredictability of revolutions,” we must not simply follow interpretive trends but also reflect on why they happen to have occurred “in the past three decades.”

political” politics signals political action that presents itself as what it is not, thriving where the separation between permissible and illicit activity is unclear. While this kind of social practice has perhaps always existed, between 1968 and 1979 in Iran it became a prominent form of domestic political practice and eventually revolutionary participation. As the above epigraph notes, “Tolerance [*tahamul*] too is a kind of participation.”

Despite some resemblance, this formulation crucially differs from Asef Bayat’s concept of “social nonmovements.”¹⁸ The term nonmovements describes a “pragmatic politics of the poor” that defies ideology insofar as it is “overwhelmingly quiet, rather than audible.” By contrast, what I call “non-political” politics *appears to be* non-ideological but is actually an ideology predicated on disavowal, i.e. an ideology of non-ideology. In this respect, “non-political” politics may involve the making visible or audible of an emergent neoliberal rationale that could not be seen or heard in the existing police order of an embedded liberal state. Moreover, where the logic of nonmovements relies on a demarcation between practice and politics, “non-political” politics relies on the inability to distinguish between what are strictly practices of survival or redress, on the one hand, and what could possibly act as political protest, on the other. In other words, where Bayat’s formulation requires a sharp distinction between extraordinary protestation and ordinary practice, “non-political” politics requires a slippage. In this respect, practices of ordinary politics may be found at the heart of an extraordinary revolutionary movement.

(3) Rather than begin with partitions between the extraordinary and the ordinary, this study follows Jacques Rancière’s example in understanding politics as a process of subjectivation that creates a rupture in the logic of rule. Rancière presents political subjectivation

¹⁸ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 14-16, 19-20.

as dissensus, a making visible or audible of that which cannot be seen or heard within a “determined, sensible world.”¹⁹ According to his account, the ordinary (what Rancière calls “the police”) is perpetually under threat of being redefined and reshaped by the extraordinary — that is, equality as a presupposition (what Rancière calls “politics”). Unlike post-1968 France — where a rise in social scientific discourse determined the sensible world, leading Rancière to present dissensus as discontinuity and fragmentation — the specific context of post-1968 Iran called for dissensus through the assertion of narrative continuity.²⁰ Like Václav Havel’s discussion of life after the Prague Spring, an increasingly authoritarian Pahlavi state predicated on corporatism and collectivism produced “a bureaucratic order of gray monotony that stifles all individuality” — where “[i]nstead of events, we are offered nonevents.”²¹ Under these circumstances, dissensus appeared through the assertion of individualist narratives that defied a state script of nonevents.

This study accordingly weaves a discussion of narrative throughout. The concept of narrative presented here draws from the work of Paul Ricœur. For Ricœur, narrative involves a three-part mimesis split across “prefiguration,” “configuration,” and “refiguration.” Prefiguration refers to the stories available in any given cultural system, the stories that already circulate among us and orient us to another. These are the stories a storyteller may draw upon in order to

¹⁹ Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 224-26.

²⁰ For Rancière’s argument that “bottom-up” social science prominent in post-1968 France necessarily involves literary procedures, see *ibid.*, 220-22; Rancière, *The Names of History*, 8-9.

²¹ Havel, *Open Letters*, 72, 74. This letter of Havel’s is reproduced (nearly in full) and discussed as a model for fundamental reform in Iran in a similar (second) letter written by Ali Asghar Hājsayyed-Djavādi on 25 December 1976. See Hājj Sayyid Javādī, *Du Nāmah*, 156-78. Hājsayyed-Djavādi’s letter was widely circulated at the time and formed a rallying cry of the activist opposition’s initial charge against the Pahlavi regime. See “Introduction” in *The Iranian Bulletins*, v. In an interview, Hedāyat Matin-Daftari presented himself as the anonymous author of this introduction. Hedāyat Matin-Daftari, in discussion with the author, July 2015, Paris, France.

compose a plot comprehensible to an audience. Configuration refers to the act of emplotment when the narrator composes a story that is meaningful. Finally, refiguration signals the activity of readers who receive and understand configured narratives in a fashion that relates to their real world experiences beyond the text. These three moments are not related linearly but rather constitute a spiral-like movement. Acts of configuration draw from the terrain of prefiguration in an unpredictable fashion while acts of refiguration work in turn to change the terrain that configuration draws from (i.e. prefiguration).²²

This dissertation naturally contains its own narrative thread. Generally speaking, I present events in chronological order from 1968 until 1979. A more deliberate pattern, however, is also woven into the material presented therein. Chapters 1 and 2 present the conjectural transformations and ideational developments that furnished an orientation toward revolutionary action in pre-1979 Iran. Chapters 3 and 4 consider efforts at emplotment by artists and activists that drew upon and echoed the developments discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. These include public narratives about the individual and the collective (Chapter 3) as well as initial revolutionary demonstrations (Chapter 4), both of which disrupted the order of the sensible in Pahlavi state. Chapter 5 turns to the period lasting from August 1978 until after February 1979 when implicitly non-teleological activist configurations from the initial revolutionary uprising were received and refigured in explicitly “unthinkable” ways by a plural revolutionary mass.

Chapter 1, “Iran ’68,” argues for 1968 as a turning point in contemporary Iranian history. I position the emergence of a distinctly revolutionary discourse in Iran in parallel with the emergence of neoliberalism. The argument hinges on two related sets of parallels. First, at the

²² For a discussion of the relationship between these three moments as “an endless spiral” as opposed to “a vicious circle,” see Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 71-76.

level state power, 1968 marked a shift in the global status of Pahlavi state policy; thereafter state efforts to implement corporatist welfare policies domestically aligned with the embedded liberalism of the New International Economic Order (NIEO). That shift created a second parallel. New opportunities for agitation indirectly placed oppositional activists from various groupings in an unspoken and even undesirable strategic alliance with U.S. foreign policy initiatives designed to undermine the NIEO. Meanwhile, the all-encompassing logic of a corporatist state gave rise to “non-political” associational activity in daily disciplined social practice, blurring the lines between resistance and state reproduction. That equivocation facilitated the emergence of neoliberalism as a distinctly periodic shift within the modern epoch.

It may be objected that the very notion of a periodic shift, especially as articulated by the *Annales* school, repeats the structuralism that Mitchell writes against.²³ My intention in describing a periodic shift is *not* to impute a structural relationship of cause-and-effect whereby a neoliberal period produces a particular revolutionary discourse and/or outcome in Iran, thereby disavowing my own role as narrator. Rather, my emphasis on a *parallel* between the emergence of neoliberalism in the Middle East and the emergence of revolutionary discourse in Iran is meant to posit a non-necessary relationship between the phenomena that reflects the indeterminacy central to the discursive formation. The chapter concludes by reassessing historiographical debates about an Iranian or an Islamic Revolution.

Chapter 2, “A Return to Which Self?,” turns to the notion of “Islamic ideology” implicit in both sides of that debate. Through a consideration of speeches and writings by Ali Shari‘ati, I identify a theory of indeterminate popular sovereignty at the heart of a teleological ideological

²³ For critiques of historical periodization along these lines, see De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 3-4; Rancière, *The Names of History*, 1-9.

formulation. Shari‘ati articulates a version of decolonial “return” predicated on a distinct reading of the Karbala paradigm.²⁴ In this rendering, *shahādat* (roughly translated as martyrdom) becomes a process through which a people may see themselves as they are constituted by their beliefs. Part of an effort to respond to the specific nature of Iranian “colonization” as disfiguration, the account inverts Frantz Fanon’s rendering of anti-colonial violence. In so doing, it prioritizes hermeneutics (i.e. narrative continuity) over phenomenology (i.e. corporal discontinuity and fragmentation) without relinquishing an anti-colonial commitment to indeterminacy.

Chapter 3, “Neo-Individualism,” draws a link between Shari‘ati’s immanent critique of Fanon, in particular his emphasis on hermeneutics, and articulations of the relationship between the collective and the individual between 1968 and 1977 in Iranian popular culture. What I call neo-individualism involves expressions of individual sacrifice on behalf of a larger ideal and/or collective that produce an uninhibited (and inadvertent) reassertion of the individual; in the process, the collective is configured in individualist terms. The chapter develops the concept through a close reading of three nominally secular texts: Khosrow Golesorkhi’s televised last defense, Sadeq Hedāyat’s short story “Buried Alive,” and Masoud Kimiāyi’s film *Qaysar*.

²⁴ The Karbala paradigm is a core narrative in Twelver Shi‘ism, one of two major sects in Islam. Shi‘a Muslims comprise between ten to fifteen percent of the world’s Muslim population; about half of the Shi‘a population resides in Iran. The narrative (and the sectarian divide, more generally) pertains to a crisis of succession following the death of the Prophet Mohammad. Where Sunnis believe that leadership of the Muslim community follows from the religious institution of the caliphate where one man (the caliph) held temporal and religious authority, the Shi‘a believed in the institution of the imamate where the leader of the community (the imam) who also possessed supernatural qualities had to be a descendent of the Prophet in a chain of succession. In the Battle of Karbala, which took place in 680 AD during the Umayyad caliphate (661-750), the third Shi‘a imam (the Prophet’s grandson, Husayn) and seventy of his family members and associates were killed by Yazid, the Umayyad caliph at the time. In the symbolic universe that emerged from these events, Husayn and Yazid represented opposites in a spectrum between good and evil. See Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala*, xi, 3-7. By focusing on Shari‘ati and the Karbala paradigm, this study follows Aghaie’s interpretive approach. In the effort to move past state-centered approaches to Iranian history, Aghaie writes: “This set of religious symbols and rituals constitutes the single most pervasive expression of social, political, and cultural ideals through the past century and a half in Iran” and has “proven to be ... very flexible and dynamic.” See *ibid.*, xi, xiii.

Across the board, expressions of an inability to narrate freely as an individual appear through the ironic performance of individual narrative.

Chapter 4, “Auto-Empathy,” amends Kurzman’s account of the revolutionary uprising. Following his lead, I focus on liberal and Islamist activist renderings of events from the Fall of 1977 to the late Summer of 1978. Presenting mourning ceremonies anew — that is, as a manifestation of “non-political” politics — I identify an unexpected basis of solidarity predicated on the convergence between *shahādat* and human rights discourse. I call this basis of solidarity auto-empathy. With this, the chapter presents a cultural frame of reference that coheres with the indeterminate pragmatism of actors on the ground prioritized in Kurzman’s “anti-explanation.” In other words, I present an historically-situated account of the discourse specific to an “unthinkable” revolution.

Chapter 5, “Narrative Revolts,” similarly amends Foucault’s writings on Iran. Taking seriously his invitation to consider “the manner in which [the revolution] was lived” [*la manière dont il était vécu*], I examine interview data from a range of activists.²⁵ The chapter describes the transition from relatively limited activist demonstrations to mass-based rallies and strikes, focusing in particular on the experiences of young activists in the prevailing pro-Khomeini Islamist coalition. On the basis of this material, I argue against the tendency to posit a sharp distinction between ordinary and extraordinary politics — a tendency prevalent among social scientists wedded to structuralism and theorists of radical democracy alike. Instead, reimagining Foucault’s notion of an “irreducible” collective will as an effect of practices oriented toward

²⁵ Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 792.

consonance — including, at one and the same time, narrative and charity work — allows an identification of disciplinary mechanisms *within* the revolt.

The final chapter thus returns to larger questions about the place of the Iranian Revolution in conceptions of social transformation in general. In this regard, examining revolution waged in the language of reform — in the language of a periodic shift to neoliberalism — can teach us about resistance in our contemporary times. Along these lines, in the **Afterword**, I provide a brief consideration post-revolutionary state consolidation in light of the perspective presented throughout.

III

Scope and Method

The historical arguments advanced here are meant to act as a basis for a broader theoretical considerations of social transformation. It will surely disappoint “pure” historians and theorists in the process. I have not attempted to write “the” history of Iranian Revolution; rather I examine an aspect of its history. As a result, a number of important experiences are not included. Similarly, this is not a theorization of neoliberalism as a whole. While the study does not pretend to make a definitive intervention in either disciplinary milieu, it does aim to register a provocation by moving across registers. It is my hope that the reader will keep this broader provocation in mind even as legitimate quibbles with particular points emerge.

As a site of emergence, a revolution (or the extraordinary) is a site of possibility. Just as the event could affirm the indeterminacy integral to it in the form of neoliberal disavowal, it may also constitute a site for resistance to neoliberalism. Read as disciplined everyday practice, nothing about revolutionary history is a given. While this study does not focus on possibilities for resistance to an emergent neoliberalism, it is not my intention to foreclose the possibilities for

that kind of theorization by turning to the Islamic Republic's founding moment. Theorizing resistance to neoliberalism simply rests beyond the scope of this particular study.

I do, however, focus on the aspects of political activism in our contemporary moment that align with neoliberalism. The nature of this focus requires a reconsideration of the category. Based on assessments from ordinary times, the activist is often taken to be a subject directly engaged in contentious politics. This project, however, is a study of the extraordinary. The prospect of “non-political” politics and the fact of a mass-based revolution challenge conventional notions of political activism. Under these circumstances, seemingly innocuous everyday actions — hearing a lecture, watching a film, working in a bureaucratic office, mourning for the dead — both could and could not qualify at once. In what follows, I attend to the revolutionary potential latent in these activities without losing sight of the indeterminacy specific to the periodization at hand.

It is my hope that this perspective challenges some of the assumptions prevalent in discussions of social change in contemporary Iran and its diaspora. In response to a hegemonic official discourse that continues to champion anti-imperialist tropes, a line is often drawn between the presumed radicalism of the past (i.e. 1979) and what is said to be a more appropriately reformist sensibility in the present and for the future. Explicitly or otherwise, the distinction exudes moral intent: the former is bad and the latter is good. In this vein, for those who participated in 1979, discussion of their participation is often presented as the abdication of personal responsibility through contextualization, a confession of guilt, a recantation, or a dirty secret. A reformist magazine in Iran publishes an interview with Abbas Abdi, a leader among the student activists who stormed the U.S. embassy in November of 1979, where Abdi (pictured on the cover) proclaims, “I was never a radical” [*hīchgāh rādīkāl nabūdam*]. In the conversation,

the interviewer challenges Abdi, now a leading theoretician (and critic) of the reform movement, to take responsibility for past actions. After insisting on context, Abdi finally concedes:

And I can say that all of our past was a mistake. I look to the entirety of the situation, not its details. And the whole is the fault of the previous regime and the [political] environment it created. For this very reason, today I behave differently. What is important is that today I do not behave in accordance with yesterday's standards. This is the most important responsibility taken by an individual such as myself.²⁶

Meanwhile, in an interview I conducted with a member of the diaspora, a former employee of the national television station at the time of the revolt recounts feelings of bliss during the one-week occupation just before the revolution succeeded as if doing so were a transgression.

It was madness. For one week, day and night, I was there without sleep... I shouldn't tell your generation this, but if once in your life, in this life, you're able to live this... it would be enough for the entirety of your life. Because humanity really is capable of freedom. You could *see* this. You could *see* it.

دیوانه بازی بود. یک هفته شبانه روز من اونجا بودم و نخواهیدم... یعنی نباید به نسل شما بگم ولی یک بار تو در زندگی تو این عمر زندگی کرده باشی... یعنی اینو زندگی کرده باشی، برای همه عمرت کافی است. برای اینکه واقعاً بشر قابلیت آزادی را داره. یعنی میدیدی اینو. میدیدی!

The publication of an interview that pivots around questions of personal responsibility for past actions and the statement “I shouldn't tell your generation this” (alongside the telling of it) both tell us about a broader ethos informing contemporary oppositional politics and discourse — an ethos oriented against radicalism and revolution. But what if the revolution, despite its radical pretensions, was not actually radical? What if contemporary oppositional discourse oriented against the revolution are an extension of its logic?

A final note on method is in order. I accessed collections and conducted archival research at a number of university libraries in the United States; the Library of Congress (Washington, D.C., U.S.A.); the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam, ND); the Archive for

²⁶ Khujastih-Rahīmī, “*Man Hīchgāh Rādīkāl Nabūdam*,” 44, 52. I present Abdi and this statement as generally representative of a broader radical left faction of Ayatollah Khomeini's supporters in post-revolutionary Iran. That faction turned to reformist politics in the 1990s. See Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 5, 47-50, 60-61, 111-27, 175-78, 252-65. Despite the designation, we should not forget that *this* radical left faction appeared against a broader, non-Khomeinist radical left. At least rhetorically, this difference facilitated its transition to a reformist posture. In this vein, Abdi argues against the notion that the hostage taking weakened the moderates by positing that it weakened the radical left, thereby preserving a space for moderation in the post-revolutionary order. See Khujastih-Rahīmī, “*Man Hīchgāh Rādīkāl Nabūdam*,” 51-52.

Iranian Research and Documentation (Berlin, Germany); the National Archives Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collections (London, UK); the National Library and Archive of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Tehran, Iran); the Parliamentary (Majles) Library (Tehran, Iran); the Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies (Tehran, Iran); the Diplomatic Archives (Paris, France); and a series of private collections in France and Iran. In addition, I conducted a number of formal and informal interviews between 2013 and 2015 in Iran, the Netherlands, Germany, France, and the United States. The interviews included conversations with researchers, but were primarily conversations with individuals as participants in the events examined. Twenty-five of the latter were recorded and transcribed. Two interviewees, both of whom were public figures, granted permission to cite their conversations by name. I have openly cited them when and where applicable. The rest of the interviews have remained anonymous by agreement and necessity.

For the purposes of data construction and analysis, I drew upon a mix of methods depending on the topic and circumstances of the conversation. In certain cases, I used oral history interview techniques to identify historical events missing from the archival record with as much accuracy as possible, challenging interviewees' accounts with documentary evidence when and where applicable.²⁷ In many others, particularly those cited in Chapter 5, I employed a phenomenological method that honed in on experiences of solidarity. A phenomenological method is particularly apt for the kind of questions pursued and broader framework adopted in response here. In particular, it better coheres with the framework Rancière employs in his discussion of dissensus. A phenomenological method does not necessarily hew to an insistence, prevalent in social scientific research, on inductive "bottom-up" research. In the first instance,

²⁷ For a general articulation of the method employed, see Weiss, *Learning from Strangers*, 61-119.

inductive, bottom-up data collection can encourage us to presume the existence of an unadulterated truth — a presumption that denies the inescapable role both we and those we study play as interpreters of information. Moreover, inductive analysis tends to encourage broad conclusions derived from disaggregate parts lacking further parsing. By contrast, a top-down phenomenological approach to data construction and analysis, one that moves from whole to part, encourages researchers to identify points of dis-identification.²⁸

I asked different types of questions from different types of participants. For those who were never direct political activists, I conducted life history interviews with a focus on the feeling and experience of the revolution as it was lived in Iran. For those who were political activists, interviews had two parts. I directed the focus of an initial life history account toward issues regarding the emergence and development of the interviewee's oppositional political disposition. I then supplemented discussions of the revolution as lived experience with more specific questions pertaining to the circumstances of each individual's activism at various stages of the revolutionary process. These interviews were informed by a series of general research questions. The questions were often but not always asked in an indirect fashion.

- On what terms did you become politically active in the revolution?
- How, if at all, did you feel solidarity in the context of the revolution?
- When, if at all, did this feeling come to an end?

Interviews tended to begin with a general statement of my research agenda at the time:

I am completing research for a dissertation about the experience of collective solidarity, or togetherness, that emerged in Iran during the transformative decade of the 1350s (1971–1981). The project will primarily consider the experiences of ordinary people as Iran entered into and successfully completed a major (Islamic) revolution. I am interested in conducting interviews with individuals who were alive and active during the revolution — and who, as a result, experienced some facet of Iran's social transformations during the long 1970s from up close.

این تحقیقات برای تکمیل پایان نامه ی دکترای من در موضوع تجربه ی همبستگی عمومی در دهه ی پر تحول ۱۳۵۰ ایران میباشد. تاکید تحقیقاتم بر تجربیات مردم عادی است، بخصوص در زمانی که ایران وارد انقلاب اسلامی شد و آن را با موفقیت به پایان رساند. علاقه ی من بر این است که با کسانی که در این انقلاب حضور داشته اند و یا فعال بوده اند — کسانی که بخشی از تحولات عظیم ایران را از نزدیک دیده اند و لمس کرده اند — مصاحبه بکنم.

²⁸ See Erickson, "Commentary: Demystifying Data Construction and Analysis," 491-92.

Upon hearing some iteration of this statement, the interviewee would begin speaking. I would respond with versions of the aforementioned questions based on what the interviewee said. In the effort to avoid analytic accounts and instead to attend to the experience at hand, my questions regularly focused on specific events: How did they happen? What were you doing at the time? How did you feel at the moment of? What did you do next?²⁹ These recorded interviews are, admittedly, a relatively small sample size for a large topic. Nevertheless, it is my hope that the range of perspectives covered reflects the diversity of experiences among activists in the revolution. I leave that to the reader to judge.³⁰

Similarly, with respect to my interpretive reading of historical texts, an argument may be advanced that I have taken these texts out of context for the instrumental purpose of making my point. While I reject this criticism's more cynical insinuations, I do not deny the presence of the author. In response, however, I would challenge the assumption of unqualified access to empirical reality. If there is anything the historiography of modern Iran has taught us since 1979, it is the difficulty of extricating an author's experience from a topic of analysis. Views once held with the utmost certainty have changed. That should be evidence enough. I say this not to sanction an arbitrary play of signification but rather to suggest that problems of interpretation, if one chooses to view them as problems, are larger than this study. I have surely been influenced by various contexts — many of which are at a remove from the period and place under investigation. In my view, this should not act as grounds for rejecting the work out of hand. This should: I have attempted to refrain from conceptions of authenticity that obstruct new

²⁹ My approach shares a great deal with — and when it comes to data construction and analysis, borrows directly from — Naghmeh Sohrabi's proposed agenda for writing a history of the "revolutionary experience." See Sohrabi, "Muddling through the Iranian Revolution."

³⁰ In adopting this approach, I drew methodological inspiration from Sawyer, *Racial Politics*, 102-6.

possibilities for interpretation without relinquishing a rigorous engagement with the events at hand. It is, yet again, for the reader to judge whether or not I have succeeded in making the attempt.

CHAPTER 1 | IRAN '68

I then had the feeling of understanding that recent events did not signify the return [*le recul*] of the most archaic [*retardataires*] groups in the face of a very brutal modernization; but rather the rejection, by a whole culture and a whole people, of a *modernization* that is itself an *archaism*. The shah's misfortune is to embody [*faire corps avec*] that archaism. His crime is to maintain through corruption and despotism a fragment of the past in a present that no longer wants it.
- Foucault, "*Le chah a cent ans de retard*"³¹

In his philosophical journalism, Foucault sought to invert the prevalent notion that the Islamic quality of the revolutionary movement in Iran signaled a return to a temporal past in the face of modernization. Instead, he presented the Pahlavi state's modernization policies as an "archaism" out of sync with the times. This provocation rings true in ways Foucault did not consider. Underlying the obvious tenets of ideology and political discourse in Iran at the time was a parallel to the emergence of neoliberalism in the Middle East. In this sense, what the revolution was leaving behind was a mode of governmentality based on embedded liberalism; what it was moving toward was a mode of governmentality based on neoliberal political rationality. The following chapter presents these parallel developments by locating the beginning of Iran's distinctly revolutionary resistance in 1968 — the year when neoliberal discourse similarly began to emerge as hegemonic.

Parallelism is not simply employed as a method here; rather it offers an interpretive perspective that matches the matter at hand. To identify historical events in terms of parallels is to write a history that captures the ethos of negation specific to indeterminate revolutionary

³¹ Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 680; cf. Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 195. When I have relied on other sources for my translation of Foucault's writings, I have listed both sources.

change and neoliberalism alike. Parallel entities are not derivative of one another. Rather they convey a sense of radical simultaneity and shared temporality between two distinct and disparate phenomena. Importantly, the simultaneity of parallel historical events precludes our ability to apply a predictive measure to their relation. True to the essence of the phenomena in question, the events themselves determine our ability to describe their relation as opposed to any structuring logic we may wish to discern beneath the event's unfolding.

As parallel, the concurrent emergence of neoliberal political rationality and new social practices in a place like Iran need not be traced to a single origin in order to operate as part of a shared periodic shift. On these terms, the appearance of a distinctly revolutionary mode of resistance in Iran must be understood not as a by-product of an already established global discourse but rather as emerging with that discourse. There were points of influence between the 1979 revolution and neoliberal modes of resistance as they each came into being, fueling one another along a similarly oriented path; the direction of that influence was mutual. Moreover, their parallel emergence was not centralized. Despite scholarly efforts to attribute the occurrence of each to elite intentionality, there was no single center or source from which they derived. Both were built from below, driven forth by oppositional forces adopting and adapting the most effective strategies of resistance available at the time.³²

This characterization amends a provocative new study by Kevan Harris and Ben Scully that attributes the emergence of “precarity” in the global South to state-centered reforms before the implementation of neoliberal policy. Harris and Scully’s account relies on the identification of an origin in the economy and, by extension, the state as reified constructs. In other words,

³² Parallels are neither analogies nor homologies. An analogy suggests a source (or “analogue”) from which knowledge and information is transferred to a second unlike thing. Homology presumes a shared origin or source separate from the two comparable things produced.

neoliberalism begins when and where its institutional policies become official state and economic policy.³³

Defining the shift to neoliberalism in terms of discourse and everyday social practice adds a popular dimension to these framings. In this regard, the emergence of neoliberalism in the Middle East was not solely a matter of institutional policies that befit the path-dependent historical trajectories of each state. Rather, in response to the challenge posed by the New International Economic Order (NIEO), neoliberal discursive practices emerged from without the Middle Eastern state. The cultivation of practices that could reproduce a neoliberal state-effect were advanced, from above, by non-regional actors and, from below, by regional oppositional forces. These elements were acting independently of one another and often to different ends against a common enemy: entrenched state power in the developing world. They found an ideal target in the post-1968 Pahlavi state apparatus. In this respect, the production of “precarity” through state-centric policies actually forged the conditions for the parallel emergence of neoliberal social practice.

1968 marks the “beginning” of this non-originary relationship. From that year onward, transitions characteristic of neoliberalism found expression in the Iranian context while simultaneously being advanced by events in Iran. This shift in historiographical perspective challenges prevailing historical accounts of 1979. Locating the discursive turn to revolution in 1968 directly refutes a shared emphasis on culture and ideology in conflicting renderings of an Iranian and an Islamic Revolution alike. Instead of a nativist return to a factual past found in both of these accounts, the discourse of the revolution signaled a step toward an indeterminate future.

³³ The authors focus on a definition of neoliberalism as commodification. They then pursue state policy in relation to this characterization. See Harris and Scully, “A hidden counter-movement?,” 418-425.

In Section I, I present parallels between the Pahlavi state and the NIEO — an organization of Third World states in collective pursuit of the promise afforded by embedded liberalism. Between 1968 and the oil embargo of 1973-74, the Shah’s pursuit of short-term interests alongside the NIEO put it at odds with its Western allies, in particular the United States. These conflicts inadvertently planted the seeds for coordinate interstate and popular resistance to the very kind of state power the Shah sought to affirm.

In Sections II and III, I present similar parallels within the ranks of Iranian popular resistance. In Section II, I present the interrelationship between the histories of transnational guerrilla warfare and individual human rights discourse. In Section III, I consider a third mode of social practice that defies the logic of state action and societal reaction underlying conventional accounts of power and resistance.³⁴ “Non-political” associational activity reproduced the state-effect in Pahlavi Iran while cultivating social practices that cohered with a significantly different manifestation of the modern state. In this regard, long before the storied uprisings of the late 1970s, everyday people were already exercising the disciplined actions that could one day beget a neoliberal state-effect.

The parallel quality of the social practices adopted by Iranian resistance to the Pahlavi regime between 1968 and 1979 was predicated on temporal simultaneity and hence a non-derivative relationship. In all these iterations, the Iranian opposition took advantage of the limited opportunities generated by transformations in the operation of Pahlavi state power. Just as the Shah played an instrumental albeit indirect role in the NIEO, resistance to the Pahlavi state

³⁴ Following Mitchell’s example, Cyrus Schayegh argues for the need to expand the scope of historical writing about Pahlavi Iran beyond the framework of state action-societal reaction, a framework that reifies the imagined autonomy of the state. See Schayegh, “Seeing Like a State,” 37-38, 46-48. My efforts here take up Schayegh’s call for alternate modes of historical and social scientific research.

played an instrumental albeit indirect role in the emergence of neoliberalism. Each of these social practices corresponded with a changing global order less and less reliant on earlier models of collective action in favor of isolated and/or avowedly “non-political” agitation. Moreover, each came into being within the Iranian opposition on its own terms even as it aligned with, drew inspiration from, and influenced global patterns from without.

Yet the peculiarity of this parallel meant that the interaction between power and resistance was not solely a matter of state action and reaction. A neoliberal ethos of negation — an insistence on being “not” what one is — challenges dichotomous characterizations of centralized (state) power over and against resistance to it. Instead, “non-political” associational activity could simultaneously reproduce the state (by not threatening the state directly) while fostering social practices that could accommodate the transition to a different mode of power and resistance altogether. The adoption of these practices forged the conditions of possibility for a neoliberal revolution in Iran.³⁵

Section IV takes this framework as a point of departure for a reassessment of the most prevalent reading of the 1979 revolution. That reading, found in both official histories as well as oppositional and scholarly tracts produced abroad, emphasizes the role of political Islam as ideology. Despite their differences, these accounts posit the 15th of Khordād uprising in 1963 as the beginning of the revolution. By contrast, I make a distinction between Islamic ideology and

³⁵ My argument presumes the impossibility of imagining a successful revolutionary movement that openly identifies its modes of resistance as derivative or transparent reflections of an emerging hegemonic order meant to secure the interests of industrialized states. This invites an admitted inconsistency in my attempt to extend Kurzman’s argument. My presumption involves a negative “retroactive prediction” of historical events (i.e. of what could not occur). Ultimately, however, I believe the reality of the Shah’s overt and persistent alignment of state power with U.S. foreign policy in Iran renders this presumption, or “retroactive prediction,” uncontroversial.

Muslim practice. With respect to the latter, the changes significant for the emergence of a distinctly revolutionary movement occurred in 1968.

I

Embedded State Power

Historian Ervand Abrahamian once characterized state power in the Pahlavi regime in terms of “uneven development.” We might imagine uneven-ness on different terms.³⁶ In the wake of the 1953 coup d’état that deposed Mohammad Mossadeq, a democratically elected prime minister seeking to nationalize Iran’s oil industry, the Shah interchanged strategies in an effort to fortify his tenuous grasp on state power. Often, the state employed outright repression. At times, however, it allowed for increased social and political freedoms to curry favor among a disenchanted populace. This ambivalent interchange, or uneven-ness, mirrored the state’s efforts to effect socio-economic development under the auspices of modernization. The Pahlavi state set out to transform Iran from on high, implementing drastic social changes designed to benefit the populace without fostering adequate organic support or initiative among the very people those changes would most profoundly effect.

In pursuing these tactics, the late Pahlavi state was not alone. It acted like so many developing nation-states at the time who had recently achieved formal independence and now sought to appear as equal participants on a world stage defined by embedded liberalism. For

³⁶ See Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 419-449. My point here adds a dimension to Abrahamian’s analysis. His designation of development as “uneven” contrasts advanced economic development with a lack of political freedom. This interpretation, however, is predicated on a blurring of the distinction between the social and the political. In the first instance, the Pahlavi state was not purely and simply authoritarian. It allowed for a number of political “openings” — openings that played an instrumental role in the composition of the revolutionary opposition. Second, the lack of organic support for economic development among the populace cannot solely be attributed to a lack of political freedom. Economic policies may be rooted in the self-interests of those they affect, and even recognized as such, without the presence of a free and open political sphere. Last but not least, the language of development, and the modernization theory it relies upon, implies a teleology at odds with the overall thesis in this study.

those states positioned on the U.S. side of the Cold War in particular, such as Iran, embedded liberalism presented a balance between integration in a global capitalist system and the maintenance of state autonomy. It allowed them to subscribe to the capitalist system without easily being labeled pawns of imperialist exploitation.³⁷

Nothing better captures Iran's position as an accidental leader among newly independent and developing embedded liberal states than the story of the first global human rights conference, held in Tehran in the spring of 1968. The conference, while seemingly unremarkable from the perspective of rights activists today, proved to be a landmark for Third World states seeking rapid economic development — and using a particular definition of rights to achieve it. Up until 1968, the international community had considered human rights debates marginal to Cold War security concerns.³⁸ African decolonization over the course of the 1960s, however, had led to an Asian-African bloc that dwarfed the Western and Soviet alliances at the proceedings, redefining what the international community was and eventually what it valued. In the void created by Cold War disengagement, representatives from the host country took the occasion of the Tehran Conference to voice the perspective of a recently expanded Third World bloc. Both the Shah and his sister, Ashraf Pahlavi (chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights at the time), delivered speeches arguing for economic development as a necessary first step before the

³⁷ These developments may be discerned in Iranian intellectual debate and discourse. Whereas in 1964, “any attack on Western imperialism or any laudatory remarks about the Third World ideology would have provoked official suspicion of the political loyalty of its author,” by 1974 “anti-imperialist and ‘tiers-mondist’ rhetoric [had] become part of the official stock-in-trade, and consequently the works of such writers as Fanon, Mende, Marcuse, Memmi, and scores of other left-wing thinkers [were] being translated and published.” See Enayat, “The State of Social Sciences,” 5.

³⁸ The United States even pursued a strategy of deliberate political acquiescence; in light of the limited effect of human rights advocacy on real political outcomes, U.S. foreign policy conceded “losses” in this arena as a “safety valve” through which Third World leaders could blow off steam. See Burke, “From Individual Rights to National Development,” 278-82. For the difference between this phenomenon and the rise of individual human rights, see Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 116-19, 126-27.

achievement of individual civil and political rights.³⁹ In other words, questions of individual human rights and political repression were to be deferred until the economic imbalance between developed and developing nation-states was first addressed. Before anything else, human rights were to be collective rights — a concept written into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as “personhood.”⁴⁰

1968 similarly marked the beginning of a series of events that rapidly transformed the status of the Third World in the international sphere, and eventually changed the framework of global power as such. The Six-Day War in 1967 signaled the demise of Gamel Abdel Nasser’s model of political leadership. In its wake, Third World nationalism, or at least the variant that proclaimed independence in defiance of both sides in the Cold War, had begun to falter. In Iran that same year, Mossadeq died in house arrest. The nearly simultaneous political and physical collapse of Mohammad Rezā Pahlavi’s most formidable regional and domestic opponents, and the related demise of their allies across the globe, presented new opportunities for the leaders of the Third World’s aspiring embedded liberal states. The NIEO thus emerged as a viable alternative to the Bretton Woods system. Where Third World nationalism and Marxist internationalism had often sought to transgress state sovereignty in the pursuit of similar goals, the NIEO made state sovereignty its organizing principle. It aspired to use the majority granted Third World nation-states in the United Nations General Assembly to pursue the economic

³⁹ Burke, “From Individual Rights to National Development,” 283-88. Importantly, these events occurred just after Iran had signed on to the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights on 4 April 1968 — an agreement that made provisions in the UDHR legally binding on member states.

⁴⁰ The definition of contemporary human rights as collective was not unprecedented. Since their introduction in 1948, contemporary human rights relied on a concept of “personality,” tying the recognition of individual identity to the situation of the individual within a collective. In this vein, contemporary human rights sought to incorporate the individual into social conventions — in particular, the modern state — where she could properly appear as a rights-bearing entity. See Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*, 17-24.

interests of developing states, in the process creating economic balance between individual states within the coalition and their counterparts in the industrialized world.

NIEO efforts culminated in the OPEC oil embargo of 1973-4, its most serious challenge to the hegemonic pretensions of industrialized states. The embargo famously combined with monetary crises introduced by the floating U.S. dollar in the early 1970s to produce “stagflation.” The U.S. responded in kind, implementing an aggressive political campaign designed to undermine the coalition of post-colonial Third World states. Daniel Patrick Moynihan first articulated and later helped implement the campaign, in so doing shifting foreign policy from Henry Kissinger’s emphasis on the sovereignty of states to the sovereignty of the individual.⁴¹ Ironically then, the NIEO, the oil embargo, and the corresponding wave of resource nationalization they inspired proved to be the death throes of “embedded liberalism” as governmentality.⁴²

Over the course of these developments, Pahlavi Iran found itself at an unenviable crossroad. On the one hand, it was an ally of the West and in particular the United States — the kind of “ally” the U.S. had spent years cultivating in Latin America as part of its “empire of liberty.”⁴³ Since the 1953 coup d’état, the Shah had secured Western support by acting as a bulwark against the encroachment of not only Soviet communism but also any indigenous

⁴¹ Mazower, *Governing the World*, 310-11.

⁴² My account of these borrows directly from Gelvin, “American Global Economic Policy,” 196-203.

⁴³ “Empire of liberty” refers to a phrase used by Thomas Jefferson to describe a plan for American foreign influence. See Bogues, *Empire of Liberty*, 13-18. In the absence of European imperial power following the Second World War, the United States was able to implement this plan across the globe. As Greg Grandin argues, it initially tested and perfected these methods in Latin America. See Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 39. Pahlavi Iran constitutes an early example of Grandin’s thesis. By virtue of the fact that Iran had never experienced direct modern colonialism, it was (like most Latin American states, which had achieved formal decolonization in the 19th century) not a colony in the 20th century. In this vein, well before its neighbors were to be defeated and discouraged in the pursuit of post-colonial self-determination, the relationship between the Pahlavi regime and U.S. power between 1954 and 1979 resembled the “new imperialism” perfected in “empire’s workshop.”

movement that conflicted with Western economic and security interests in the region. This aspect of Iranian-American foreign relations was exacerbated in 1969 with the inauguration of the Nixon administration.⁴⁴ Iran fell squarely within the objectives of what came to be known as the “Nixon Doctrine.” In the wake of increased opposition to and military failure in the Vietnam War, the Nixon administration sought to build friendly outposts in nations like Iran that could do the work of global policing on the U.S.’s behalf, thereby precluding its direct involvement in foreign affairs.

At the same time, as part of its efforts to catch up to industrialized states, the Pahlavi regime pursued rapid development through increased foreign investment and trade, thereby generating a condition of “precarity.” The Shah was acting at cross-purposes. On the one hand, his indirect (or parallel) collaboration with the NIEO asserted national sovereignty over the domestic economy. On the other, the policy measures adopted in the 4th economic plan (1968-73) opened the domestic economy to contingencies that could stretch beyond the scope of state control. In the immediate future, these contingencies generated large debts, in response to which the state sought to corner an increasingly larger portion of oil profits. Paradoxically then, the debts that propelled the Shah’s quest for increased oil revenue — the same debts that formed the basis of his favoritism and friendship with the United States — also created the grounds for his animosity with an emerging hegemonic order.

These paradoxes were most apparent in the “re-nationalization” of Iran’s oil industry. While Iranian activists at the time were eager to point to the Pahlavi state’s hypocrisy, dismissing any appearance of discord with the U.S. and Britain as show, the actual historical record between 1969 and 1974 presents a more fraught, less calculated diplomatic relationship. It is true that,

⁴⁴ See Cooper, *The Oil Kings*, 20-21, 27, 94.

during the 1973-74 oil embargo, Iran continued to produce oil for Israel and its Western allies.⁴⁵ It is also true, however, that it was also only after the embargo, when the costs of nationalization were significantly outweighed by the high price of oil, that the Shah was able (or willing) to “re-nationalize” the Iranian oil.⁴⁶ Yet the embargo followed years of tense negotiations between Iran and the Oil Consortium, during which the Shah repeatedly threatened to take “unilateral action” in alliance with OPEC if his terms were not met.⁴⁷ In this sense, the Pahlavi state did not simply benefit after the embargo occurred. It also played its part: from well before, it produced anxiety for British and American political and business leaders by threatening full Iranian control of assets and production. The threat was so real Republican presidential administrations in the U.S. engaged in backchannel negotiations to secure the Shah’s desire for increased oil revenues in return for increased military spending.⁴⁸

In the end, the Iranian state had shrewdly played both sides in the conflict between the NIEO and the U.S. against each other. It finally and successfully accrued advantages from

⁴⁵ Ibid., 47, 117, 135-36.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the opportune moment when resource nationalization may occur, see Mahdavi, “Why do leaders nationalize.” Notably, in “re-nationalizing” the Iranian oil industry, the Petroleum Act of 1974 exceeded even Mossadeq’s efforts; by virtue of having worked closely with the Consortium for 20 years, Iran’s control of production could now be accompanied by domestic technical expertise. See Mahdavi, “Oil, Monarchy, Revolution, Theocracy,” 241-43.

⁴⁷ See Cooper, *The Oil Kings*, 34, 52, 77, 91-92, 139. For some examples of the tensions, see The National Archives of the UK: FCO 8/2068, 2; FCO 8/2069, 63; FCO 8/2072, 275. The latter, a diplomatic report produced after an oil bill was signed on 31 July 1973, provides a useful summary of negotiations in 1972-73, which it describes as “long and difficult” but ultimately occurring with “no real crises.” This sense of difficulty without “real” crisis marks the parallels between embedded state power in Pahlavi Iran and the NIEO. The Shah’s threats were directed toward price increases instead of an embargo, which Iran was unlikely to join because it could not afford a loss to its revenue stream. See Cooper, *The Oil Kings*, 122-24, 140-41. Yet increased prices posed their own, less immediately spectacular but nevertheless significant, challenge. On 19 December 1973, the French foreign minister, Michel Jobert, told Kissinger: “It was clear...that the Shah was going to push for another major oil price increase by exploiting the current embargo, induce shortage and yet the United States acted as if it considered the Shah to be a friendly country with the same interest...these artificial prices would be used as a pretext to justify higher overall OPEC prices.” See *ibid.*, 145.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, 25, 32, 36-44, 57, 92, 143.

increased oil revenue through the embargo, benefiting handsomely from the NIEO's success without the costs of fully aligning itself with their political agenda. At the same time, the Shah had never demonstrated overt hostility toward the U.S. and its allies in the Cold War. Iran seemed to win on all counts.

The victory, however, proved to be short sighted. What the Pahlavi regime had actually done was entrench itself in an increasingly outdated expression of state sovereignty. As the global landscape shifted in the mid-1970s, the U.S.-led campaign against the NIEO put the Shah in an awkward position. Iran now sat in alliance with a notion of embedded liberalism under attack because it could be (and effectively had been) used by Third World leaders to challenge the international ruling bargain and by extension U.S. hegemony. At the same time, the Shah's claim to power had been secured by submission to those very things. In short, the Pahlavi regime wed its fate to a form of state power that stood in direct contrast to the rise of neoliberal discourse in the Middle East.

II

Neoliberal Resistance

On January 1, in the annual celebration of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro declared 1968 "the year of the guerrilla." Castro's declaration both was and was not prescient. The years that followed witnessed a dramatic increase in transnational guerrilla warfare. The experience of protest movements in 1968 fueled this trend, inspiring a radicalized opposition with their momentary success while legitimizing further radicalization in the wake of their failures.⁴⁹ For

⁴⁹ These transformations were reflected in various articulations at the time of a "New Left." In the United States, the New Left was defined as both revolutionary (leaving behind the possibility of working within the existing system) and nationalist (seeking to build solidarity between distinct nationalist groupings). See "The Old Left and the New," 3-11. In the UK, the New Left was identified both as supplement to and against the Labour Movement. Where the latter was centralized, the New Left promised to work alongside its activities but impinge upon them new initiatives that arose autonomously in a fragmented and dispersed manner. See Hall, "Introducing NLR," 1-3.

the Third World, Castro's example set a precedent. The Cuban and Chinese experiences of revolutionary success occurred via a departure from Leninist models — models that required strict adherence to specific objective and subjective conditions before the incitement of political violence. By demonstrating the possibility of successful revolutionary change otherwise, Cuba and China rewrote the script.

Unlike the movement that remade Cuba in 1959, however, the global New Left was increasingly detached from the political communities its activists sought to transform. In Cuba, a vanguard from within an existing political community employed guerrilla warfare to change the character of that community. Their internationalism emerged through the capture of the state, not despite it. By contrast, after 1968, guerrilla warfare became transnational in its means. Groups increasingly trained and resided outside of the political communities they wished to transform. The targets of their attacks were also less of that political community. Like global exchange rates, new waves of freedom fighters were floating. Increasingly independent and organized in cells across multiple geographic locales, they extended and radicalized the principle of individual freedom pursued in '68. Castro and Nasser had given way to Che Guevara and the Palestinian rebel as exemplars. Liberation struggles had gone global.

In its response, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously endorsed a proliferation of the term “terrorism.”⁵⁰ For industrialized states, “terrorism” emptied transnational guerrilla warfare of its aspirations for social and political liberation. In the absence forged therein, particularly since the discussions emerged in response to events in the Munich Olympics, the term reintroduced Orientalist tropes predicated on the racialization of Muslims,

⁵⁰ See Brulin, “Defining ‘Terrorism,’” 12-30.

reframing political acts in terms of worldly nihilism for the sake of deliverance in the hereafter.⁵¹ Or they were simply rendered as criminal behavior, a matter of “individual violence.”⁵² States from the Group of 77 (including Pahlavi Iran), which later went on to advance the NIEO, affirmed the usage of the term in their own right. Rather than resist the label altogether, they merely insisted it also be used to describe “state terrorism.”⁵³

The NIEO’s position was a reflection of its deep investment in state sovereignty. By contrast, new liberation struggles were unhinged from state formations, directly threatening to upset the power derived therein instead of using that power, as previous movements had, for nationalist and/or statist solidarity. When and where they succeeded, however, these movements ironically paralleled the U.S.’s campaign to disrupt the NIEO through the proliferation of what would later become neoliberal rhetoric. Both international movements drew upon and radicalized

⁵¹ Muslim racialization refers to the construction of a racial identity predicated on presumed religious difference (i.e. the figure of the Muslim) — a trope that reappears most visibly after the September 11 attacks but which has been at the heart of constructed Western identity since before 1492. Those who are not practicing or even nominal Muslims may fall subject to the construct. Like all racial categories, it both is and is not a referent to lived reality. See Rana, “The Story of Islamophobia,” 149-51, 159; Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon*, xiv, xvii-xviii.

⁵² This phrase was used by the Austrian mission to the United Nations in a letter written in the midst of the proceedings condemning terrorism, dated 10 April 1973. The letter notably posited “individual violence” against the principle of self-determination. See Archives Diplomatiques: Nations Unies et Organisations Internationales, 1970-1973, 1410, S.50.5.2.7 (Janvier–Aout 1973).

⁵³ Iran was among the 35 nations in a Special Committee on International Terrorism, which included a number of founding G77 countries. For the report from the 27th session of the UN General Assembly (dated 23 April 1973) that names the initial 35 members, see *ibid.* The Committee eventually adopted a set of recommendations that included state support. In the Committee’s meetings, according to French diplomats, the USSR (with whom Third World states in the UN often aligned in the early 1970s) stated: “*Sans doute, suivant Lenine, s’est-il montre hostile au terrorisme individuel...Le veritable terrorisme reside donc pour le representant l’URSS dans des attaques étatiques*” [“Without a doubt, following Lenin, he presented himself against individual terrorism ... But for the representative from the USSR, real terrorism resides in state-sponsored attacks”]. See *ibid.* The Iranian delegation played an active role in debates around resolution 3034 — debates where one side insisted on a study of the causes of terrorism and another side insisted on immediate action. Citing the notion of “personality,” the delegation recognized the legitimacy of national liberation movements *and* condemned terrorism in all forms. It thereby drew a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate manifestations of self-determination. See “Intervention de Représentant Permanent de l’Iran” in *ibid.* For a discussion of the USSR’s participation in the advancement of collective as opposed to individual rights in the drafting and later interpretation of the UDHR, resulting in the artificial construct of the “person,” see Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*, 45-63.

the concept of individual freedom expressed in '68 albeit for dramatically different projected ends.

In lockstep with global patterns, the Iranian resistance made its decisive turn to transnational guerrilla warfare in 1968 even though secret, underground cells first began to form after 1963. In addition to the broader international context mentioned above, their emergence and later coalescence in 1968 is attributable to two domestic factors. In the years preceding the “White Revolution” of 1963, Iran witnessed a political opening seized upon by the Second National Front. As a result of its unstinting reformist approach, however, the Second National Front lost the support not only of its leader (Mossadeq); it also alienated a younger generation of university students from reformist politics altogether. Moreover, in the years following the “White Revolution,” the Tudeh Party — Iran’s historical bastion of leftist, pro-Soviet organizing — was infiltrated by the Shah’s secret police (SAVAK), exposed as such, and pushed into exile.⁵⁴ Its subsequent de-legitimization further alienated younger generations of activists looking for new means with which to resist the Shah.

With the closure of the opening that gave rise to the Second National Front and the compromise of the Tudeh Party — not to mention, the violent suppression of the 15th of Khordād uprising in Qom — younger generations of political activists began to propose a new agenda for social change. At first, their agenda sought to replicate Cuban and Chinese revolutionary models.⁵⁵ By 1968, however, failed attempts to export the Cuban and Chinese revolutions to

⁵⁴ In a widely broadcast trial shortly after the revolution, a SAVAK torturer (Bahman Naderipour, known as “Tehrani”) noted that this infiltration occurred just before he joined in 1346 [1967-68]. See “*Hizb-i tūdih-yi irān rā sāvāk rahbarī kard*” [“SAVAK Directed Iran’s Tudeh Party”] in *Ittilā‘āt*, no. 15880 (26 Khordād 1358/16 June 1979), 9.

⁵⁵ Over the course of the 1960s, Iran witnessed various aborted attempts at the construction of a guerrilla movement that directly imitated these examples. See Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 5-13.

other corners of the globe inspired a new kind of guerrilla warfare focused on resistance in urban contexts. That same year, the two groups central to the formation of the Organization of the Iranian People's Fadā'i Guerrillas (hereafter, the OIPFG) began rapidly organizing and preparing for armed struggle in Iran on these terms.⁵⁶ Their activities culminated in the February 1971 Siāhkal operation — a series of attacks in Iran's northern provinces which, despite their immediate failure and the execution of the members involved, resulted in a massive symbolic victory. In their aftermath, the OIPFG assumed a legendary status, inspiring copycat attacks, a large following, and a sea change in the options available to resisting the Shah.

This iteration of guerrilla warfare — transnational in its gestation, yet urban in its targets — unhinged adherents from the need to entertain reform and compromise with the existing regime. Unlike previous forms of guerrilla warfare, however, it also abandoned the prospect of working within an existing community to legitimize resistance. In other words, there were no necessary conditions before an attack could occur; the attack as event would itself create the conditions for revolutionary change. Having been freed from responding to a broader political community, it was now the guerrilla's task to determine that community. From this perspective, despite the Marxist-Leninist outlines orienting these groups, their turn to transnational guerrilla warfare paralleled a rising discursive shift to neoliberalism defined by autonomous, individualized social practice.

This shift was more easily discernible in the similarly parallel rise of individual human rights discourse in Iran.⁵⁷ In January of 1968, one of the founding groups of the OIPFG was

⁵⁶ Ibid., 23-25.

⁵⁷ For a conventional state-centric account that analyzes human rights and political liberalization as diplomatic history (i.e. how different U.S. presidential administrations influenced the Shah), see Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution*, 180-84. My account provides a different periodization by virtue of a difference in framework.

imprisoned en masse.⁵⁸ On principle, the fact of the Jazani-Zarafi Group's case conflicted with the human rights conference held in Tehran that same year. The group had been imprisoned without trial and systematically tortured.⁵⁹ In the effort to hold their court proceedings sooner, Bizhan Jazani asked his wife, Mihan Jazani, to distribute a flyer to the representatives of member countries attending the Tehran Conference. The flyer, translated into English by Hedāyat Matin-Daftari and surreptitiously distributed just before the day's proceedings, expressed the prisoners' complaints regarding the lack of clarity surrounding their imprisonment. It requested an immediate trial.⁶⁰

Rhetorically, the flyer sought to expose a contradiction between the spirit of the event and the site where it was held. Yet even if it had been widely read by the attendees, the Jazanis' efforts would have fallen on deaf ears. The Tehran Conference redefined human rights as a whole by prioritizing collective rights — a tactic that spoke to the immediate interests of the Third World states making up a majority at the proceedings, many of whom harbored similar cases back home.⁶¹ In reaching out to the representatives, the Jazanis appealed to universal principles of individual rights superseding collective concerns.

⁵⁸ Two groups initially formed the OIPFG: the Jazani-Zarifi group and the Ahmadzadeh-Puyan-Meftahi group. The former (older) group was an offshoot of the Tudeh Party whereas the latter emerged from within the Second National Front. See Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey*, 16-24.

⁵⁹ For a detailed account of Jazani's arrest and torture, see Jazanī, "Bīzhan," 46-47. See also IISH: Amnesty International Archive, Folder 433, "Report by Mrs. Betty Assheton on Visit to Iran, December 1968/January 1969."

⁶⁰ According to Mihan Jazani's account, security officials at the event suspected and identified her and a colleague just as they finished distributing the flyers. The officials were able to collect most, but not all, of the flyers before the attendees arrived for the commencement of the day's proceedings. See Jazanī, "Bīzhan," 49-50.

⁶¹ It should be noted that the conference "adopted with the approval of Iran a Resolution on the Rights of Detained Persons." See IISH: Amnesty International Archive, Folder 441, "Iran: Trial Procedures for Political Prisoners," 18 August 1972. And yet despite these overtures, the conference's general sensibility privileged collective over individual and civil rights. See Burke, "From Individual Rights to National Development."

That this appeal came from a leading figure in Iran's Marxist-Leninist guerrilla movement indicates both the peculiarity of Iran's political history and its unintentional parallels with a concurrent discursive transition to neoliberalism in the Middle East. For some scholars, the rise of individual rights discourse in these years reflects the realization of a telos initially sown into the fabric of modernity by the French Revolution. Others have sought to disrupt the mythical and celebratory qualities of these depictions, instead offering contingent and historically situated accounts for why individual rights gained purchase when they did.⁶² Samuel Moyn's counter-history attributes their rise to transformations at the level of ideas, specifically the failed promise of collectivist utopian projects. Against Moyn's idealist depiction of historical change, Mark Mazower and Anthony Anghie provide empirical grounding. Without relinquishing the importance of historical contingency, each in their own right attributes the rise of individual rights discourse to the political machinations of industrialized states seeking to counter the influence of the NIEO and their corresponding emphasis on the primacy of state sovereignty.⁶³

None of these accounts, however, considers the role of non-state actors and movements rooted in politics within G77 member countries and affiliated states (i.e. the non-Western world

⁶² Lynn Hunt's *Inventing Human Rights* is the most prominent scholarly work arguing for a continuous trajectory between modern and contemporary human rights. Samuel Moyn's *The Last Utopia* is the most prominent critique of teleological histories. For a critical summary of the differences between Hunt and Moyn, see Green, "Humanitarianism in Nineteenth-Century Context," 1157-62.

⁶³ For Mazower, in particular, these political contests occasioned the rise of neoliberalism. He accordingly refers to the "Non"-Governmental Organizations advocating individual rights as GONGOs (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations). While Mazower does not engage Moyn's work, direct critiques are aplenty. By way of illustration, Anghie's critique of Moyn is two-fold. First, by focusing on legal doctrine, he points to the complicity of states themselves in the rise to prominence of contemporary human rights. Second, he emphasizes the NIEO's programs for development as an alternate utopia overlooked by Moyn's tendency to generalize from the experiences of Western social activists. For this argument as well as other critical accounts, see Anghie, "Whose Utopia?," 63-80.

set to benefit from the NIEO).⁶⁴ In this vein, precisely because of the Pahlavi regime's distinctly parallel association with the NIEO, the Iranian case played a significant role in the rise of contemporary rights discourse and the corresponding periodic shift to neoliberalism in the Middle East. As noted above, Pahlavi Iran had effectively played both sides of the international conflict in the oil embargo — benefitting from increased oil revenues and “re-nationalization” brought about by the NIEO's challenge while firmly positioning itself on the U.S. side of the Cold War. In the process, the Shah became a prime target for human rights activism. Member states in the NIEO eventually succumbed to global pressures exerted through the appeal to individual rights. Where these states could hold off anti-imperialist activists by characterizing the universality of rights discourse as deceptive and misleading, Pahlavi Iran experienced a full-blown attack. Because of the regime's parallel relationship with the NIEO and concurrent formal affiliation with the “Nixon Doctrine,” Iranian activists could appeal to global NGOs advancing rights principles, while doing so in the name of an anti-imperialist struggle.

In the overlap between anti-imperialism and individual rights advocacy, the Iranian opposition contributed to the “radicalization” of individual human rights as an imagined construct detached from existing political communities or citizenship.⁶⁵ International advocacy

⁶⁴ By contrast, Pheng Cheah and Golnar Nikpour do so in their respective work. In a review of Moyn's book, Cheah argues for “an alternative way of understanding the role of human rights today: they are not a utopian vision but effective technologies in the material making of humanity, and we must analyze their efficaciousness as well as how and why these technologies are limited on a *case-by-case basis*.” See Cheah, “Human Rights and the Material Making of Humanity,” 61, *emphasis mine*. My efforts here follow Cheah's call for analysis on a “case-by-case basis.” Similarly, focusing on the specific history of Iranian rights discourse, Nikpour argues that existing histories of human rights (especially Moyn) examine the state of mind of Euro-American activists without considering the state of mind of Iranian diasporic activists (who eventually exerted an influence on domestic actors). These Iranian activists formulated a distinct vision of human rights that was political, not moral. See Nikpour, “Prison Days,” 31-78. My efforts partially echo Nikpour's insight. Unlike Nikpour, however, I dispute Moyn's sharp distinction between the political and the moral; as a result, I present parallels between Iranian activists and Western activists without compromising the autonomous nature of the former's actions.

⁶⁵ On the overlap, see *ibid*. This “radicalization” occurred at the level of discursive practice — or, in other words, what people were saying and thinking about human rights at a particular moment in history. My argument follows

was initially focused on working within the existing constitutional framework of the state under investigation. Iran was no exception to this rule. On 4 April 1968, days before the Tehran Conference, Iran signed the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a covenant that gave human rights principles legal force in the international sphere.⁶⁶ Just over two weeks later, in his address to the Conference, the Shah described the UDHR as “the new moral code of the world.”⁶⁷ For international human rights organizations working to reform existing states, the dissonance between the Shah’s words and deeds could not have been more ideal.⁶⁸

Even before the signing of the protocol and the conference proceedings, human rights in Iran was already becoming a cause célèbre for international campaigns. The earliest appeals for the defense of human rights in Iran appear in 1963 with the introduction of the White Revolution and the political repression of opposition to it.⁶⁹ Famous (non-Iranian) personalities soon

Moyn in identifying the history of an idea as it rose in usage and not the doctrinal or theoretical formation of human rights in an abstract sense.

⁶⁶ The signing of the ICCPR in 1966 and its implementation in 1976 marked the beginnings of contemporary human rights as legal doctrine. See Anghie, “Whose Utopia?,” 70.

⁶⁷ IISH: Amnesty International Archive, Folder 441, “Iran: Trial Procedures for Political Prisoners.”

⁶⁸ Amnesty International Secretary-General Martin Ennals at one point went so far as to say that “no country in the world has a worse record in human rights than Iran.” See “Amnesty International Press Conference on Iran, May 16, 1975” in *Resistance* 4, no. 1 (December 1975): 11.

⁶⁹ In April 1963, the International League for the Rights of Man wrote an appeal to U Thant, Secretary General of the United Nations, concerning “the grievous conditions of human rights abuses in Iran, a member state and signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” The appeal outlined the plight of professors and students who had been held in prison without trial since January of 1963, the imprisonment of National Front leaders, and press censorship. Roger Baldwin and Jan Papanek, “Appeal to UN,” April 1963, found in private archive. A similar appeal was sent to the Shah on June 4, 1964 expressing shock regarding “documentary evidence of grave violation[s] of civil and political liberties presumably subscribed to by Iran under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by its vote in the General Assembly... The imposition of military rule, the outlawry of the National Front, the torture of prisoners and the activities of the secret police discredit Iran’s claims to participation in the free world.” See IISH: IUSY Archive, Folder 1554.

followed suit, forming committees in European cities tasked with the objective to defend Iranian political prisoners.⁷⁰

International advocacy for individual human rights in Iran took off in 1965 through the efforts of the Confederation of Iranian Students, National Union (CISNU).⁷¹ CISNU was an international student union spread across primarily European and North American cities. It adopted the language of human rights as early as 1962, incorporating a reference to the UDHR in its charter.⁷² From its founding to its disbandment in 1975, the student union exhibited a noteworthy ability to bring together expatriate students representing disparate and often agonistic leftist and nationalist political sub-groupings. Between 1963 (when the Pahlavi regime banned domestic forms of protest and opposition) and 1971 (when it was deemed illegal by the Iranian state), it was the only legally sanctioned organization expressing opposition to the Shah.

In 1965, CISNU jumped into the global spotlight. The Pahlavi regime partially blamed it for an attempt to assassinate the Shah. It responded by organizing a publicity campaign in

⁷⁰ The first committee formed in France around the personality of Jean-Paul Sartre at the prodding of expatriate Iranian students. Interview with former activist, July 2015. By June 1973, expatriate publications boasted that four such defense committees were in existence: one in France, led by Sartre; one in England, led by MP William Wilson; one in Italy, led by Simone Gato, Llio Basso, and Frocho Pari; and one in Switzerland. See *Resistance* 1, no. 4 (June 1973): 20.

⁷¹ Like guerrilla warfare, this activism grew in response to the movement of ideas and information between Iran and the broader world, an interaction facilitated by a growing population of Iranian students and activists residing abroad. The Shah's plans for modernization involved expanded opportunities for Iranian students to receive higher education in Europe and the United States. These students were active on a number of fronts, including the translation of texts that informed Iran's guerrilla movement. In 1967, a Persian translation of Régis Debray's *Révolution dans la révolution?* was circulating in Mashhad, only two months after its initial publication. By 1975, the OIPFG was circulating critiques of Debray's work. See *Chahār naqd*. Frantz Fanon's *Pour la révolution africaine* was translated in 1970 in France, then reprinted in Iran five times, with the fifth printing boasting 11,000 copies. See Abdi, *Junbish-i Dānishjū'ī*, 166. Similarly, in 1971, Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre* was translated by students and activists in Paris; it was published under Ali Shari'ati's name to maintain the anonymity of its translators. See Abolhassan Banisadr, in an interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 21 May 1984, Paris, France, Tape 3, pp. 12 of transcript, Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University; cf. Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 126-7. For a more detailed discussion of internationalism, human rights, and CISNU, see Nikpour, "Prison Days," 31-78.

⁷² For a discussion of CISNU's charter, see Matin-asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition*, 54.

defense of fourteen accused political prisoners (five of whom had been its members).⁷³ While they did not succeed in preventing the trial from taking place, a series of hunger strikes across European cities secured the attention of international observers (including, for the first time, Amnesty International), fueling the growth of related rights campaigns and defense committees across the globe.⁷⁴

1968 yet again proved to be a turning point. In late 1968, Amnesty International sent Betty Assheton to visit Iran for six weeks as an observer in military proceedings for the Jazani-Zarafi Group. In her report, Assheton noted that, “substantial improvements could be gained by negotiation without resorting to publicity” and recommended that Amnesty establish itself “as an organization which could” perform that negotiation.⁷⁵ Assheton’s report was procured on 17 March 1969; by 8 May that year, Amnesty’s Secretary General Martin Ennals penned a letter

⁷³ In July of 1965, CISNU issued a press communiqué asking for the intervention of the UN Human Rights Commission in the death of a student. See IISH: ICFTU Archives, Box 3491. Postcards from the campaign were directed to the Iranian Prime Minister. One side featured images of not only torture and executions but also everyday working conditions; the other side included the following message, in English, German, and French: “I protest the suppression of human rights in Iran, demand a halt to the persecution of Iranian patriots. Release all political prisoners in Iran. In solidarity with the Confederation of Iranian Students and its five members arrested in Tehran.” See IISH: IUSY Archives, Box 1554. This was the first of a series of similar campaigns that came to define the organization’s role as a publicity arm defending activists who were imprisoned on the frontlines of the struggle against the Shah. Their success constituted a “major turning point” in the organizational history of the student movement, acknowledged by nearly all of its leaders; it had proven its ability to “engage the shah’s regime in a direct confrontation, gain international publicity, and defend the regime’s victims inside Iran.” See Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition*, 89.

⁷⁴ Unlike previous military trials, these proceedings were public, feeding foreign media interest. For an account of Amnesty International’s involvement, see IISH: Amnesty International Archive, Folder 441, “Iran – State of the Nation, May 1972.” A statement from the British Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners signed on 8 November 1965 by three MPs stated the trials and sentences have “quite clearly” violated “the principles of the Declaration of Human Rights.” One week later, a letter sent to the Iranian Ambassador to the UK from 74 members of the British Parliament dated 16 November 1965 declared “no desire whatsoever to intervene in the internal affairs of Iran” but in the name of “deep concern about human rights in all countries” recommended that Iran not impose the verdicts arrived at in the trial. See IISH: IUSY Archives, Box 1554.

⁷⁵ IISH: Amnesty International Archives, Folder 441, “Iran – State of the Nation, May 1972.”

addressed to all AI national sections asking that Assheton's report not be published, because he had received a favorable response from the Iranian government.⁷⁶

A changing global atmosphere however forced their hands, inciting revisions to Amnesty's reformist orientation. While Assheton and Amnesty International went about their work, the emergence of an urban guerrilla movement in Iran had already begun to dramatically transform conditions on the ground. In 1970, an increasingly antagonistic and radicalized CISNU succeeded in securing the widespread attention of the European press. Tensions between it and the Pahlavi government boiled over in October of 1970 during an Amnesty International visit arranged by the student group.⁷⁷ The day the visit began (October 10) corresponded with the second airplane hi-jacking in Iranian history — the first where hijackers demanded the release of political prisoners.⁷⁸ The coincidence of these events and the parallel nature of their demands may have contributed to the government's sudden about-face in relation to both CISNU and Amnesty. On that visit, Hans-Heinz Heldmann (a professor at Frankfurt University) became the first AI representative to be expelled from Iran. Heldmann traveled with Hossein Rezāi — a student in West Germany, a CISNU member, and an accredited Amnesty International delegate. Rezāi was arrested and added to the list of political prisoners held in Tehran.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ See IISH: Amnesty International Archives, Folder 433.

⁷⁷ After 1965, missions and reports by international bodies were spurred on by CISNU campaigns. For a partial (and celebratory) summary of the reports produced between 1965 and 1973, see "System of Injustice: Part One" in *Resistance* 1, no. 2 (April 1973): 4-9; "System of Injustice: Part Two" in *Resistance* 1, no. 4 (June 1973): 14-21.

⁷⁸ The hijackers landed the plane, which was originally head to Abadan from Tehran, in Baghdad. Unlike the previous instance of hijacking, which also landed and released the plane in Baghdad in exchange for political asylum, in this case the demands also involved the release of 21 political prisoners. Bāqer Parhām, interview by Nasser Mohajer; *Ittila'at*, 19 Mehr 1349 [11 October 1970]. I am grateful to Nasser Mohajer for sharing a transcript of this unpublished interview with me. For accounts of Heldman's visit, see *Resistance* 1, no. 4 (June 1973): 17-18; *Resistance* 5, no. 2 (January 1977): 13.

⁷⁹ See IISH: Amnesty International Archive, Folder 437, "Iran," September 1971.

Three months later, on 18 January 1971, a military court deemed CISNU an illegal organization; its members were given until 21 March to either abdicate membership or face trial in absentia for prison sentences between 3-10 years.⁸⁰ For the first time, the student group — which had always “officially adhered to the Iranian Constitution and international conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” — was positioned outside the legal framework of the state.⁸¹ By March 1972, observers and foreign journalists were no longer permitted to attend trials in Iran.⁸² According to its own assessment, Amnesty International had been rendered “ineffective;” they were “without direct sources of information, received no case details adequate for adoption, could not obtain entry for a delegate, [and] were unable to take any of the normal forms of action.”⁸³ Detached from any direct correspondence with officials and hence unable to enact a mediating role, AI had no choice but resort to the same tactics used by CISNU: publicity and propaganda.

The change in tactics adopted by international organizations was inadvertently facilitated by the rise of domestic human rights advocates. They played a pivotal role in providing information to international organizations when they could no longer do much themselves. Abdolkarim Lāhiji’s story presents one of the most important examples. A practicing lawyer once active in the Second National Front, in 1978 Lāhiji became the primary lawyer defending political prisoners when the state finally permitted their hearings to occur. Lāhiji’s turn to human rights advocacy began in 1968 as a reaction to three events: the promise and failure of the Prague

⁸⁰ *Resistance* 5, no. 2 (January 1977): 10.

⁸¹ Matin-asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition*, 123.

⁸² IISH: Amnesty International Archive, Folder 441, “Iran – Trial Procedures for Political Prisoners.”

⁸³ IISH: Amnesty International Archive, Folder 441, “Iran — State of the Nation, May 1972.”

Spring, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Tehran Conference. The first two brought his attention to new forms of activism predicated on the advancement of individual freedom and civil rights. The third demonstrated the limitations to advancing that model within the accepted parameters of state power in Iran and, by consequence, the pressing need to do so. He and his colleagues requested participation in the Tehran Conference; in the wake of the government's refusal to allow their participation, Lāhiji obtained his passport and began regular trips abroad as part of his private practice. During these trips, he became one of many domestic informants who would secretly meet with international organizations involved in rights advocacy, including Amnesty International, in order to distribute information about violations in Iran — information that formed the basis of those organizations' publicity campaigns. For safety, these actions were taken as an entirely independent and autonomous individual unaffiliated with any formal association or group.⁸⁴

These kinds of events radicalized individual human rights by detaching its mode of advocacy from the need to work with or within the existing political community where those rights were to be protected. Increasingly, instead of Amnesty International sending delegates to Iran to negotiate with the state, informal and unofficial “representatives” secretly traveled from Iran to provide information for global publicity and propaganda campaigns abroad. This reversal affirmed the notion that the only possibility for social change existed beyond the parameters of the state — even among avowed reformists, now obliged to adopt a guerrilla disposition of their own.

The reversal contributed to the transformation in global understandings of individual human rights and the tactics needed to secure them. In light of it, articulations of individual

⁸⁴ Abdolkarim Lāhiji, interview with the author, July 2015, Paris, France.

rights as distinct from notions of “personhood” gained currency. From here on, change was to come from without. In this sense, the emergence of contemporary rights discourse as radical individuality was not solely the product of disenchantment in collectivist ideals (Moyn) or the machinations of U.S. hegemony (Mazower). It was also just as much the effect of political contestation by domestic and exilic opposition forces acting against state power in the Third World.

Intentional or not, these changing tactics paralleled the emergence of U.S. efforts to mobilize individual human rights to undermine the NIEO. CISNU’s efforts failed to make much of a difference in the United States until after Moynihan’s designs to counter the NIEO became official foreign policy — at which point press coverage of Iranian human rights abuses increased markedly.⁸⁵ Moreover, beginning in 1976 with the onset of the “Carterite Breeze,” the Shah began to release large numbers of political prisoners.⁸⁶ In the midst of the first wave of amnesties, the Committee on International Relations in the U.S. House of Representatives held two hearings concerning the issue of human rights in Iran (3 August and 8 September 1976). Shortly thereafter on 28 November, Amnesty International published a briefing that essentially repeated information from its 1972 report. In a world of altered political discourse and shifting

⁸⁵ For a discussion of increased press coverage, see Matin-asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition*, 122, 130-162.

⁸⁶ Amnesties were reported in June, August, October, November, and December of 1976, and January, February, and March of 1977. This trend culminated in the release of all but 300 “violent” prisoners in late 1978 as mass demonstrations engulfed the nation. According to Amnesty International’s 1977 report, “Most of these amnesties were to mark the 50th anniversary of the Pahlavi dynasty; others were in honour of the Shah’s birthday and the Iranian New Year.” An announcement by the Pars news agency on February 27, 1977 declared that nearly 5,000 prisoners had been freed since March 1976. See *Amnesty International Report, 1977* in The National Archives of the UK: FCO 8/3211, 6. These developments have led some scholars to acknowledge the importance of a “Carterite breeze” as a causal explanatory factor in the emergence of the 1979 revolution. According to these (primarily state-centric) accounts, the Shah’s decision to cave to changes in U.S. foreign policy led to the release of political prisoners; they in turn shared their accounts of torture and abuse broadly, generating widespread antipathy against the Pahlavi regime. In other words, instead of shoring up support for the Pahlavi regime, liberalization added fuel to the fires of discontent by providing reasons for it — and hence mobilizing the revolutionary crowds.

hegemonic allegiances, its re-publication led to a furor: for the first time, the Pahlavi regime reacted, accusing AI of deliberately sowing dissent.⁸⁷ Individual rights advocacy had by now become a site of convergence between revolutionary resistance and a neoliberal discursive shift.

III

“Non-Political” Associational Activity

An editorial in the first issue of *Hambastigī* [*Solidarity*] observed that “non-political” organizations [*sāzmān-hāyih ‘ghayr-i sīyāsī’*] had implemented in deed (and not just in word) the need for coordinated efforts [*ishtirāk-i masa’ī*] more quickly than political organizations. This was, according to the newsletter, one of the more interesting and unexpected phenomena of the revolution. At the same time, the editorial called for the yet to be realized participation of other organizations, naming in particular workers’ syndicates, teachers, and university students. Clearly, “non-political” organizations did not signify the associations regularly affiliated with a corporatist state. Instead, what the editors of the samizdat had in mind were the various liberal organizations that had emerged over the course of the revolutionary uprising.⁸⁸

Their observation may be extended beyond histories of direct political unrest. A series of questions can and should redirect our understanding of the “non-political”: Under what lived

⁸⁷ The National Archives of the UK: FCO 8/2998, 51. The repetition of information originally gathered in 1972 occurred because of the ban on international observers implemented in August of 1972.

⁸⁸ The editorial qualifies the designations “political” and “non-political.” It places the latter in scare quotes while specifying that the former is being used in “a particular sense of the term” [*bi m’anā-yi akhs-i kalamih*]. See “*Az hamāhangī tā itihād-i ‘amal’*” [“From Coordination to Unified Action”], *Hambastigī*, n. 1 (12 Āzar 1357/3 December 1978), 1. These qualifications support my characterization of “non-political” politics as an indeterminate phenomenon. It should be noted that *Hambastigī* was a joint newsletter produced under the collaborative stewardship of the Iranian National Faculty Organization [*Sāzmān-i Millī-yi Dānishgāhīān-i Irān*], the Iranian Writers’ Association [*Kānūn-i Nivīsandigān-i Irān*], and the Iranian Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners’ Rights [*Kumītiḥ-yi Difā az Hūqūq-i Zindāniyān Sīyāsī-yi Irān*]. These are the specific “non-political” organizations referred to in the editorial. The two associations missing from this list are the Society for the Defense of Freedom and Human Rights and the Association of Iranian Jurists. For a fuller list and description of all five associations in English, see *The Iranian Bulletins*, v-vi.

circumstances could the prospect of revolutionary resistance, expressed as autonomous, rights-bearing individualism, flourish in Iran? What kinds of social practices — across the broader Iranian populace — allowed this discourse to take root? What, in other words, were the conditions of possibility for a mass-based revolutionary resistance on terms that paralleled individual human rights discourse?

In response to these questions, the following section presents a rise in “non-political” associational activity in Iran on two fronts. First, I demonstrate the ways in which these social practices came to define overt and covert political reactions to the state. In this regard, the dialectic between state action and reaction furnished practices for an entirely different order of power and resistance — and hence the state’s undoing. At the same time, however, “non-political” associational activity blurred the lines between state action and reaction, skirting the centrality of the state altogether. For an emergent middle and dispossessed class residing in Iran, neither of which assumed a position of directly hostile political opposition, these practices reproduced the state-effect while cultivating ways of being that were autonomous to it at one and the same time.⁸⁹

In the dialectic between state action and reaction, the regime contributed to the proliferation of “non-political” social practice. The late Pahlavi state sought to present itself as simultaneously detached from but also all-encompassing in relation to Iranian society.⁹⁰ In projecting this image and at times imposing it upon the social order, the state effectively required

⁸⁹ In writing his history of contemporary human rights, Moyn discusses the “non-political” but does so solely in moral terms. Individual human rights appear as “non-political” because they rise above politics into a realm of morality. See Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 132, 136-37. I expand on Moyn’s insight. “Non-political” social practice may be moral but it is not exclusively that. By shifting our focus from Western activists to activists and everyday people in the “embedded” Third World, we may move beyond the conceptual binary positing morality against politics.

⁹⁰ Schayegh, “‘Seeing Like a State,’” 39-44.

any and all political activity to filter through it. The quintessential manifestation of this projection arrived in 1975 when the government introduced a single political party, *Hizb-i Rastākhīz*, which all citizens were required to join. Under these conditions, resistance to the state and its policies fostered self-identification as “non-political” not only for one’s safety, but also on principle.

These tactics extended an already long tradition of resistance and survival in authoritarian states: that of presenting one’s activity as purely associational [*sinfi*], “non-political,” and hence non-threatening even if and when it actually was.⁹¹ In moments of political closure, demands were regularly made indirectly. At his court hearing in late 1968, Bīzhan Jazanī, the storied leader of Iran’s urban guerrilla movement, presented his views in the language of more acceptable demands.⁹² Importantly, however, the more acceptable demands still appeared at this point in a political register, one that evoked the existing constitution. The rising relevance of *sinfi* activity in the wake of the Pahlavi regime’s monopoly over the public sphere corresponded with a transformation in political rhetoric. From here on, political demands were increasingly

⁹¹ In Persian, the term *sinf* means guild. In popular usage, particularly as an adjective, the term refers to any and all collective activity that is not overtly political, including cultural and associational activity. In either case, the point is that the term was indeterminate, its precise meaning remaining particularly fluid in these years. For instance, in his study of a part of the pre-revolutionary student movement, Abbās Abdi writes: “We must not forget, however, that the students had an expanded interpretation [*tafsīr-i muvasa’ī*] of the term *sinfi*. For example, in solidarity with students in other universities, they too would go on strike. They understood this action as *sinfi*.” See ‘Abdī, *Junbish-i Dānishjū’ī*, 137.

⁹² According to Betty Assheton’s account of the proceedings, Jazani stated: “Ever since I knew myself I was interested in the interests of the Iranian people. I believe in the Constitutional Law. There are two cases where the Constitutional Law is inadequate: one, individual freedom and the other freedom of elections. In the interest of the Iranian people, these are the problems on the basis of which I launched my activities.” See IISH: Amnesty International Archives, Folder 433, “Report by Mrs. Betty Assheton on Visit to Iran, December 1968/January 1969,” pp. 9. Jazani’s reference to constitutional law and his characterization of activism as an effort to reinvigorate or amend that law is characteristic of the public presentation of resistance before the definitive turn to *sinfi* activity. Assheton’s brief summary, however, fails to capture the essence of Jazani’s defense, the entire text of which has only recently been discovered and published. See Bijan Jazani, “Difā’ī,” 5-14. Jazanī’s defense mobilizes principles in the existing Iranian Constitution in order to demonstrate the unconstitutional character of the proceedings.

shrouded in the language of what they were not; the pretension to the political was abandoned altogether.

Because ensuing demands were detached from the framework of the state, their actual political content could be unabashedly utopian. Without the need to harmonize what one wanted with what one said, the need to limit one's political imagination to existing realities suddenly disappeared. In this regard, the Pahlavi state's projection of itself as separate from society inadvertently fueled non-state representations of the self as autonomous. In other words, where the proliferation of "non-political" discourse was meant to suppress discontent by increasing the costs of doing so, it actually ended up contributing to the radicalization of that discontent.

Overt political opposition adopted this register in advocating for individual rights protections. Conceptually speaking, radicalized interpretations of individual human rights as detached from any existing collective formation or political community (i.e. as universal) cohered with the concept of the "non-political." In the wake of the public relations success experienced in 1965, this kind of advocacy became the single shared cornerstone of CISNU's initiatives. The student movement abroad radicalized with the commencement of urban guerrilla warfare in 1968; at the same time, rights discourse became less of an end and more of an instrumental means. Various splinter groups within CISNU continued to champion the cause of human rights, but did so with the intention of circumscribing the gains of those initiatives in different iterations of anti-imperialism and Marxist revolution. All the while, the "non-political" quality of individual human rights facilitated its use as an empty signifier.

This tactic was not limited to the secular student movement. Muslim students and activists abroad made similar appeals in the language of individual rights. In 1971, a group calling itself "Iranian Students of Islamic Science" wrote a letter addressed to the UN Human

Rights Committee in New York, Amnesty International, and the French Committee in Defense of Political Prisoners. The letter called for the protection of “75 students of Islamic revolution and 50 other Iranian combatants similarly awaiting trials in the Shah’s military courts.” It characterized the Pahlavi regime as having “abandoned the nation’s constitutional, Islamic, and human laws.”⁹³

This “non-political” discourse arguably had more of an effect on determining what opposition groups were and did than mobilizing or manipulating the international community. CISNU, in particular, was defined by the unification produced through its use of “non-political” rhetoric: the sole initiatives its various parties regularly agreed upon (apart from shared opposition to the Shah) were public relations campaigns concerning individual rights abuses and the formal procedures of the association itself.⁹⁴ When the association fell apart in 1975 as a result of infighting, its various factions continued to work together on rights campaigns when the Pahlavi family and its associates visited in the United States and Europe.⁹⁵ Each faction sought to draw on the universal appeal of “non-political” discourse to advance its own agenda; in practice, however, the strategy held in common ended up unifying and harmonizing the various factions themselves. For Islamist activists in exile, the growing appeal of universal moralistic principles in place of elaborate ideological programs and a concrete political agenda worked to their benefit. The ethical nature of individual human rights as a “last utopia” directly corresponded with the increasing prominence of their ethical pronouncements.

⁹³ See IISH: Political Organizations and Student Associations of Iranians in Europe and the United States Collection, Folder 8G.

⁹⁴ To this end, between 1960 and 1975, when it finally succumbed to its internal divisions, CISNU was a remarkable example of democratic self-governance across factional difference. See Abrahamian, “Review,” 711.

⁹⁵ Interview with two activists from competing CISNU factions based in Texas, 2014.

Covert political opposition in Iran employed this register by organizing around educational demands. In 1339 [1960/61], student activists organized a strike in response to a sudden change in assessment standards. The ethos and strategies invoked in that strike reappeared in the spring of 1346 [1967] and continued until the summer of 1347 [1968], when university students in all eight of Iran's institutions of higher learning organized demonstrations "pressing complaints about the educational system."⁹⁶ Their demands were strictly limited to the administration of their education, including lowering newly instituted tuition fees, raising university budgets, and providing better facilities.

In Tabriz University, strikes began in the spring of 1967 as a deliberate effort to mimic and extend similar protests at Tehran University.⁹⁷ Yet where the Tehran University strike ended after 3 days, Tabriz's strikes continued for months until officials granted students' their *sinfi* demands. In the end, the striking students were able to autonomously control and administer the university for the duration of the 1967-68 academic year.⁹⁸ Students at Tabriz University were organized in two units, one underground with ties to the OIPFG and the other publicly advancing "non-political" demands as a cover. In this regard, their actions mirrored CISNU's model. Their

⁹⁶ See Memorandum from the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (Helms) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) from September 2, 1970; U.S. National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box #1325, NSC Unfiled Material, 1970.

⁹⁷ Demonstrations in different cities took on different trajectories. In Tehran University, 100 students were arrested in February 1968 — 20 of whom were alleged to be "pro-Chinese Communists." In Pahlavi University in Shiraz, 50 "religiously conservative" Muslim leaders were arrested that same month for "fomenting the strikes." See *ibid.* My account of events at Tabriz University is based on two separate oral history interviews with individuals who were both students and behind-the-scenes organizers at the time of the strikes. Interview with former Tabriz University student activists, April–June 2015.

⁹⁸ According to the interviews I conducted, their control over the administration of the university came to an end when their public representatives were imprisoned in the summer of '68. For an account of how the event caught the attention of SAVAK agents at the time, see "*Kushtār-i fajr '9 fadā'ī va mujāhid bi dastūr-i shāh būd*" ["The Tragic Killing of 9 Fadā'ī and Mujāhid Guerrillas Was Ordered by the Shah"] in *Ittilā'āt*, no. 15885 (31 Khordād 1358/21 June 1979), 9.

protests — which were repeated again in relation to rising bus costs in February 1970⁹⁹ — marked a broader turn among a younger generation of activists seeking ways of conducting independent political activity in a political environment closed off to it.¹⁰⁰

Yet the increase in associational activity was not always a cover for radical political objectives. Associational activity stretched beyond political concerns, strategies, and objectives by definition, thereby blurring the lines between what was and was not political. As a result, its increase involved the proliferation of practices ambiguously situated between the reproduction of state power and the creation of an other world separate from and autonomous to it.

The Institute for Social Science and Research (ISSR) [*Mu'assasah- 'i Mutāla'āt va Tahqīqāt-i Ijtimā- 'ī*] exemplifies these ambiguities.¹⁰¹ Established in 1958 by Ehsān Narāqi in affiliation with the University of Tehran, the ISSR sought to “adapt” Western social scientific methods for the purposes of studying social life in Iran and, by extension, informing and influencing state policy.¹⁰² The ISSR was neither a direct reflection of state action nor an

⁹⁹ Telegram 668 from Embassy in Tehran to the U.S. Department of State, February 24, 1970; National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 23-8 IRAN.

¹⁰⁰ Abdi provides an account of these events from the perspective of university students in the Polytechnic College in Tehran. According to this account, students were expelled from Tabriz University, leading to a strike. Their representatives came to the Polytechnic College, which then went on strike in solidarity. Abdi also notes the transformations in the quality of student strikes in general. The tactics used to organize the strikes were openly political in 1339 [1960-61] then increasingly became secretive, with 1347 [1968-69] marking a turning point; and yet, all the while the police never engaged the students in confrontation. See Abdi, *Junbish-i Dānishjū 'ī*, 137-38.

¹⁰¹ I am grateful to Kaveh Ehsani for bringing this point to my attention. Schayegh and Mehrzad Boroujerdi present the Institute in a diametrically opposed fashion. Schayegh characterizes the ISSR as participating in the construction of an elitist technocratic vision for changing Iranian society. See Schayegh, “‘Seeing Like a State,’” 42. Boroujerdi by contrast presents ISSR’s critiques of the technocratic elite (and, by implication, the Shah) for not attending to “indigenous Iranian conditions, norms, and values.” See Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*, 138-9. While those critiques may still contain an elitist and technocratic vision of their own, reaffirming Schayegh’s point, ambiguity remains. My consideration of the ISSR takes these ambiguities as a defining feature of its “non-political” quality.

¹⁰² In a 1974 survey of contemporary intellectual life, Hamid Enayat noted that social sciences other than Political Science were able to expand and grow in Iran due to “the politically ‘innocuous’ character of most of their findings.” In this vein, the ISSR had become “the leading organization...for teaching and research” in Iran. Its work

exemplar of non-state resistance. It was a state-supported institution that employed members of the Iranian opposition and in many instances provided social, political, and financial cover for them. On the one hand, the projects these individuals were assigned to and worked on articulated policy initiatives for the state. On the other, the very nature of that relationship undermined the notion that the state was all-encompassing in its ability to dictate what others did; in short, its own policy initiatives were being determined for it by many of the individuals it defined itself against.¹⁰³

The same ambiguities appeared in popular social practice. Collective actions taken by some of Tehran's bread bakers are a telling case in point. In 1344 [1965/66], the state formed a commission that nullified the work permits for all bread bakeries in the capital; each bakery was required to re-certify itself as part of a state-initiated workers' cooperative [*shirkat-i ta'avuni*] to keep its doors open by law. Of the approximately 500 bakeries in Tehran at the time, 312 were able to secure the requisite permits. In ensuing years, the remaining bakers wrote a series of petitions to the Iranian Parliament, registering complaints about their inability to secure permits

consisted of producing and publishing monographs regarding demography, urban sociology, rural life, and tribes. See Enayat, "The State of Social Sciences in Iran," 5, 8.

¹⁰³ For instance, one of the ISSR's leading researchers, Bāqer Parhām, regularly met with and helped publish translations by Amir Parviz Puyān — a central member of the OIPFG and most famously the author of *The Necessity of Armed Struggle and a Refutation of the Theory of Survival*. Puyan's pamphlet was pivotal in the increase in violent insurrection and guerrilla warfare. When interrogated by the Shah's secret police, Parhām maintained his allegiance to Puyān, keeping information regarding an illicit visit after he had already gone underground confidential. See Baqer Parhām, interview with Nasser Mohajer. Parhām more regularly collaborated with the likes of Mostafā Sho'ayān and Vidā Hādjebi. Hādjebi later became an important symbol in international rights campaigns to free Iranian political prisoners. She was arrested on 23 July 1972, along with five other unidentified sociologists researching living conditions in rural Iran and sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment. She was selected as a "prisoner of conscience" for the week of October 14-20, 1973. Her case also won the support of Amnesty International, P.E.N., the American Sociological Association, the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association and the National Organization for Women. By 8 February 1975, U.S. Congressman Ronald Dellums was writing a letter to the Iranian ambassador to the United States expressing his concern. See IISH: Amnesty International Archives, Folder 449, "Women in Prison," March 1975, pp. 12; Library of Congress: "Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience Week," October 1973; *Committee for Artistic and Intellectual Freedom in Iran (CAIFI) Newsletter* 1, n.1 (March 1975): 5, 15.

and the abuse they experienced from state officials as a result.¹⁰⁴ The letters implied corruption and conspiracy on the part of the 312 bakers in complicity with government officials.¹⁰⁵

Their letter writing reveals how associational activity stretched beyond a clear-cut demarcation between state power and non-state resistance. Here, state efforts to induce and control associational activity in a non-political fashion inadvertently resulted in the autonomous practice of associational activity. Representatives from the remaining 188 bakeries worked together to identify and articulate shared interests and grievances for all Tehran bread bakers, including the 312 they accused of conspiracy and corruption.¹⁰⁶ Through this act, they simultaneously reproduced state designs while breaking from them. They were asking for inclusion in the association, but on their own terms.

The disgruntled bakers were able to get away with this departure in light of the content of their complaints. Put crudely, they were not seeking to advance the interests of a Marxist

¹⁰⁴ In the fall of 1352 [1973], the Majles (parliament) received two related sets of petitions. The first, penned on 27 Āzar 1352 [18 December 1973], was from bakers following up on a separate request made on 4 Mordād 1350 [26 July 1971]. Making what is most probably a reference to the sudden increase in oil revenue “as the government was attending to all of the country’s problems,” the letter reiterated a request for guild benefits [*mazāyā-yi sinfi*] that were owed and overdue. The second set — dated 8 and 14 Ābān 1352 [30 October and 5 November 1973] — was from a group of over 40 bakers protesting the increasing costs of membership in their workers’ cooperative. Their refusal to comply with a newly instituted requirement mandating the payment of health benefits for their workers had resulted in their exclusion from the benefits of the cooperative (specifically, the lowered price of subsidized flour) and, in some cases, the imprisonment of a number of bakers. See Parliamentary (Majles) Library Archives: *Nānvā ī-hāyi Tīhrān* (2/2094/405/1/5).

¹⁰⁵ Perhaps because these letters are housed in the archives of the Parliamentary Library in Tehran they only show the aspects of the story that pertain to the bread bakers who were not able to secure government permits. In this regard, the letters cohere with a broader official narrative in post-revolutionary Iran regarding the progressive dispossession of ordinary people in pre-revolutionary times by corrupt officials. Setting possible selection bias aside, the documents also reveal the kind of associational activity assumed from below in response to these conditions. Short of manufactured documentation, which may exist in any state archive, it is indisputable that representatives from the remaining 188 bakers worked together to articulate their complaints against state transgressions on “non-political” terms. The identification and theorization of this kind of resistance cannot readily be categorized in terms of post-revolutionary state propaganda.

¹⁰⁶ The first letter, dated 10 Farvardīn 1350 [30 March 1971], includes a chart outlining the daily costs of production for a Tehran bakery. Based on the chart as well as the city’s population (which it lists at 3.5 million), the letter argues that the certification of 500 bakeries could not and would not threaten the profit margin of any individual baker. See *ibid.*

working class. In one of their later petitions, the workers complained about a newly instituted requirement mandating the payment of health benefits for their workers — an added cost they could not afford — in return for their share of government subsidized flour.¹⁰⁷ By acting against the interests of workers' rights in the abstract, the petition appeared in an acceptable, non-threatening, “non-political” register. More concretely, the 188 bakers were adopting a practice of associational activity positioned against their own workers — a position that undermined state-centered initiatives (and corruption), but that also by consequence advanced the precarious conditions of Iran's dispossessed classes.

Social practices that refuse to be categorized on either side of a neat dichotomy between the reproduction of embedded state power and non-state resistance echo the ethos of negativity inherent to neoliberalism. They also affirm the presence of a parallel between the emergence of neoliberalism and Iran's revolutionary movement. In the practice of associational activity, everyday Iranian resistance was “not” resistance. Without any previous designs or intentions, but rather in the act itself, it prefigured the shape of change to come.

IV

Islam and Politics in a Neoliberal Period

There is more to a name than just a name.

In the writing of history, naming may constitute a site of continued political contestation and, in some instances, unlikely political alliance. Proponents of the Islamic Republic that formed in and after the 1979 revolution in Iran have at times found themselves in common parlance with Orientalist critics and political opponents. Both sides identify the event as “the

¹⁰⁷ In a move that bespoke potential neoliberal economic reforms to-come (albeit many years the revolution), the state had placed the costs of providing health care onto small business owners, threatening to cut their subsidies if they failed to comply. The new tax had only been imposed on those bakeries that were not certified.

Islamic Revolution” (*inqilāb-i islāmī*). For its proponents, this designation and its accompanying narratives position the roles of other actors — secular and even non-clerical Muslims — as marginal to what occurred. In a reflection of these official narratives, one cleric described Imam Khomeini’s revolution as a continuation of the spirit first invoked by the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁰⁸ For opponents of the post-revolutionary order — which includes a non-homogenous cast of reformed Marxists, nostalgic Monarchists, and area studies Orientalists — the same narratives act as an indictment against the regime. Here, the revolution marks the acceptance of anachronistic religious edicts — edicts that managed to better appeal to irrational sensibilities in the ideological competition for the attentions of everyday people.¹⁰⁹

More measured scholars have acknowledged the significance of religious practice in order to account for the course of Iran’s revolutionary moment without aggrandizing or debasing religion as such.¹¹⁰ These accounts stand against a body of historical writing that insists on disavowing the importance of religion in the uprising itself, writing that imagines a “stolen” *Iranian* — as opposed to *Islamic* — Revolution. The latter celebrates an initial liberal moment of

¹⁰⁸ Author interview with cleric, Qom, Iran, May 2015. The interview account is not meant to reflect the “true” feelings or beliefs of the cleric — which are difficult to ascertain for anyone, much less a scholar of his stature — but rather presents a reflection of *some* official narratives in clerical circles. Speaking with a student researcher visiting from the United States, we might imagine it prudent for a figure who harbors any disagreement to share a narrative that coheres with official representations. At the same time, there are layers of resistance contained even within the reproduction of official narratives. As Ervand Abrahamian argues, it was in his early years that Khomeini posited the Prophet Muhammad’s Mecca and Imam Ali’s caliphate as “models to replicate. In a later 1982 speech, however, Khomeini “boasted that the Islamic Republic of Iran had surpassed all previous Muslim societies.” See Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 14-15. If we take Khomeini’s pronouncements as a measure, this particular cleric’s account would suggest an agreement with earlier official narratives and a disagreement with later official narratives — without abandoning a shared framework.

¹⁰⁹ For representative examples in academic scholarship, see Skocpol, “Rentier State and Shi’a Islam,” 269-270, 275; Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, 119, 190-6.

¹¹⁰ The work of Kamran Scot Aghaie and Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi are exemplary in this regard. See Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala*, 67-86, 131-53; Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent*, 34-35. The latter presents Islamism as “the plurality of modernity” and the Islamic Republic in Iran as “the plurality of Islam.”

uprising before the mass “mobilization” of religious sentiment took over.¹¹¹ By contrast, accounts that acknowledge the significance of religious practice from well before have understood the 1963 uprising against the Shah’s proposed “White Revolution” as a “dress rehearsal” for 1979.¹¹²

Indeed, for proponents of official narratives, certain ideological detractors, and these more thoughtful scholars alike, 1963 marks the contemporary “beginning” of the 1979 revolution.¹¹³ Oddly, despite their considerable differences, accounts that identify 1963 as the “beginning” of the revolution also tend to attribute a timeless quality to popular expressions of

¹¹¹ A range of accounts, with diverse and even conflicting conceptual commitments, are unified in their description of an essentially “Iranian” Revolution with mass-based participation that was manipulated and “stolen” by clerical elites. For a sophisticated and illustrative example directly pitched in terms of the names of the event, see Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, 25-6, 32-5, 38, 88-95, 305. According to these authors, revolutionary leaders “mobilized” the masses into legitimating their “appropriation” of an otherwise open-ended “Iranian Revolution” as a more narrow “Islamic Revolution.” The tenuous nature of this characterization, however, emerges in the distinction the authors make between the two revolutions. The “Iranian Revolution” is an uprising filled with a diverse array of political actors and ideologies in the public domain. The “Islamic Revolution” by contrast involves the implementation of an ideological framework crafted by a set of emerging elites over a century’s worth of struggle, but which was only successfully “mobilized” because it reflected the “communal identity” of the mass. This is where the paradox emerges. This process of “appropriation” expresses a set of ideas authentic to the semi-literate mass but is also contrary to the very same diverse mass who seem to have created the “Iranian Revolution.” It is not clear if the authors wish to say that elites mobilized the masses to be who they had already come to be (i.e. their shared communal identity) or if elites persuaded the masses into accepting something alien to who they truly were (as a diverse set of political actors with varied ideological perspectives). In the end, it seems as if the “Iranian Revolution” was an exceptional yet highly instrumental detour in the implementation of a pre-determined elite-driven agenda. This dynamic becomes most apparent in the equivalency the authors establish between an already articulated Islamic ideology and the ideology of the newly consolidated state. Even though they account for the participation of the masses in the production of the discursive world they come to inhabit, their analysis ultimately suggests that the revolutionary moment simply created the stage where an established ideological framework could be adopted and appropriated. In this regard, the process did not change the content of the ideology; moreover, elite intentionality resurfaces to override the prospect of mass agency.

¹¹² Nasser Mohajer, “Bi Sūyih Qudrat,” 93. H.E. Chehabi similarly argues that the revolution was a more organized iteration of what first happened in 1963. See Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism*, 179.

¹¹³ The notion that a new story in the course of history — one never before told — “begins” with a revolution is distinct to the modern concept of revolution. See Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, 11, 18-19. The effort to identify a “beginning” to the Islamic Revolution on the part of scholars — whether it be in 1963, 1906 (Iran’s Constitutional Revolution), or the 7th century — reflects this modern conceit. And yet, “a beginning must *be thought* possible, it must *be taken to be possible*, before it can be one.” Edward Said, *Beginnings*, 35. As I argue below, the historical record of 1963 — which shows an Islamist opposition working within the framework of the existing constitutional monarchy, instead of seeking to act (as moderns would) to break from it — suggests these possibilities were not thought as such at that time.

Islam as political resistance, so that contemporary expressions of that resistance appear as a form of nativism.¹¹⁴ In response to the dramatic social changes wrought by the Pahlavi state's implementation of modernizing reforms through autocratic means, Iran's popular masses are understood as having turned to authentic modes of life exemplified by the timeless institutions of Shi'a Islam.

Without delving into a consideration of its metaphysical essence, however, Islam may just as well be understood for how it has been interpreted, lived, and embodied by Muslims across time. In reference to the theories of the Cordovan Zahirites in medieval Arabic linguistics, Edward Said presents the Quran as a "worldly" text — a sacred text that, in opposition to the revelatory qualities of the Judeo-Christian tradition, emerged through a unique event at a decidedly particular moment in historical time. The Cordovan Zahirites interpretation of the Quran presents it as an "interplay" between human language and the divine. Said employs this example to illustrate how worldliness in general differs from circumstantial determinism.¹¹⁵ We may extrapolate from this example to imagine understandings of Islam as it is lived — as Muslim practice, coherent with the founding spirit of its sacred text.

In fact, this manner of interpretation echoes the broader ethos guiding modernist instantiations of Islamic political thought in the 20th century.¹¹⁶ From "reformists" to

¹¹⁴ Mohajer, in particular, presents a split between "regressive," pre-capitalist forces and newly emergent "progressive" capitalist forces as a constitutive (and dialectical) contradiction that begins in the 19th century and reaches its climax in the 1979 Revolution. See "Bi Sūyih Qudrat," 91-5.

¹¹⁵ Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 33-39.

¹¹⁶ Islamic modernism is the effort to respond to the changing conditions of Muslim life in and after colonization including the growing influence of Euro-American hegemony from the 18th century onwards. It encompasses tendencies that some scholars describe as "fundamentalist." On these terms, Peter Mandeville accordingly situates Islamism as a distinctly modern phenomenon that emerges in response to, and thus within, modern state formation. See Mandeville, *Global Political Islam*, 49-146. Ghamari-Tabrizi similarly present it as a "counter-hegemonic" response to the European myth of progress. See *Islam and Dissent*, 18. More specific to the context of revolutionary Iran, Abrahamian convincingly argues against the applicability of the term "fundamentalist" to Khomeini and the founding of an Islamic Republic. See *Khomeinism*, 13-17.

“fundamentalists,” various forms of Salafism have called for a return to origins. When and where this call has amounted to the strict interpretation of initial experience as moral law, circumstantial determinism rears its head. When and where there has been an effort to contend with — as opposed to simply reject — existing realities however, the worldly spirit of Islam’s founding moment may be discerned in a contemporary context. In Iran, this ethos is most distinctly apparent in the writings of those Islamic “ideologues” who were preoccupied with responding to Marxism and its attendant emphasis on materialism.¹¹⁷ Beyond what these thinkers might have intended, we may discern the worldly dimensions of what they did in light of broader historical changes.

In this fashion, Islam appeared as a revolutionary formation in Iran alongside the parallel emergence of a neoliberal discursive shift in the Middle East and the changing character of Iranian resistance to the Pahlavi regime, broadly construed. A reconsideration of the 1963 uprising is in order. Rather than acting as the “beginning” of the 1979 Revolution, it was one among a series of events that set the stage for a new mode of social practice in the late 1960s. Those social practices, far from the splendor of any single inaugural event, innocuously coalesced over time before eventually coming together in the “unthinkable” outburst of the 1977-79 uprising.

On the 15th of Khordād 1342 [5 June 1963] protests erupted in a number of Iranian cities (including Tehran, Qom, Shiraz, and Mashhad) in response to the imprisonment of Ayatollahs Khomeini (Qom), Mahalāti (Shiraz), and Qomi (Mashhad).¹¹⁸ An extended battle over the

¹¹⁷ For a discussion of varied and numerous examples of this phenomenon, see Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 140-4, 152-5, 224-7, 329-31, 353, 380-4, 387.

¹¹⁸ Mohajer, “Bi Sūyih Quadrat,” 93.

passage of governmental reforms ultimately resulted in a provocative speech, delivered by Khomeini on 3 June 1963, and the ensuing arrests. According to some accounts, the clerics opposed the Shah's proposed land reforms — because they violated the principle of private property, protected in Islam¹¹⁹ — as well as political changes — which would give women the right to vote and run for office, again contravening certain interpretations of Islamic law.¹²⁰ From another perspective, Khomeini's actions represented an “unconventional path to prominence and preeminence” in the void left by Grand Ayatollah Hossein Boroujerdi's death (on 30 March 1961).¹²¹ Most importantly for the effort to appreciate the historical role of Muslim social practice, regardless of what their intentions actually may or may not have been, Khomeini and his colleagues carefully presented the movement as a response to “internal autocracy” and “foreign hegemony” grounded in a defense of both *shariah* and the existing Iranian constitution.¹²²

¹¹⁹ A number of prominent clerics (including Khomeini) were themselves landowners. Moreover, senior *'ulamā* worked closely with the Agricultural Union of Iran from its inception. Yet their statements in opposition to land redistribution consistently cited the defense of private property on religious and constitutional grounds. Khomeini's fatwa along these lines acknowledged the rights of the poor against the transgressions of large landowners, before also asserting “the principle of private ownership” — all in the name of “reason, religion, the interests of the country and...Islamic justice and jurisprudence.” See Majd, *Resistance to the Shah*, 194-5, 198-9, 204-5.

¹²⁰ In a telegram to Prime Minister Asadollah Alam dated 28 Mihr 1341 [20 October 1962], Khomeini expressed opposition to a cabinet decree regarding the election of district and provincial councils. The decree would allow candidates to take the oath of office with a “holy book” (instead of, specifically, the Quran); it also implicitly extended the franchise to women. In his statement of opposition, Khomeini's argues that by allowing women to be elected to office Alam was acting against both the constitution and *shariah*. For the text of this telegram, see *Khātirāt-i Āyatullāh Muntazirī*, 421-2.

¹²¹ Fakhreddin Azimi, “Khomeini and the ‘White Revolution,’” 29.

¹²² Hamid Algar, “The Opposition Role of the Ulama,” 249-50, 255. The popular representation of these events most closely cohered with this position. Ayatollah Khomeini clearly exhibited an acute awareness of the significance of popular perception for achieving political success. As opposition to the Shah's referendum (26 January 1963) mounted, Ayatollah Hājseyyed Ahmad Khansari declared opposition to agricultural reforms. Khomeini expressed frustration with Khansari in private quarters: his statement could turn everyday farmers and agriculturalists [*kishāvarzān*] who might stand to benefit from the reforms against the movement. Khomeini instead argued that opposition should be expressed against the essence of the referendum, not its substance (e.g. future referendums could contravene constitutional and Islamic law). See *Khātirāt-i Āyatullāh Muntazirī*, 114-5.

When it occurred, the 1963 uprising appeared to be an isolated event. No secular political party took a formal position in support of it or against it; meanwhile, university students, the new middle class, and the industrial/urban working class refrained from participating. The movement was instead made of “clerics, bazaar merchants ... shopkeepers, craftsmen, itinerants [*durihgirdhā*], street vendors, laborers in traditional workshops, carpenters, blacksmiths, bread bakers, and the unemployed.”¹²³ Thus, understood solely in terms of its social class composition, 1963’s uprising certainly was a reaction to the threat posed by the Shah’s “modernization” policies to entrenched collectives.

The political and ideational response to this threat similarly involved the assertion of a literal return to (or rather, preservation of) the past. Yet the kind of past “returned” to, or preserved, was not an ahistorical one. Like other actors in opposition to the Pahlavi state, resistance to these policies affirmed the existing constitutional monarchy — an affirmation that declared the Shah’s particular exercise of power to be illegitimate on legal grounds. Tellingly, the sole political party to come out in support of the 1963 uprising was the Liberation Movement of Iran (hereafter, the LMI).¹²⁴ On the second day of rioting (6 June 1963), it issued a statement in support of the movement, with party activists participating in demonstrations. In the public trials of its leaders, Mehdi Bāzargān (who would go on to become the Prime Minister of the post-

¹²³ For a detailed discussion of these various class interests, see Mohajer, “Bi Sūyih Qudrat,” 93. For a slightly different account, which includes students and office employees among the crowd and the National Front among its leadership, see Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 424.

¹²⁴ The LMI — an offshoot of the National Front that shared with it the common goal of national independence and liberty — was distinct for its Islamic “motivation” and “social and political ideology.” Between its inception in May 1961 and January 1963 (when most of its leaders were imprisoned), it operated openly as a party within the political system. See Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism*, 153.

revolutionary Provisional Government in 1979) famously stated, “theirs would be the last trial in which a political group was persecuted for upholding the Constitution.”¹²⁵

It was only in the late 1960s, in parallel with a broader discursive shift in the region, that entirely new — and hence, revolutionary — political formations were to be imagined within the so-called Islamist opposition. These formations were exemplified by the abandonment of the existing constitution and a consequent rejection of the Pahlavi state as a whole. Their grounding within Islam, moreover, went further than classical appeals to national self-determination. As I argue in the chapter that follows, Iran’s Islamist opposition imagined and articulated political formations that simultaneously drew on and negated sovereignty. The result was the articulation of an indeterminate collective subject — a rhetorical trope that expressed detachment from all existing forms of political community. In the “interplay” between existing forms of political community and idealized conceptions of the *ummah*, that trope paralleled a neoliberal ethos of negation.¹²⁶

From this perspective, against efforts to “begin” histories of a revolutionary “Islamic ideology” with Jalal Al-e Ahmad’s influential *Gharbzadegi* [Westoxification] — published intermittently between 1962 and 1964 — ideational experimentation referencing Islam as a pivot

¹²⁵ The main accusation leveled against the LMI was that it had “plotted against the constitutional monarchy.” See *ibid.*, 182.

¹²⁶ In his characterization of nationalist thought, Partha Chatterjee presents a paradox between substantive assertions of difference (the “problematic”) and the adoption of “colonialist knowledge” as a rhetorical form in order to do so (the “thematic”). By virtue of “a process of mutual influence” between the “problematic” and the “thematic,” that adoption is never straightforward; the expression of nationalist thought in colonial contexts inherently changes the way in which nationalism is expressed, thereby threatening to transcend the “thematic.” Notably, these moments of seeming transcendence occur in Chatterjee’s study when and where he discusses religion. See Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 11, 40-3, 74-5, 100, 112. For Chatterjee, this transcendence only ever “seems” to be happening; in actuality, it reiterates an inescapable nationalist framework in the service of state sovereignty. In a slight departure from Chatterjee’s model, I am suggesting that the articulation of self-determination in terms of religion explicitly, and in particular Islam, shifted the way in which the nation-state was reproduced. In this regard, what “seems” to be happening is constitutive for what actually occurs.

for proposed social and political change may be located in the late 1960s, and not the 15th of Khurdad uprising in 1963.¹²⁷ Indeed, revolutionary Islam emerged most forcefully as a political and ideational practice in 1968 when young members and sympathizers of the LMI began to “work out a revolutionary strategy” in the guerrilla group the Organization of the Iranian People’s Mujahidin (hereafter, the OIPM).¹²⁸ The OIPM, an underground and transnational guerrilla movement that combined Marxism with Islam,¹²⁹ offered the most direct and confrontational of the innovations taking place within an Islamic ideational framework. Their particular affirmation of Islam involved an outright rejection of the existing constitution, fulfilling Bazargan’s prophetic warning.¹³⁰

These innovations, while limited to select members of the lower middle class and university students, did not leave the “traditional” *‘ulamā*, or clerics, unaffected. In locating the “beginning” of the “Islamic” Revolution in 1963, scholars have pointed to the death of

¹²⁷ Intellectual histories of an “Islamic ideology” in Iran tend to begin with Al-e Ahmad and in particular this text, even if as a point of departure for genealogical inquiry. For example, see Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 73-6 and Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*, 53. These accounts cohere with those situating 1963’s uprising as the “beginning” of the 1979 revolution. The first version of *Gharbzadegi* was written in 1961, published in late 1962, and distributed privately among Al-e Ahmad’s friends. It was then distributed without his consent as samizdat both in Tehran and abroad. A revised draft of a second edition was first completed in early 1964, after the June 1963 uprising, and then revised again in Farvardin 1343 [March-April 1964]. In their translations, both Sprachman and Campbell attribute the first appearance of the revised second edition to early 1963, i.e. *before* the June 1963 uprising. The Campbell translation, however, also writes the Iranian date as “the end of 1342.” The end of 1342 corresponds with late February and early March 1964, i.e. *after* the June 1963 uprising. See Al-i Ahmad, *Gharbzadigī*, 3; Al-e Ahmad, *Plagued by the West*, 2; Al-i Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 26.

¹²⁸ The organization itself and historians since have traced its “beginning” to the 1963 uprising and the ensuing formation of a reading group in September of 1965. The OIPM only began concentrated political activity however, what I have discussed here as social practice, in 1968. See Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, 85-9.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 92-104.

¹³⁰ Inadvertently, Bazargan foreshadowed these events. In the second portion of his defense, he questioned constitutional monarchy as such, going so far as to suggest that it would invariably result in despotism. This aspect of his defense only appeared in published form overseas in 1972. Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 338. By 1972, the ideational atmosphere of resistance had shifted. If we are to consider the reception as opposed to the production of ideas, the coincidence of the later publication date with a changed discursive atmosphere is significant.

Boroujerdi as the opening for alternative, explicitly political, ideas within the ranks of the clerical class. Yet, in parallel with the appearance of Iranian lay innovations in Islamic thought, this transition too does not become explicitly revolutionary until the late 1960s.

The exemplary manifestation of these developments in politicized clerical thought belongs, of course, to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini — the leader of the 1963 uprising and later the 1979 Revolution. As his intellectual biography demonstrates, significant changes in the expression of his thought occurred in parallel with those among lay Muslim activists (albeit in a decidedly more subtle fashion).¹³¹ According to Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, Khomeini’s political thought went through four discernible stages. The first (represented by 1943-44’s *Kashf-i Asrār*) involved an extension of Sheikh Fazlollāh Nouri’s insistence on the unchanging nature and primacy of Islam against secular constitutionalism; on these grounds, Khomeini disengaged from political participation.¹³² The second — which occurred in the build-up, unfolding, and aftermath of the 1963 uprising — asserted the need for political engagement.¹³³ Khomeini, like the LMI, affirmed the principle of constitutional monarchy as a way to proclaim the Shah’s illegitimacy.¹³⁴

¹³¹ In this regard, the *usūlī* tradition — to which almost all Shi‘a *ulamā* in modern Iran prescribed, Khomeini being no exception — defined his innovations more than any encounter with modernism or “Westernization.” See Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 428-29. This characteristic of Khomeini’s thought best accounts for the quality of the changes found therein. In either case, it is my intention here to show the parallels in form between those (subtle) changes and the more radical innovations found elsewhere simultaneous to them.

¹³² Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, “The Divine, the People, and the *Faqih*,” 212-16.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 216-21.

¹³⁴ This tendency was a widespread among Shi‘a *ulamā* at the time. They tended to follow the theoretical example set by Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Nāini. Nāini’s *Tanbih al-Umma va Tanzih al-Milla dar Asas va usul-i Mashrutiyat* (An Admonishment to the Nation and an Exposition to the People Concerning the Foundations and Principles of Constitutional Government) sought “to reconcile continued awareness of the occultation of the Imam, together with the resultant impossibility of legitimacy, with the practical need for a form of government that does not grossly offend the dictates of religion.” See Algar, “The Oppositional Role of the Ulama,” 238. In this respect, Nā’ini’s theory corresponds with what Andrew March (with reference to John Rawls) has identified in Islamic modernism as a “realistic utopia.” See March, “Taking the People as They Are,” 191-2. In the Iranian context, a “realistic utopia” at this point in time amounted to endorsing liberal constitutionalism while jettisoning the (impossible) ideal of realizing religious legitimacy on earth.

He notably maintained this position for years after the 1963 uprising and well into his eventual exile in Najaf, Iraq.¹³⁵

In line with broader historical developments, a distinct change appeared in his writings at the turn of the decade. The third stage — beginning in January 1970 and culminating in the revolution — involved the rejection of constitutional monarchy without, however, rejecting constitutionalism in principle.¹³⁶ Khomeini famously presented the replacement of secular constitutional legislative capacity with divine law (or Islamic Government) — a process guided by “the guardianship of the jurist” (*wilayat al-faqih*).¹³⁷ He would go on to resolve the tension between contractualism and elitism in those lectures by later asserting the primacy of popular sovereignty. Beginning in late 1972, culminating in October 1978 during the height of the revolutionary uprising, and continuing up until over two years after the victory of the 1979 Revolution, Khomeini predicated the legitimacy of the *faqih* [jurist] on the divine will of “the people.”¹³⁸

How did this third ideational formation emerge? The characterization of these developments solely as a matter of intellectual history, or ideology, precludes the quality of the

¹³⁵ For instance, in a letter to Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda dated as late as 27 Farvardin 1346 [16 April 1967], he describes the injustice of his exile as conflicting with both *shariah* law and existing constitutional law. See *Sahīfi-yi Nūr*, vol. 1, 132. Abrahamian points to a related affirmation of monarchical rule in a 1965 pronouncement and a general non-revolutionary disposition on Khomeini’s part until the late 1960s. See *Khomeinism*, 20-22.

¹³⁶ For Khomeini’s rejection of the existing constitutional monarchy, because it represented the imposition of foreign laws, see Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 30-32, 35, 56. For the presentation of Islam as an alternate (more legitimate) set of laws with a constitutional quality, see *ibid.*, 35-37, 43-44, 55-56. These citations are taken from a translation of *Islamic Government*, the published text of his accumulated 1970s lectures arguing for *wilāyat al-faqih*.

¹³⁷ Ghamari-Tabrizi, “The Divine, the People, and the *Faqih*,” 221-26. See also Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 24-26.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 226-31. After the revolution, Khomeini’s “utilitarian pragmatism” would lead to the assertion of state interest over divine law — completing his departure from Nouri. *Ibid.*, 231-7. Ghamari-Tabrizi identifies this shift as occurring in September of 1981.

transformations taking place in Khomeini's ideas.¹³⁹ Intellectual history and ideology alike presuppose a unidirectional process of influence from elite to mass. According to it, elite intentions are applied or replicated on a broad scale by ordinary individuals; popular masses are in turn presented as passive recipients of knowledge and information. And yet, this idea itself — of a *faqīh* whose legitimacy derives from the divine will of “the people” — posits an inverse relation between elite and mass. To stay consistent to the idea (which is not the same as the intentions of whoever may articulate it), we may instead consider the historical relationship between the articulation of the idea and the social practices of “the people” — that is, Muslim practice instead of Islamic thought. How, in other words, were these new political imaginaries part of a broader discursive shift? If Khomeini, as projected *faqīh*, grounded his legitimacy in the divine will of “the people,” then who were “the people” and what were they doing at the time?

For “the people” too, the effects of 1963 were most acutely felt in the late 1960s. Laws and state policies introduced in 1963 were only implemented and executed in 1968, including most significantly a dramatic increase in rural to urban migration and urban squatters.¹⁴⁰ That migration brought together a concentration of informal laborers in urban centers — laborers who

¹³⁹ Ghamari-Tabrizi attributes Khomeini's discussion of divine popular will to the influence of young Islamist activists. These included Ibrahim Yazdi, Abulhassan Bani-Sadr, Sādeq Qutbzādeh, and Mustafā Chamrān who “helped Khomeini see himself as part of a larger anticolonial struggle around the globe and express his political discourse in a language that was directly inspired by Shariati's liberation theology.” See Ghamari-Tabrizi, “The Divine, the People and the *Faqīh*,” 227-8. Bani-Sadr himself affirms this interpretation, claiming to have authored a manuscript that grounded *wilāyat-i faqīh* in popular sovereignty entitled *Usūl-i Rānamā'ī-yi Hukūmat-i Islāmī*; that manuscript was later approved by Khomeini and published in his name, a strategy adopted to give its claims clerical legitimacy. See Abolhassan Banisadr, in an interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 21 May 1984, Paris, France, Tape 5, pp. 9-10 of transcript, Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University. This manner of intellectual history, however, undermines the broader effort to understand the primacy of the revolution as event leading the formation of thought, as opposed to being determined by it. In fact, this tendency was apparent in a whole host of thinkers at the same time — thinkers who were not necessarily directly influencing Khomeini. For instance, Bazargan referred to the destination of the *hāj* (pilgrimage) as *khāniyih mardum* (“The House of the People”) and not, as it was traditionally known, *khāniyih khudā* (“The House of God”). See Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 364.

¹⁴⁰ Nasser Pākdāman has argued that the problems addressed in the revolution began in 1348 [1969] when Tehran's city limits were demarcated. See Pākdāman, *Dah Shab-i Sh'ir*, 126.

were detached from preexisting traditions of societal organization yet unevenly incorporated in the new social roles defining the urban middle class.¹⁴¹ In this respect, yet again, the supposed primary subject of the 1963 uprising — the social class most directly affected by the transformations wrought by modernization policies — only really formed in 1968.

Yet entrenched traditional classes were not the only ones to protest the autocratic implementation of modernization policies. Even those who more readily fit the image of modernity projected by the Pahlavi state experienced development in an “uneven” fashion. For the urban middle class too, 1963 signaled a rupture from the expected organization of social life. That rupture involved a widening gap between conceptions of political community as state sovereignty and the impossibility of affecting an actual return to unincorporated forms of social organization. In response, at the turn of the decade, the dominant cultural trend across various social classes involved a nostalgic desire to return to a purer past — a nostalgia that was, like other fictions of its kind, entirely of its present moment. From the Pahlavi state’s celebration of “2,500 years of monarchy” to the urban intelligentsia’s celebration of indigenous architectural forms, by the late 1960s just about everyone was looking backward to move ahead.¹⁴²

While its purported content may have been “nativist,” the actual enactment of this sentiment introduced new social phenomena cast as an increase in older, more familiar social practices. For those espousing a religious imaginary in particular, this ethos could be discerned in

¹⁴¹ Asef Bayat provides a general description of the effect this migration had on the composition of Tehran as a city as well as, more specifically, the formation of the “new poor” as a distinct social and cultural identity in *Street Politics*, 23-33. It should be noted that the paradoxes of this particular social class formed the core of a revolutionary consciousness — paradoxes that included swings between the consumption of taboo Westernized cultural production, on the one hand, and devout, seemingly authentic religious identification, on the other. For a discussion of the appeal of Westernized pop music among “traditional” classes in terms of this framework, see Yazdī, “Jām’ih Shināsī-yi Mūzīk-i Tūdih.”

¹⁴² In terms of timing, both the state and secular intellectuals’ engaged and advanced discourses of authenticity beginning in the late 1960s. See Negin Nabavi, *Intellectuals and the State*, 97-105.

the rise of “non-political” associational activity. Between 1347 [1968/9] and 1353 [1974/5], Iranian cities witnessed a marked increase in religious publications and audio productions, places of worship, and independent centers, associations and charitable trusts.¹⁴³ In Tehran, a number of religious associations unaffiliated with the state would appear.¹⁴⁴ These associations [*hayyat*] were organized around Shi’a mourning rituals, normally held in a *husayniyah*.¹⁴⁵ Groups of individuals organized themselves as *hayyat* based on trade affiliation, expressions of religious devotion, or markers of identification with a provincial region or ethnic minority.

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Organized by: | The Religious Association [<i>hayat</i>] of... ¹⁴⁶ |
| Trade Affiliation ¹⁴⁷ | Goldsmith Workers; the Goldsmiths' Guild [<i>sinf</i>]; Tehran's Barbers; the Fabric Merchants' Guild; the Sowers' Guild; the Quilt Merchants' Guild; the Architects and Builders' Guild; the Weavers; the Office of Busing; the Taxi Drivers' Guild; Automobile Parts Merchants; Plastic Merchants; Shoe and Sock Weavers; the Iron Merchants' Guild; the Shoemakers' Guild; the Shoemakers' Workers; Apothecary and Abortion Practitioners; Bathhouse Workers; Rug Sellers; the Guild for Passenger Services; the Fruit Juice Sellers' Guild; the Plumbers' Guild |

¹⁴³ Najafi, “Payvast,” 150-166. It should be noted that the results of Najafi’s study do not necessarily indicate an increase in religious sentiment. For instance, when presenting the increased publication of religious texts, Najafi does not control for a simultaneous increase in literacy. See *ibid.*, 151-2. Scholars who have drawn on his work have taken these conclusions for granted. See Arjomand, “Shi’ite Islam and the Revolution in Iran,” 311-3; Gudarzi, “*Vaqtī Jāmi’ah Az Tawsi’a Aqab Mī’uftad*,” 128-134. Nevertheless, Najafi makes an important contribution in his documentation of various religious associations [*hayat*], which unlike the rest of his addendum only relies on his own primary research. See Najafi, “*Payvast*,” 163.

¹⁴⁴ Arjomand distinguishes between these associations, which he identifies with “traditionalism,” and Shari’ati’s thought, which he identifies with “modernism.” For Arjomand, the former were “gatherings, at regular intervals, by new-comers to an alienating modern world to consolidate their attachment to the Islamic tradition and to reaffirm their collective cultural identity.” See “Shi’ite Islam and Revolution in Iran,” 312. It is my contention that such a reaction to “the modern world” both authored and was itself a new formation — despite even its own intentions.

¹⁴⁵ A *husainiyah* was a building originally annexed to a mosque, designed for Muharram ceremonies commemorating the death of Husayn (the third Shi’a Imam); by the late 18th century, these buildings were the site of dramatized Ashura processions. See Calmard, “Hosayniya,” 517-18. Najafi’s study documents an increase in the number of these sites alongside similar *mahdiyih*, *fatimiyih*, *zaynabiyih*, and *haidariyah* in 1352-3 [1973-5]. See Najafi, “*Payvast*,” 161.

¹⁴⁶ These lists are a direct translation of the select associational titles Najafi included in his published study. He writes that he chose from 1,821 *hayat* which had given themselves titles. He counted an additional 10,479 in Tehran that year without titles. See *ibid.*, 161-63.

¹⁴⁷ It is noteworthy that these professions match up with those that participated in the 1963 uprising. Also, here, the term “guild” is a translation of *sinf* — which I have elsewhere translated as “association.”

| | |
|---|---|
| Expressions of Religious Devotion | Husayn’s Beloved [<i>muhabbān</i>]; [Jafar] Sādeq’s Beloved; Rezā’s Beloved; Jafar’s Beloved; Zahrā’s Beloved; Akbar’s Beloved; Ali’s Beloved; the Husayni Unfortunates [<i>bichāri-hā</i>]; Musā bin Jafar’s Abject [<i>zalīl-hā</i>]; Imam Rezā’s Affiliates; Ali’s Affiliates; Zahrā’s Affiliates; the Qom Caravan; the Thirsty-Lipped Devotees [<i>fadā’ī-yi lab tishnih</i>] |
| Provincial/Regional or Ethnic Identification ¹⁴⁸ | Natanzis living in the Central Province; Gilānis from Kashan; Semnānis; Azirbaijānis; Muwaddin of Iraq; Birjandis; Arabs; Pakistanis; Nishāburis; Marāghi’is; Yazdis; Qomis; Ashtiānis; Kermānis; Khuzistānis; Mashhadis; Borujerdis living in the Central Province |

Like other forms of associational activity emergent at the time, religious associational activity was not new. What was “new” was its marked increase. Under circumstances where the state attempted to gather all forms of collective and social action under its watchful eye, these associations offered a permitted, ostensibly “non-political” avenue where participants could express a shared identity — one that stood apart from the purview of the state while fostering practices of self-governance.¹⁴⁹ In other words, what was “new” was that these associations *increasingly* became avenues for expressing political life in a “non-political” register, without any direct indication of what the signified actually was.

One familiar and concrete example of this practice involved expressions of economic autonomy. As in other locales where Islamism would emerge as a viable social and political force, charitable trusts in 1970s Iran procured an alternate source of banking without charging interest or seeking profit. They provided social services for a population otherwise and inadvertently marginalized by the increased centralization of state power.

¹⁴⁸ These associations may reflect the felt effects of the policies introduced by 1963’s “White Revolution,” in particular the resultant rise in rural to urban migration.

¹⁴⁹ I do not mean to suggest that participants joined religious associations for the express or instrumental purpose of expressing a shared, autonomous identity. Rather, by virtue of my emphasis on parallelism, I mean to suggest that what they did in practice cohered with a broader discursive shift in the region, *inadvertently*.

In short, the rise of Islamist social, cultural, and political expression in Iran paralleled the rise of “non-political” modes of action. Against existing historiography, these practices did not begin with or in 1963 (when older forms of organizational and rhetorical practice were still prevalent) — just as the most revolutionary articulations of political opposition did not occur with or even immediately after the 15th of Khordād uprising. Rather, the ostensibly “Islamic” practices and ideas that would come to define the character of uprising and resistance in 1979 coalesced in the late 1960s in line with a broader discursive shift.

There is more to a name than just a name.

CHAPTER 2 | A RETURN TO WHICH SELF?

It happened sometime before 1987. They gathered the political prisoners in a large room for a question and answer session with a representative from Ayatollah Ali Montazeri's office.

She recalled one exchange clearly. A fellow inmate asked:

They have held me here for supporting Dr. Shari'ati. I've spent three years in prison because I defended Shari'ati. And today, the newspaper *Jumhūrī Islāmī* has a one-and-a-half-page article about Dr. Shari'ati. It praises him. Why are you holding me here if it praises him? I did nothing other than this.

ما را اینجا به جرم حمایت از دکتر شریعتی نگه داشتند. من الان سه سال است تو زندان هستم به خاطر دفاع از شریعتی. و امروز روزنامه ی جمهوری اسلامی یک صفه و نیم راجع به دکتر شریعتی مقاله دارد. تعریف میکنه. پس منو چرا اینجا نگه داشتین اگر تعریف میکنه؟ من کاری غیر از این نکردم.

The representative's response to the query provides a window, albeit unintended, into Shari'ati's relevance as a theorist of indeterminate social transformation.

Dr. Shari'ati is like a rock in the middle of a river that helped intellectuals, who place their foot on this rock as they entered the embrace of Islam. To place their feet and come to this side of the river. Water will wash away those who stand on it. You must cross over.¹⁵⁰

دکتر شریعتی مثل سنگ وسط رودخانه است که کمک کرد که روشنفکرها پاشونو روش بگذارند بیان به دامن اسلام. پاشونو بگذارند بیان اینور رودخانه. آنهای که روش وایستادند آب مییره. باید بیای اینور.

Scholars have taken post-revolutionary events like these as evidence to solidify Shari'ati's status as an ideological midwife of the Islamic Republic.¹⁵¹ Despite his death in 1977, months before protestors spilled onto the streets of Tehran, Shari'ati's lectures and published writings are said to have defined the tenor of the uprising. In his most influential lectures, delivered at Hosseiniyeh Ershad during the late 1960s and early 1970s, Shari'ati fused radical ideas from Marxist and existentialist traditions of thought with a religious nationalist

¹⁵⁰ This account is based on an interview with the author, recorded in 2014.

¹⁵¹ Ervand Abrahamian writes that Shari'ati is "justly credited with being the main intellectual, even the Fanon, of the Islamic Revolution" and then that Shari'ati "has gone down in history as the main ideologue of the Iranian Revolution." Nikkie Keddie describes Shari'ati as doing "the most to prepare the Iranian youth for revolutionary upheaval." See Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 466; Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, 103; Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 215. While Hamid Dabashi is measured in his assessment of Shari'ati's place as "the" ideologue of the revolution, his work has nevertheless done the most to present intellectual production as ideology "instrumental to the outcome of the Revolution," essentially arguing that "the Islamic Revolution is predicated on 'the Islamic ideology.'" See *Theology of Discontent*, xlvii, 109, 157.

discourse.¹⁵² These lectures were attended by activists from guerilla groups and are considered to have been an ideological source for insurrectionary violence against the Pahlavi regime in the early 1970s. Shari‘ati subsequently came to form a cornerstone of the myth-making that attended the revolution, with his image carried in mass demonstrations. In this vein, he is said to have made 1979 possible — providing oppositional intellectuals a language that resonated among the revolutionary masses. In so doing, he paved the way for Ayatollah Khomeini’s assumption of political and ideological leadership. By understanding Shari‘ati, we can understand 1979 — or so the story goes.

Yet this reading imposes a teleology on Shari‘ati that conflicts with his speeches and writings, particularly when they are read in context for both content and form. This chapter accordingly presents Shari‘ati on different terms — not as an ideologue of the revolution, but rather as a theorist of popular sovereignty and social change. Reading his collected works as political theory allows us to identify the indeterminacy that defined 1979 “irreducible” and “unthinkable” revolution at the heart of its “Islamic ideology.” Doing so moves against readings of the revolution as a teleological process with a discernible “beginning” in 1963 — when

¹⁵² In 1964-5, the Hosseiniyeh Ershād was established in southern Tehran. In 1967, it moved to Qolhak, in the north of the capital city where its speakers could more easily present innovations in religious interpretation due to the clergy’s relative absence. See Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism*, 202. Shortly after the move, Shari‘ati (who was neither a cleric, nor a fully employed professor) took over for Morteżā Motahari (a prominent cleric closely affiliated with Ayatollah Khomeini) as Ershād’s featured attraction. Shari‘ati’s prominence at Hosseiniyeh Ershād lasted from 1348 [1969] until 1972. See *ibid.*, 204-5. In the immediate post-revolutionary moment, debates regarding the differences between Motahari and Shari‘ati presented the former as the purveyor of “traditional Islam” and the latter as an “antitraditional innovator.” Yet the points of continuity between the two thinkers is ultimately more significant than their rivalry. See Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 157. Because of Shari‘ati’s innovations, articulating Islam as a revolutionary ideology, this turn of events never sat well with the clergy — revolutionary or otherwise. Importantly, however, the revolutionary clergy never publicly and unequivocally distanced themselves from it or from Shari‘ati. Motahari worked to denounce Shari‘ati after leaving Ershād, going so far as to ask Ayatollah Khomeini to issue a fatwa banning his book. Notably, despite trusting “Motahari’s judgment in all political matters, [Khomeini] refused to censure Shari‘ati publicly.” For a discussion of the clerical reaction to Shari‘ati, and public denunciations by the more traditional and jurisprudentially oriented clerical class (as well as Shari‘ati’s reaction to them), see Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent*, 171-3. See also Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*, 206-9, 266-76. For an account of Shari‘ati’s ambivalent status in the revolutionary uprising, see Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 149-50.

dispossessed members of traditional classes were first mobilized by elite Islamic ideologues bearing a pre-determined plan implemented in 1979. Rather, it furnishes an entirely different reading of the revolution as an event in the context of a broader discursive shift. In this respect, ideational innovations could suggestively imagine the promise of an indeterminate future to be a good thing; in other words, an undefined telos could conceivably act as the desired telos of mass-based revolutionary action.

Section I considers *Ummat va Imāmat* [The Muslim Community (the *Ummah*) and the Shi'a Tradition of Leadership (the *Imamate*), or more simply *Community and Leadership*] — the text of Shari'ati's that most readily suggests a determinate teleology leading from popular sovereignty and revolution to an authoritarian Islamic Republic. An entirely different reading, however, may be advanced. As I argue, *Ummat va Imāmat* presents a “realistic utopia” within a reiterated Marxist framework; that utopia is, by definition, incomplete.

Every teleology requires not only an endpoint but also a beginning. Shari'ati managed to disrupt conceptions of where or what it is we are going toward by posing where we are coming from (and even who we are) as a question. In this vein, the following two sections compare Shari'ati's ideas with Frantz Fanon's. In Section II, I situate Shari'ati's overall framework within the context of decolonial theory, specifically theories of new humanism and “return.” This tradition does not root the concept of “return” (i.e. who or what it is we are going toward) in a factual and temporal past but rather in an indeterminate present and/or future. In adding a consideration of religion, specifically Islam, to the framework, Shari'ati's contribution only enhances the sense of indeterminacy communicated therein. Based on the distinct manner of (what he called) colonization in Iran, Shari'ati presented a different kind of self to “return” to and relatedly a distinct vision as to how that “return” (*bāzgasht*) might occur. In Section III, I

argue that Shari'ati's "self" was religious and not corporal; accordingly, his notion of "return" was primarily hermeneutic, not phenomenological. Central to this conceit was a new conception of *shahādāt* on narrative terms.

In Section IV, I return to *Ummat va Imāmat* and the question of beginnings. Drawing on insights gleaned from the separate discussions of "return" and the "self" in Sections II and III, I present the text's form as the basis for a reconsideration of popular sovereignty in Muslim political thought. In this respect, Shari'ati offers a theoretical framework within which to interpret the emergence of neoliberal revolution in Iran.

I

The Ummah and its Imam

Ummat va Imāmat is the title given for a series of lectures Shari'ati delivered at the Hosseiniyeh Ershād at some point in 1968 or 1969.¹⁵³ The text seems to be the most damning confirmation of his role as a stepping stone in a teleological process of Islamic revolution. After the revolution, *Ummat va Imāmat* was reprinted in book form, a material history that informs the scholarly reception of the ideas contained therein. At least one copy was published in Esfand of 1358 [late February, early March of 1980].¹⁵⁴ At the time, the first official draft of the Islamic Republic's constitution, which contained the two articles regarding Ayatollah-now-Imam Khomeini's concept of "the guardianship of the jurist" (*wilāyat al-faqīh*), had been ratified [November 1979]; Mehdi Bazargan's liberal provisional government had been unseated [November 1979]; Abulhassan Bani-Sadr had been elected president through majority vote

¹⁵³ Toward the end of the lectures, Shari'ati makes reference to the May 1968 uprising in France, which he incorrectly describes as having occurred "last year" in "1967." See *Ummat va Imāmat*, 161.

¹⁵⁴ Later editions of Shari'ati's transcribed lectures tend to contain footnotes responding to critics. For a discussion of this phenomenon in *Islāmshināsī*, see Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 129. For an example of it in *Ummat va Imāmat*, where Shari'ati actually refers to *Islāmshināsī* — which appeared in 1972 after the lectures in question — see *Ummat va Imāmat*, 166fn1.

[January 1980]; and full-on civil war between the newly instituted post-revolutionary state and the Mojāhedīn-e Khalq Organization (MKO) was yet to begin [July 1981]. In short, post-revolutionary state consolidation was still a negotiated process with multiple and competing claims to popular legitimacy. Since then, the by-then consolidated Islamic Republic has aired the lectures on public radio, recasting Shari‘ati as an intellectual heir to the ruling order.¹⁵⁵ The publication and broadcast of Shari‘ati’s lectures in these contexts invite the notion that he justified and endorsed Ayatollah Khomeini’s undisputed leadership of the post-revolutionary order — not simply without democratic procedure and consent, but what is more as imbued with the legitimacy of a Shi‘a Imam.

Indeed, *Ummat va Imāmat* delivers a sharp critique of liberal democracy as part of its larger argument on behalf of strong revolutionary leadership.¹⁵⁶ In a pattern typical for Shari‘ati, the claim he makes on behalf of “engaged democracy” [*dimukrasī-yi mut‘ahid*] translates principles found in contemporary debates (in this case, the 1955 Bandung Conference) into the language of Shi‘a Islam (in this case, the narrated tradition of the imamate).¹⁵⁷ The text’s discussion of “engaged democracy” emerges from an initial distinction between *sīyāsāt* [“the political”] and *politique* [“the police”].¹⁵⁸ When and where Western societies affirm liberal

¹⁵⁵ Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent*, 178.

¹⁵⁶ He presents democracy as the ideal form of governance championed by intellectuals since the beginning of the 18th century — a century that first celebrated freedom of thought and belief, the worship of individual freedom as such, the combination of individual freedom with abstract notions of humanity, and declarations of human right in terms of individual (as opposed to collective) rights. See Shari‘ati, *Ummat va Imāmat*, 47-48, 148.

¹⁵⁷ The Imamate tradition concerns the exemplary claim to leadership of the Muslim community by the 12 Shi‘a Imams. Each Imam, in the example first set by the Prophet, embodied the most ideal manner of human existence.

¹⁵⁸ *Siyāsāt* is a Persian word, normally meaning “politics,” which Shari‘ati uses to describe conditions in non-Western contexts. Shari‘ati transliterates the original French when referring to *politique*, which is meant to describe Western contexts. See *ibid.*, 44-46. While *politique* interestingly resembles Sheldon Wolin and Jacques Rancière’s discussions of “politics” (Wolin) and “the police” (Rancière), through its emphasis on leadership *siyāsāt* differs from “the political” (Wolin) and “politics” (Rancière). Where Wolin associates “politics” with political leadership and Rancière describes violence as “noise,” Shari‘ati’s notion of *siyāsāt* (as I demonstrate in what follows) contains

democracy, they essentially affirm a condition of “being” [*būdan*] that calls for the administrative management (e.g. policing) of what simply is (*politique*). Non-Western societies, however, require *sīyāsāt*, a mode of political organization necessary for processes of change and transformation.¹⁵⁹ By virtue of their “backward” condition, if granted formal liberal democracy, unchanged non-Western societies would simply use it to vote themselves back into a state of exploitation, autocracy, and dictatorship.¹⁶⁰

In accordance with this distinction, Shari‘ati introduces one of many paradoxical formations. He depicts the Muslim community — its essence as a communal formation — in line with *sīyāsāt*, a process of change and transformation. The Muslim social and political community (the *ummah*) is defined as a process of “going” [*raftan*] and “becoming” [*shudan*]. Its “going” is not, however, a passive movement from one point to another, leaving the mover unchanged; it is instead a movement that changes the subject as such.¹⁶¹ The perpetual change that defines the *ummah* is also not unconditional; it is oriented by and toward permanence. In the *ummah*, politics must be predicated on guided leadership, self-cultivation, self-formation — in sum, self-determination.

This process involves the transformation of the people from on high by an exemplary leader, or an Imam-like figure. Through his leadership, the people would assume a condition where they might later be prepared to participate in democratic self-governance, ostensibly in

the prospect of both leadership and violence. See Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” 11, 13; Rancière, *Disagreement*, 27-30, 52.

¹⁵⁹ In this sense, the distinction between *sīyāsāt* and *politique* is akin to Walter Benjamin’s discussion of lawmaking and law-preserving violence. See Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” 241-44.

¹⁶⁰ Shari‘ati, *Ummat va Imāmat*, 154-55. His point here follows from an understanding of colonization as having created deplorable condition in non-Western societies — not a reductive understanding of those societies as such.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 37-39.

accordance with the model set forth and cultivated in them.¹⁶² In this regard, what Shari‘ati calls for — his characterization of the essence of Islam — both stands against and affirms the practice of *‘ijmā* (or consensus), typically associated with the foundation of Sunni Islam.¹⁶³ Democracy (or Sunni Islam) can only occur after the Muslim community has first been trained for it (via Shi‘a Islam). This training must, in turn, occur through the exemplary leadership of elite figures, or Shi‘a Imams.¹⁶⁴

In an extrapolation of Hegelian logic onto Islamic history, Shari‘ati presents the Shi‘a Imam — typified by the figure of Ali — as becoming who he essentially and already is through the process of transformation he imparts to the community. Whereas the classic Imam may only be “discerned” [*tashkhīs*] for what he is, a contemporary “imam” (or political leader) may be “determined” [*ta‘īn*] by the people.¹⁶⁵ The hero of a revolutionary movement — a figure who differs from the ideologue and the statesman that precede and follow an uprising, respectively — is defined by the process of being discerned for what he is as he becomes it:

...He is born and comes to life through the union between *jihād* and belief. In love, through the negation of himself, he asserts himself. And in search of the people, in losing himself, he finds himself — he senses himself. In action, toward consciousness [*āgāhī*]; in failure, toward victory; in quitting himself and departing [*hijrat*] from himself toward the people [*mardum*]; he becomes human [*bi insān mīrisad*]. There, he comes to himself. In the fires, his identity transforms. In the people [*khalq*], he creates the destiny of his

¹⁶² “A human who does not recognize his Imam is akin to a sheep [*gūsfand*] that has lost his shepherd [*shabbān*].” Ibid., 74. In this sense, Shari‘ati’s echoes Foucault’s discussion of pastoral power — as the art of governing others and allowing oneself to be governed by others, institutionalized for Foucault through the Christian Church. He does so, however, without Foucault’s critical tone. See Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 135-61, esp. 148, 151-52.

¹⁶³ *‘Ijmā* [consensus] and *bayat* [obedience] defined the Sunni claim to leadership of the Muslim community after the passing of the Prophet, leading to the institution of the caliphate. Shari‘ati notably and explicitly associates these practices with Western liberal democracy. Shari‘ati, *Ummat va Imāmat*, 148-49.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 138, 181-84.

¹⁶⁵ For discussions of Imam Ali as the exemplary model of imamate, see ibid., 110, 123-4. These Imams can never be “determined” [*ta‘īn*] by “the people” or anything akin to democratic vote, but rather may solely be “discerned” [*tashkhīs*] for what they are. Shari‘ati compares them to the boxer Muhammad Ali; it would be absurd to think that people could “determine” whether or not he was, in actuality, world champion after of his refusal to fight in the Vietnam war. Only contemporary “imams” may be “determined” by the people. Ibid., 124-5, 142, 146-7.

society, his own destiny. In everything he builds, he becomes self-determined [self-built, *khud sākhtih*]. In everything he cultivates, he becomes self-cultivated [*khud parvardih*].¹⁶⁶

In reconfiguring the tradition of imamate for our contemporary moment, Shari‘ati appropriated language within the Shi‘a tradition to advance an argument for guided or “engaged,” democracy. In this regard, he set the basis for Khomeini’s later identification as “Imam” Khomeini.¹⁶⁷ Put differently, even before Khomeini did so, in 1968/9 Shari‘ati presents something akin to the “guardianship of the jurist” as grounded in the divine will of the people. Even more damning, the divinity (or agency) granted “the people” comes from their projected transformation. It happens to them, not by them.¹⁶⁸ For those seeking to characterize and condemn Shari‘ati as *the* “ideologue” of a teleological 1979 revolution and an anti-democratic and elitist post-revolutionary Islamic Republic, no document could be more incriminating.

For those seeking more measured analysis, having identified the counter-hegemonic qualities of Shari‘ati’s thought, no trend is more contradictory and “perplexing.”¹⁶⁹ And yet, because the argument requires the possibility for transformation, it does not fundamentally preclude the capacity for democratic action. In other words, even in this explicitly anti-democratic formulation, Shari‘ati’s writings and speeches evince a democratic spirit. Shari‘ati presents a familiar dialectical argument first advanced by Karl Marx in 1843’s “On the Jewish Question.” In that essay, Marx argued against the realization of political freedom before the realization of economic equality; he was not simply against bourgeois or political freedom as an

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 121.

¹⁶⁷ Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent*, 175, 275n43.

¹⁶⁸ Shari‘ati, *Ummat va Imāmat*, 105, 176.

¹⁶⁹ Ghamari-Tabrizi identifies this tendency as the point at which Shari‘ati lost relevance as a leading dissident intellectual, giving ground to “new religious intellectuals” such as Abdolkarim Soroush. See *Islam and Dissent*, 175-80, 188. Shari‘ati’s arguments are only “perplexing,” however, if we fail to appreciate his Hegelianism — and the concomitant manner by which terms and concepts change meaning as his argument unfolds.

end-goal but rather affirmed it in principle, insisting that democratic practice (“political emancipation”) could only truly be realized when social or economic rights had first been addressed (“human emancipation”).¹⁷⁰ Shari‘ati replays Marx’s dialectic across Islamic history. Instead of assuming a fundamental, or sectarian, opposition between Sunni and Shi‘a, he instead affirms the Sunni practice of *‘ijmā* (the equivalent of bourgeois political freedom, or liberal democracy) on the basis of a foundation set by the Shi‘a practice of *imāmat* (or revolutionary leadership).¹⁷¹

The democratic quality of these formulations hinges on our assessment of a projected utopian order. Marx of course, like others in a secular imaginary, proposes an all-encompassing utopia on earth. This paradise promises to respond to our needs and wishes here — what Thomas More suggests is a “no place” (precisely because it is so ideal).¹⁷² Insofar as that kind of utopian order lies out of reach, the practice of democracy might appear as a false promise. This problem — the problem of secular utopianism — continues to plague Marxist theory in our contemporary

¹⁷⁰ Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 31-32, 45-46. It is fitting, and perhaps ironic, that the pattern of argumentation Shari‘ati follows is most expressly found in this essay by Marx. Where Marx proposes “human emancipation” as a “final and complete” form of emancipation from religion, Shari‘ati presents religion as central to the prospect of what Marx might call “human emancipation.”

¹⁷¹ Shari‘ati, *Ummat va Imāmat*, 181-84.

¹⁷² In her assessment of More’s *Utopia*, Giulia Sissa explains the “absurd philosophy” expressed by Raphael Hythloday (Idletalk), combining Platonic idealism (which disavows pleasure in its utopian imaginary) and an Epicurian affirmation of desire as both necessary and satiable. As Sissa argues, that “absurd philosophy” conveys the views of More’s friend, Desiderius Erasmus — who possessed a “philosophy of life” that was “disdainful for the necessary compromises of active people.” More’s text thus communicates the impossibility and practical incoherence of utopian visions. See Sissa, “*Familiaris reprehensio quasi errantis*,” 128-29, 137.

historical moment.¹⁷³ Under these conditions, unless the act itself can foster democratic practice, the prospect of holding democracy off until an intangible later date is anti-democratic.¹⁷⁴

But if the kind of utopia imagined in reiterating Marx’s formula is explicitly “realistic,” then a different set of possibilities emerges — possibilities that may in fact cohere with our contemporary historical ethos and its emphasis on democratic ideals. The key difference between a young Karl Marx and a young Ali Shari‘ati lies in the latter’s substitution of religious ethics for economics. Where Marx is invested in the advancement of knowledge through science (an Enlightenment belief in the power of positivism), Shari‘ati seeks to cultivate belief. This difference reflects the different utopian orders each imagined. Paradoxically, it is through his departures from a secular and materialist imaginary that Shari‘ati is able to argue for a “realistic utopia.”¹⁷⁵ Indeed, returning to my earlier reference to Edward Said, Islam’s worldly qualities make it particularly well-suited for an alternate conception of utopia as “realistic.” Because we

¹⁷³ This dynamic is most apparent in efforts to emphasize “the political” in processes of social change. The distinction between “the political” and “the social” emerged in 19th century debates about revolutionary changes that had occurred in the 18th century — particularly in work by Marx and Tocqueville; these questions were rekindled in the 20th century by Arendt. Briefly, debates revolved around whether the realization of political freedom was predicated on non-political (i.e. social, specifically economic) factors — a formulation which itself defined “the social” and “the political” as separate and autonomous realms. See Marx, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party”; Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the Revolution*, 24, 166-67; Arendt, *On Revolution*, 49-105.

¹⁷⁴ There is, of course, no uniform consensus on this interpretation of Marx. His discussion of materialist history as a praxis between structural conditions and human agency lends itself to open-ended accounts of future-time. In my rendering of Shari‘ati, he ultimately resembles Marx’s work and these conflicting interpretations of his arguments as teleological — even though the rendering is made in distinction to Marx on this point.

¹⁷⁵ I borrow this formulation from Andrew March who in turn borrows it from Rawls to express the best that humans can and ought to possibly wish for — a theory that unites normative aspirations with the prospect of stability. March uses the concept in order to “provoke thought about [Sayyid] Qutb’s project” without losing sight of that projects normative differences with liberalism. See March, “Taking the People As They Are,” 191-93. Shar‘ati himself uses the terms “realistic” and “utopia” in order to mark the difference between Islam’s “virtuous city” and the ideal types found in secular political imaginaries. He also makes reference to Qutb, similarly collapsing and challenging supposed sectarian differences between Sunni and Shi‘a. See *Ummat va Imāmat*, 95-98, 130-31. Yet, as I argue below, Shari‘ati employs these terms in a manner that simultaneously rejects and affirms liberal democracy; in this regard, his worldview differs from the emphasis on stability that March identifies in both Qutb and Rawls.

and our projected leaders, models, and exemplars are all too human — and not Gods — all we can ultimately wish for is always incomplete.

When Shari'ati refers to the *umma* as movement, and associates it with *imāmat* as a manifestation of humanity, he implies (if not, intends) the permanent incompleteness of a “realistic utopia.” On the one hand, he contrasts Islam with secular visions of utopia:

This religion [*dīn*], of which we are its purveyors [*mu'arīf*], does not express virtuous cities [*madīnih-yi fāzilih*] that are impossible to realize. It is not a religion that worships super-humans, only built in our imagination, or that only exist in the heavens! Rather, it is [expresses] a virtuous city that may exist on earth. This is a doctrine [ideology, *maktab*] according to which it would be possible to reconstruct the human in the ideal form s/he has always desired...¹⁷⁶

In addition to being holy and divine, Islam is “realist” and “humanist” by virtue of its recognition of humans as the highest entity short of God; we hold the potential to reach the greatest of heights and yet even in such ideal forms (as Imams) we are still but humans.¹⁷⁷ Yet this ideal realism is only ever a potential. It is incumbent on each human to reconstruct him or her self in accordance with the ideal¹⁷⁸ — an ideal self which, as I demonstrate in the sections that follow, must be located in the popular collective consciousness of those very humans themselves.

In this regard, the projected arrival of the ideal (Sunni Islam, democracy) is not a distant possibility precluded from our existence as humans, but rather an imperfection that may exist alongside our path to perfection. Shari'ati's affirmation of a “realistic utopia” thus sits in productive tension with his explicit (and teleological) configuration of “engaged democracy” as involving clear-cut steps from Shi'a-to-Sunni Islam. In other words, while the publication of *Ummat va Imāmat* in early 1980 may have been used to put an end to the prospect of popular

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 110, my translation. Shari'ati insists throughout that Imams are *not* super-human.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 99-100, 103.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 101.

democratic action, justifying elite and even authoritarian leadership in its place, the text did not necessarily lead to this conclusion. The prospect of a “realistic utopia” presented within a reiterated Marxist framework undid the neater (anti-democratic) aspects of Shari’ati’s own formulation.

This dynamic — the open-ended, undone, and indeterminate qualities of social change — is most pronounced in Shari’ati’s discussion of insurrection. In the two sections that follow, I present Shari’ati’s contribution to anti-colonial and insurrectionary political thought. In a departure from his interlocutors (Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon), Shari’ati formulated popular sovereignty and democratic leadership within the act of anticolonial revolutionary social transformation. In so doing, he articulated a framework that may be used to interpret the experience of the 1979 Iranian Revolution — a status that I can only suggest at this point in my argument.¹⁷⁹ For the time being: returning to *Ummat va Imāmat* with this formulation of insurrection in mind, I identify points of continuity between an explicitly democratic and dissident Shari’ati and his seemingly undemocratic views on community and leadership. Taken together, Shari’ati may be read for an articulation of indeterminate collective subjectivity — the very kind of collective subject that made the 1979 revolution in Iran the paradigmatic revolution of a neoliberal historical period in practice.

¹⁷⁹ As the above reading of *Ummat va Imamat* suggests, what a particular “ideologue” said at one moment (1968/9) or even is interpreted to have said at another (1980) does not determine the fate of his text. We may instead revisit Shari’ati as a theoretical resource for interpreting the Iranian Revolution on different terms. My presentation of Shari’ati’s as theorist is based on the completed dissertation and my corresponding reading of the archive of the 1979 Revolution as an event. It is for the reader to judge whether this designation is appropriate upon reading the entirety of the text and not simply Chapter 2. In the meantime: while my particular interpretations were not readily available for Shari’ati’s audience in the moment of the act (this dissertation is, as far as I understand, the first text to interpret Shari’ati’s lectures and writings on *Community and Leadership* in this fashion), this does not mean to suggest that they are arbitrary or unrelated to it. In other words, we can read a figure like Shari’ati as theorist without losing sight of what Said called the “worldliness” of the text. In fact, my interpretations arise from an appreciation of the act as a whole — the kind of perspective afforded to and even required for historical writing, but necessarily precluded from lived experience.

II

Bāzgasht, or Imagining the Universal as Particular

Over the course of his career, Shari‘ati shifted between encouraging violence against the state to provoke social transformation and a more quietist position predicated on the need to cultivate a revolutionary sensibility in preparation for the arrival of radical social change through spontaneous mass movement.¹⁸⁰ These tendencies generally occurred in opposition to one another. There remains, however, a considerable overlap between Shari‘ati’s political speeches (directed at challenging the authority of the state and religious establishment) and his ethical statements (directed at transforming the self).

In reading Shari‘ati through the revolution, the precise nature of this overlap has often been misinterpreted. In particular, some of his later ethical reflections — where he deliberately abandoned the call for insurrectionary violence — have been conflated with the political changes pursuant to the establishment of a post-revolutionary state. According to these accounts, which tend to cohere with historical writing that identifies 1963 as the “beginning” of the 1979 Revolution, Shari‘ati was a nativist intellectual who fostered violent and totalitarian tendencies drawn from a tradition of “counter-Enlightenment” philosophy.¹⁸¹ As I demonstrate here, a

¹⁸⁰ Ali Rahnama characterizes Shari‘ati’s tendency toward quietism as a deliberate attempt at revisionism, rejecting the suggestion that *all* of these writings were compelled or even authored by the Shah’s secret police. See Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*, 356-363, 369-370. Ghamari-Tabrizi has theorized Rahnama’s observation as a Gramscian inclination in Shari‘ati meant to produce a counter-hegemonic cultural order. See Ghamari-Tabrizi, “Review Essay,” 105-111.

¹⁸¹ Scholars of Iranian Studies who have considered the development of an Islamic ideology in contemporary Iran as the “triumph of nativism” have emphasized the influence of continental philosophy. These studies situate Martin Heidegger as a looming figure, lurking behind particular manifestations of his central theses in the Iranian context. From Heidegger on to a whole host of Iranian writers and activists, these accounts identify the roots of 1979’s revolution and its aftermath in a set of borrowed ideas passed on across time and context. Shari‘ati emerges here as a pivotal ideologue, a figure who adopted ideas initially introduced by Ahmad Fardid, then translated them into a popular language with cultural resonance for Iran’s Shi‘a masses. For an interpretation of Iranian intellectual history as the “triumph of nativism” see Boroujerdi’s *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*. On the influence of German philosophy, see Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization*; Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment*.

different relationship between violence and political ethics persisted in Shari'ati's discourse. Most notably, the call for ethical transformation in his earliest discussion of *bāzgasht* — a distinctly non-revisionist discussion of the concept of “return” — formed the backbone of his later noteworthy speeches on insurrectionary violence and *shahādat*.¹⁸²

Along these lines, surprisingly few considerations of Shari'ati's discussion of the self have substantively addressed his engagement with Frantz Fanon — a thinker and activist cut from the same cloth, whose writings Shari'ati is credited with translating into Persian, and who most importantly also grappled with the relationship between ethical transformation and violent social change.¹⁸³ Beginning in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes the colonized intellectual's failure for recognition as rooted in the very language and systems of thought through which he understood himself in the world. “All [*tout*] colonized people — that is to say, all people within whom an inferiority complex has given birth due to the burial of a local cultural originality — finds itself face to face with [*se situe vis-à-vis*] the language of the civilizing nation, that is to say the culture of the metropole.”¹⁸⁴ Embedded within this language is a perception of blackness that prevents the ability to exist as fellow human beings: “Ontology ... does not permit us to understand the being of the Black man [*le Noire*]. For not only must the

¹⁸² *Bāzgasht*, meaning return or restoration, signals Shari'ati's contribution to a shared anti-colonial discussion of a return to self.

¹⁸³ The brief references to Shari'ati's relationship with Fanon have all pointed out the passage in Shari'ati's “*Bāzgasht be Khīshān*,” as well as an exchange letters discussed by Shari'ati in various lectures (including the fourteenth lesson of *Islāmshināsī*), where Shari'ati argues for participation in the anti-colonial front through religion against Fanon's reservations. For examples of original passages, see Shari'ati, *Bāzgasht*, 29-30; Shari'ati, *Islāmshināsī*, 169-171. For secondary scholarly references, see Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, 115-116; Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 110; Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization*, 121; Nabavi, *Intellectuals and the State*, 101.

¹⁸⁴ Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, 14, my translation.

Black man be black; he must be so in opposition to the White man [*en face du Blanc*].”¹⁸⁵ In response, Fanon advanced a vision of liberation predicated on embodiment — the immediate presence of physical bodies that had otherwise been limited by colonial discourse. These bodies held the promise of a common humanity, located in the present and the future where the bondage endemic to the historical realm ceased to exist.

This vision provided Shari‘ati with a generative link to a broader tradition of anti-colonial political thought — which in turn provided a conceptual language, combining discussions of a cultural “return” to self with an active political agenda of insurrection. In its earliest manifestations (that is, before its revision), Shari‘ati’s discussion of *bāzgasht be khīshtan* (return to self) drew directly from Fanon. For both, the effort to respond to colonial and imperial power through new humanism explicitly diverged from a nativist impulse.¹⁸⁶ Instead of imagining a return to a historically factual past, they argued for a “return” to a self that exists immediately in the present but is yet to be realized.

The history of Shari‘ati’s discussion of the concept of “return” as *bāzgasht* is particularly obscure. He first addressed the concept in a lecture entitled “Bāzgasht be Khīshtan” (“A Return to Self”) at the University of Jondishāpour some time around 1967 and before his famous insurrectionary lectures at the Hosseiniyeh Ershād.¹⁸⁷ Later, in 1976 following his release from

¹⁸⁵ Fanon, *Peau Noire*, 88; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 110. When I have relied on multiple versions of Fanon’s work for my translation, I have listed both sources.

¹⁸⁶ Charges of nativism have been levied against Fanon as well. For these readers, Fanon represents an “apostle of violence” who rejects colonialism by embracing the reactionary violence of the colonized subject as the autonomous expression of a particular identity. See Bulhan, *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*. For important texts in political theory that similarly interpret (and condemn) Fanon’s discussion of violence see Arendt, *On Violence*; Taylor “The Politics of Recognition.”

¹⁸⁷ See Shari‘ati, *Bāzgasht*, 3-33. Rahnama has identified this lecture as having occurred four years before Shari‘ati’s insurrectionary speeches, which took place in two clusters during October of 1971 and February of 1972. See Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*, 342-43.

prison, the state sponsored newspaper *Kayhān* published two serialized articles entitled “*Insān, Islām va Falsafihā-yi Maghrib-Zamīn*” [“Mankind, Islam, and Western Philosophies”] and “*Bāzgasht bi Khīsh*” [“A Return to Self”].¹⁸⁸ The content of these articles — as well as that of a third text, “*Bāzgasht bi Kudūm Khīsh?*” (“A Return to Which Self?”) — presented a shift in Shari’ati’s thinking. The first two were explicitly anti-Marxist. Arguing against internationalism as a form of cultural imperialism, they called for a return to Iranian national identity in a jingoistic fashion. Unlike the other two, “A Return to Which Self?” (which does not include the same anti-Marxist and nationalist rhetoric) argued against armed struggle.¹⁸⁹

While some have referenced these texts as evidence of Shari’ati’s collusion with fascist leanings in Heidegger’s philosophical treatises,¹⁹⁰ Shari’ati’s initial discussion of *bāzgasht* in 1967’s “*Bāzgasht bi Khīsh*tan” is more accurately understood as embracing an anti-colonial tradition that positioned itself in direct opposition to Heidegger’s argument for a return to the temporal past.¹⁹¹ The revivalist spirit of Islam in Shari’ati’s discussion of return echoed some

¹⁸⁸ The titles for both of the articles discussing *bāzgasht* translate into English as “A Return to Self.” The Persian term used to indicate the self in each title is, however, different: *khīsh*tan, in the former, and *khīsh*, in the latter. In an effort to counter Shari’ati’s influence on guerilla activities, the title of the former was changed to “Marxism Against Islam.” See Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 338-49. For the text of 1976’s discussion of *bāzgasht*, see “*Bāzgasht be Khīsh*” in Shari’ati, *Bāz’shināsi-yi Huviyat-i Irāni-Islāmi*, 79-226.

¹⁸⁹ Shari’ati’s biographer’s has presented at least one of the articles published after his imprisonment as part of a recurrent tendency toward revisionism in his intellectual production. Rahnema endorses the hypothesis that while the two articles published in 1976 were likely “extracted by SAVAK,” “A Return to Which Self?” was written by Shari’ati upon his release. Its argument against insurrectionary violence evinced a broader revisionist tendency that emerged, in this case, in response to the death of a number of his activist students. See Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 339-49, 356-70.

¹⁹⁰ The effort to situate an Islamic ideology in the shadow of continental philosophy directs our attention to a shared modern trajectory. Mirsepassi in particular has argued that Shari’ati helped transfer the philosophy of the “counter-Enlightenment” — a version of “reactionary modernism” prominent among thinkers working within the tradition of German romanticism — to Iran. For Mirsepassi, Shari’ati’s emphasis on religion as an expression of authentic knowledge and self-hood corresponds with Heidegger’s discussion of the ontological bonds that establish communities in the face of atomization in modern society. See Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment*, 40-41, 85-128.

¹⁹¹ Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* emphatically denies a return to a temporal past: “We are not men for whom it is a question of ‘either-or.’ For us, the problem is not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the

aspects of German thought; yet his broader discursive agenda reflected a more radical commitment to the crafting of a new universal. Shari‘ati, akin to Fanon, argued for a new humanism — a position that rejected the rigidities of a predetermined universal handed down by colonial powers while eschewing the celebration of the particular as a similarly static cultural form. His references to Heidegger were meant to contrast the notion of *bāzgasht* from the versions of “return” advanced by his interlocutors, as Shari‘ati strove to introduce religion — more specifically, cultural Islam — into broader anti-colonial polemics.

In rejecting the humanist tradition that justified colonial power, Aimé Césaire and Fanon refrained from turning to particular instantiations of local culture and instead sought to create a new universal that could operate in the spirit of a Sartrean impetus for “totalization.”¹⁹² In “Bāzgasht bi Khīshtan,” Shari‘ati aligns himself with this impetus: “As long as they [Westerners] are, in their words, human (*insān*) and we are natives (*būmī*), any kind of humanist partnership with them [Westerners] is a form of violence against our existence, and we must separate ourselves and stay away from them. Because in this exchange, their relationship with us is one of colonizer and colonized ... This is not a relationship. This is enmity (*dushmanī*).”¹⁹³ Echoing

past, but to go beyond. It is not a dead society that we want to revive. We leave that to those who go in for exoticism. Nor is it the present colonial society that we wish to prolong, the most putrid carrion that ever rotted under the sun. It is a new society that we must create, with the help of all our brother slaves, a society rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with all the fraternity of olden days.” See Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 45, 51-52. The *Discourse* goes even further, pointing out that the totalitarian state in Nazi Germany represented an extension of that which had devastated the colonies for years — a technique of power regularly exercised by Europe against non-Europeans, which had now reared its ugly head within the continent.

¹⁹² George Ciccariello-Maher argues that, for Sartre, the situated condition of the human predilection for conceptualizing totalities holds the universal and the particular together in an irresolvable fashion. This tension leads Sartre to acknowledge his limitations as a European philosopher — one who cannot conceptualize the experience of the colonial condition, leaving this task in his preface for *Wretched* to the non-European intellectual. According to Ciccariello-Maher, Sartre’s position emerges through Fanon and Césaire’s influence. See Ciccariello-Maher, “European Intellectuals and Colonial Difference,” 129-54.

¹⁹³ Shari‘ati, *Bāzgasht*, 27-28.

Fanon's description of the limitations attendant to the granting of formal recognition in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Shari'ati refused to accept the promise of a shared humanity without an initially radical (and autonomous) break from existing social conditions¹⁹⁴ — a break that promised to result in the creation of a “new human” without reverting to “native nationalism.”¹⁹⁵

These anti-colonial thinkers shared an understanding of the “new human” as a living entity that was of the present yet for the future. For his part, Shari'ati describes the decolonizing social movements that accompanied it as both sudden and miraculous.

Yes, in such societies, suddenly a miracle appeared — such an astonishing miracle that the sociologists could not understand it. Societies that felt corruption, decay, ignorance, neglect, redundancy, tradition, superstition, and slavery in the depths of their existence, suddenly rose. The warm blood of life and movement came into being within them as they threw this stale mask from their face. A generation took on the air of a free, awake, determined, and responsible human being. From the depths of a dead society — the cemetery and sewage of history — suddenly movement and life were created ... It made all of the intellectuals who had lost hope hopeful ... that it is possible for such a great miracle to appear in their societies ... [that it is possible] to bring about a human society. A human that consists, according to Frantz Fanon, of a new race, a new skin, a new way of thinking.¹⁹⁶

Shari'ati's reference to a “dead society” that suddenly experiences the “warm blood of life and movement” not only echoed Césaire's similar characterization of the past and the present

¹⁹⁴ Toward the end of his 1952 book, Fanon re-assesses Hegel's master/slave dialectic, writing: “There is not an open conflict between white and black. One day the White Master, *without conflict*, recognized the Negro slave. But the former slave wants to *make himself recognized*.” The “former slave,” concerned as he is with the other's consciousness, desires a conflict so as to earn his recognition. He wishes to return to the foundational moment of reciprocity so as to assert his equal humanity. Yet, as Fanon describes, “it is too late.” He cannot achieve the same kind of recognition because the foundational moment of absolute reciprocity (a moment prior to history) has passed. In this sense, formal recognition continues to treat him as an object “acted upon” rather than an authentically free human subjectivity with negative capacities of his own. The granting of formal recognition leaves the black man with a gnawing desire for conflict, for the opportunity to earn what he had suddenly been given. He waits for the white man to insult him, to give him a reason to risk his life, to reciprocate with violence — and yet the pretext never arrives. See Fanon, *Black Skin*, 216-222. Shari'ati discusses Fanon's *Black Skin* in depth in the introduction to his translation of *Wretched* — entitled “On Frantz Fanon and His Thought.” See Fanon, *Dūzakhīyān*, 15-21.

¹⁹⁵ He acknowledges that this — “native nationalism” — is a kind of return but rejects it as a “reactionary return” (*bāzgasht-i irtijā'ī*). Shari'ati distances himself from the latter: “It is racism, it is fascism, it is Nazism ... We do not want to return to race ... We do not want to drive humans to the worship of blood and dirt.” He goes on to contrast his position with the celebration of a pre-Islamic past, declaring that the latter holds no import for the masses. See Shari'ati, *Bāzgasht*, 28-30.

¹⁹⁶ See Shari'ati, *Bāzgasht*, 7-8. Fanon concludes *The Wretched of the Earth* with: “For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must don a new skin [*faire peau neuve*], develop a new way of thinking, endeavor to set afoot a new man [*tenter de mettre sur pied un homme neuf*].” See Fanon, *Les Damnés de la Terre*, 306.

in his *Discourse on Colonialism*.¹⁹⁷ It also invoked Fanon's characterization of the colonized as a "death in life," defined by the problem of time:

The problem considered here is to be situated within temporality. Those Negroes and Whites will be disalienated who refuse to let themselves be sealed away in the materialized Tower of the Past. For many other blacks, disalienation will be birthed otherwise through their refusal to accept the present as definitive. I am a man and what I have to recapture is the whole past of the world ... In no way should I derive my basic purpose [*vocation originelle*] from the past of the peoples of color. In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized black civilization. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and of my future.¹⁹⁸

Fanon extends Césaire's rejection of a return to the temporal past, arguing that the effort to "take back the self" in the creation a "new man" must be grounded in the shared corporality of all human beings.¹⁹⁹ He accordingly calls for the universalism of the body within a contingently present future-tense — "the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself."²⁰⁰ Where the history of language and perception have determined the significance of the colonized's body, restricting and distorting it, the metaphors of "life" and "movement" proposed by the notion of a "return" necessarily take on a corporeal valence for Fanon. The future of the "new man" promises to be grounded in a body that feels — and that can freely move — as the basis of its engagement with the world.

¹⁹⁷ Shari'ati makes references to the "revival" or "restoration to life" of "human characteristics" (*ahyā-i khūsūsīyāt-i basharī*) when comparing his notion of *bāzgasht* with Fanon's insistence on the absence of religion in a unified anti-colonial front. He uses a similar language when describing Islam as an ideology: "Islam in the form of an ideology is not a collection of inherited, traditional, frozen ethnic molds, but rather the restoration [*tajdīd*] of a spiritual birth, a renaissance of thought, and a movement. It is not a return [*bāzgasht*] to the past, but the revival of the past in the present. These two are not the same." See Shari'ati, *Islāmshināsī*, 170, 173.

¹⁹⁸ See Fanon, *Peau Noire*, 183; Fanon, *Black Skin*, 226. My translation draws from and amends the latter. Fanon refers to the experience of colonization as a "death in life" in an article discussing the "North African Syndrome." See Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, 13.

¹⁹⁹ My interpretation of Fanon searching for a "new universal" relies on the identification of a formative engagement with Hegelian themes and narrative structures presented in Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*, 22-27.

²⁰⁰ See Fanon, *Black Skin*, 231.

In his introduction to the translation of *Wretched*, Shari‘ati correctly identifies Fanon’s effort to reject essential racial categories in response to a broader system of colonial power; the racialized body is an effect of the colonial order, rendering our attention to it a by-product of that order’s machinations.²⁰¹ His failure to note Fanon’s reconfiguration of the body as a site of common humanity in the present, however, is just as telling. While Fanon rejects the essentialism of skin color, he does not eschew the universalism of the body in general; Shari‘ati’s conception of a different form of colonization does.

In contrast to *L’An Cinq, de le Révolution Algérienne* for example, where Fanon characterizes the experience of colonization in Algeria through the veil²⁰² — and hence, yet again, a relationship to the body — Shari‘ati proposes an alternate reading of the Muslim self predicated on what he claims to be a different experience of colonization. While the “Westerner” has told the “African” (specifically, Césaire) that he has no culture or civilization — that in the global system he must work as a laborer or slave for the colonizer — he does not insult the “Iranian” in the same way.²⁰³ Instead, by recognizing the value of an existing civilization with spiritual truths, but relegating it to an inferior status in deference to the more materially advanced

²⁰¹ See Fanon, *Dūzakhīyān*, 19.

²⁰² In “Algeria Unveiled” (the first chapter of *L’An Cinq*, translated in to English as *A Dying Colonialism*), Fanon describes the racialization of the Muslim through the field of colonial perception. He in turn characterizes the veil as *the* marker of difference in North Africa, before going on to describe the embodied experience of colonization by the Algerian woman in relation to the veil. See Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 35, 58-59. It is worth noting that the description of the Algerian woman’s “muscular tension” in this text uses language similar to the description of the colonized in the first chapter of *Wretched* discussed below.

²⁰³ Shari‘ati, *Bāzgasht*, 22-26, my translation. Like Shari‘ati’s use of the category “the West,” his reference to “Africa” is a broad generalization. There are moments in the text when he identifies Fanon, for example, with the Antilles. There are also moments, however, where he associates both Fanon and Césaire with “Africa.” These generalizations are accompanied by statements such as, “An African intellectual can quite simply take pride in being black, in being African — in being tribal even — when in reality the African past is nothing to be proud of.” See Shari‘ati, *Bāzgasht*, 23. My discussion here does not address Shari‘ati’s faulty assumptions but rather focuses on how they are deployed within his conception of self-formation.

West, colonialism changes the appearance (*maskh*) of an authentic Iranian self.²⁰⁴ The responses to these injustices vary accordingly. The “African” can and must assert himself and his past, but the Iranian and the Muslim cannot. Instead, the Iranian engages in a process of re-education, working against the disfiguration to restore real Islam — a “consciousness-raising,” “progressive,” and “resistant” ideology.²⁰⁵

This vision of a religious self must be understood as simultaneously more particular and more universal than Fanon’s “new man.” In a supposed exchange of three letters in response to a request that he write the introduction to Shari’ati’s translation of *L’An Cinq*, Fanon is said to have claimed that a unified anti-colonial struggle could not be predicated on religion. According to Fanon, by grounding his “return” in religion, Shari’ati would eventually work toward the disintegration of a common global front into factions.²⁰⁶ In his lecture addressing Fanon’s

²⁰⁴ The use of the word *maskh* appears throughout Shari’ati’s various discussions of *bāzgasht* and *shahādat*. It also appears in his translation of Fanon’s conclusion to *Wretched* in place of the French verb *détraquer* (meaning to put something out of order or have its regular functioning disturbed). Fanon’s use of the verb emerges as he criticizes the notion of “catching up” to Europe (the very problem a “return” promises to resolve). Employing the language of industrialization in the sentences before it — where Fanon discusses the need to no longer speak and think in terms of the intensification of production, while at the same time refusing a return to their opposite form, “Nature” — the use of *détraquer* suggests that these processes are disturbing the mind’s proper functioning. See Fanon, *Les Damnés*, 304. In this context, Shari’ati’s translation of this term as *maskh* is striking. See Shari’ati, *Bāzgasht*, 406. It not only breaks the rhythm of the metaphors; it also signals his conceptual differences with Fanon. *Maskh shawdan* refers to a metamorphosis or, in its most technical guise, the passing of a soul at death into another body. In more common usage, it signals a change in appearance where something has changed its form and no longer appears as it truly is. In other words, where Fanon’s term signals a physical and material malfunction, Shari’ati’s reference to changing appearances evokes an entirely different register of meaning. In *maskh shudan*, the soul — like history — remains but has been disfigured beyond recognition. For a related discussion of the term in a central text for Iran’s secular opposition, see Hājī Sayyid Javādī, *Du Nāmāh*, 154-56.

²⁰⁵ Shari’ati, *Bāzgasht*, 32. In essence, Shari’ati presents a past ontology that has not been fully negated by colonization and that consequently continues to exist as an accessible tradition. *Bāzgasht* signals the effort to reinvigorate this tradition — a Heideggerean construct operating within an anti-imperialist framework. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 435. As I demonstrate below, while Shari’ati borrows from Heidegger to distinguish his notion of the self from Césaire and Fanon, he ultimately employs the philosophical framework that his anti-colonial interlocutors developed and responded to — a primarily Hegelian one.

²⁰⁶ There are no indications of these letters other than Shari’ati’s discussion of them in this lecture. This is significant in light of Shari’ati’s tendency to develop fictional characters and plots for the purpose of rhetorical effect. See Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*, 161-175. As I demonstrate below, a tendency to question the line dividing fiction and historical fact also marked his discussion of *shahādat* and in turn our interpretation of *Ummat va Imāmat*.

critique, Shari‘ati argues that if a particular religion while leading us into our own private and specific lives also leads us to focus on a broader struggle against colonialism, then a “return” to this particular “particular” would not be a hindrance.

[Fanon] suggests that the relevant issue for Third World societies in their struggle against global colonialism — before being political or economic — is a human and cultural issue. Essentially, colonialism, before undergoing its economic and political stage, completes a sweeping and fading away of all authentic human values. The ground is leveled, then it enters ... It is for our fortification and growth then that in the same Third World we return to religion [*bi mazhab barmīgardīm*]. And we see that a return [*bāzgasht*] to a conscious Islam and a reliance upon it not only does not produce schisms in the opposition to a unified colonialism, but also is a predestined and inevitable necessity in the formation of a unified anti-colonial front on a global scale. Before an individual can be anti-colonial, they must be human, conscious, and rich with meaning and thought. It is for this reason that we return [*barmīgardīm*] to our own culture, that place that is replete with the elements that create awareness, humanity, independence, the strength to distinguish, to recognize, to evaluate, to decide, to commit, and to struggle.²⁰⁷

In the spirit of their shared critique of humanity, Shari‘ati argues that the application of the principle of return, the “new human,” or any other abstract universality reasserts the “all-encompassing originality of the West” to the detriment of the “specificity and particularity of different people in different places in the world.”²⁰⁸ He does so, notably, by applying Fanon’s discussion of colonized society as robbed of ethical values.²⁰⁹ For Shari‘ati — in contrast to Fanon, for whom all colonized societies are similarly rendered valueless — the contest over particular histories is significant. Where different forms of colonization are presumed to have been initially experienced, Fanon’s new universalism as corporeality fails to apply.

Instead, Shari‘ati’s *bāzgasht* promised to create its own “new universal” — one where religious and non-religious intellectuals might find common grounding:

... when the issue of a return to self [*bāzgasht bi khīsh*] is put forth, for me who’s religious and you who are not — we who are equal partners in our social responsibility who’ve arrived at a shared understanding — the issue changes from “a return to self” to “a return to one’s culture,” a recognition of our self as we are. It is in the pursuit of this inquiry that we reach “a return to the culture of Islam and the Islamic ideology” — Islam not as a tradition, a line of inheritance, an existing order or belief in society, but Islam

²⁰⁷ Shari‘ati, *Islāmshināsī*, 169-71.

²⁰⁸ Shari‘ati, *Bāzgasht*, 13-14.

²⁰⁹ See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 6.

as an ideology ... It is not a reliance upon an inherited religious feeling or a dry spiritual sentiment. [This return] is based on the slogans of intellectuals, slogans that are relevant for all intellectuals across the globe.²¹⁰

In “*Bāzgasht bi Khīshtan*,” Shari’ati thus transforms religion from signifying ritualized and fatalistic practices — the kind that Fanon criticizes for rendering the colonized passive — into a form of political ethics.²¹¹ Alid (or Alavi) Shi’ism in particular represented an originary spirit, which Shari’ati repeatedly and deliberately identified with a professed sense of social responsibility; that sense of responsibility could be practiced by religious and non-religious intellectuals alike.²¹²

In his commitment to the immediacy of the “return” proposed by his anti-colonial interlocutors, Shari’ati would ground this conception of a religious self in the collective consciousness of the present-day masses. Like his interlocutors, he constructed *bāzgasht* as a restoration of life. And yet, in contrast to Fanon, the presence of physical bodies took on an instrumental quality for Shari’ati, who instead imagined the living self as part of a hermeneutic relationship configured across historical time. Shari’ati’s discussion of insurrectionary violence as *shahādat* accordingly re-imagined Fanon’s understanding of decolonization from within a shared conceptual framework.

III

Shahādat, or the Political Ethics of Action-Provoking Thought

²¹⁰ This passage is prefaced by a list of non-religious intellectuals, who Shari’ati praises for coining the concept of “return,” including Césaire, Fanon, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta, Leopold Senghor, Kateb Yacine, and Al-e Ahmad. See Shari’ati, *Bāzgasht*, 12-13.

²¹¹ See Fanon, *Wretched*, 18.

²¹² The distinction between Alid and Safavid Shi’ism forms a central pillar of Shari’ati’s thought. See Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, 217-20. For the overlaps between Shari’ati’s understanding of the intellectual-activist and similar renderings by secular progressives at the time, see Nabavi, *Intellectuals and the State*, 80-81.

Despite their shared framework, the kind of selves Fanon and Shari‘ati imagined a return to differed. For Fanon, corporeality provided the seeds for a new conception of recognition in the present tense. Grounded in the experience of a racialized subjectivity that privileged the phenomenological perception of the world as a general optic, Fanon argued for embodiment as the basis of a hermeneutic encounter with others. His famous concluding prayer in *Black Skin, White Masks*—“O my body, make of me always a man who questions!”—went on to define his account of decolonial violence in *The Wretched of the Earth*. There, the act of killing the colonizer realized the liberation of the colonized.²¹³ For Shari‘ati, by contrast, the specific experience of “colonization” in Iran called for an inverse relationship. Privileging the primacy of the hermeneutic — that is, the story-like quality of the past as present-day experience — he advocated a return to a religious self beyond the corporeal. Instead, Shari‘ati presented religion as a form of political ethics rooted in the collective consciousness and social responsibility of the masses. The act of *shahādat* facilitated a “return” to this self by exposing thoughts that had been figuratively “hidden” from collective memory. At the same time, in a recursive gesture, the *shahīd* was to be understood as the self to which the “return” (*bāzgasht*) was directed.

In this vein, Shari‘ati’s *shahīd* chooses to die where Fanon’s colonized definitively does not. The significance of this choice is far-reaching, signaling a re-thinking of two pivotal conclusions in Fanon’s account. First, by locating the self beyond the physical body, Shari‘ati’s conception of *shahādat* adds to Fanon’s characterization of violence as both means and ends. As an end, *shahādat* represents the transformation of a historically factual individual into a living “historical” thought perpetually memorialized through the collective stories of the masses. In this regard, Shari‘ati, unlike Fanon, imagined conditions where the “new human” could confidently

²¹³ Fanon, *Black Skin*, 232.

turn toward “history” as a source from which to cultivate a revolutionary self.²¹⁴ Moreover, the *shahīd* represents an exemplar from whom the masses derive a source of ethical guidance. By virtue of its origins within the collective spirit of the present-day, the exemplary status of *shahādat* contrasts with a hierarchical leader/led relationship; it also, however, differs from Fanon’s flattened conception of the decolonial masses as leaders themselves. *Shahādat* is instead predicated on a fluid relationship between three separate parties: the one who chooses to die and in so choosing becomes the message he seeks to deliver, the one who delivers that message, and the many who eventually receive it and in so doing strive to become the message (themselves).

Thus, Shari‘ati’s discussions of *bāzgasht* as *shahādat* capaciously re-imagined Fanon’s insights on temporality and embodiment. On these terms, the conversation incited by Fanon’s vision of the body could continue in the future — not only after that body had ceased to exist, but more so because of its decision not to. Paradoxically then, Shari‘ati adds to Fanon’s conception of embodiment by accounting for the body’s extinction as a form of being in the future; the self to which a “return” occurs exists beyond the death of the physical body, an event that defines the very experience of embodiment. Locating this self in the collective stories of the masses, Shari‘ati’s speeches and writings on insurrectionary violence counter the misrepresentations endemic to a particular modality of colonial power in Iran by crafting a new universal from within — a political ethics of violent social change.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Shari‘ati’s discussion relies on a deliberate disregard for the value of historical fact over fiction. This sentiment aligns with Fanon’s account of the colonized’s skepticism toward objective truth: “Truth is what hastens the dislocation of the colonial regime, what fosters [*favorise*] the emergence of the nation . . . In the colonial context there is no truthful behavior. And good is quite simply what hurts *them* most.” Fanon, *Wretched*, 14; cf. *Les Damnés*, 52.

²¹⁵ Iran of course never experienced a direct form of colonization. Shari‘ati’s use of the term takes on greater significance in light of this fact. On the one hand, it establishes an intellectual link with the anti-colonial tradition despite historical realities that suggest otherwise. In this regard, Shari‘ati saw the world as he wished to see it. On the other, Shari‘ati’s use of the term indicates the global scope of his perspective; if not directly colonized itself, Iran

In the early 1970s, as the shift to new modes of social practice blossomed, Shari‘ati gained fame and notoriety for presenting Islam as “a universal, historical perspective.”²¹⁶ In *Islāmshināsī* [*On the Sociology of Islam*] — a series of lectures delivered at Ershād from February until November of 1972 — he strove to redefine Islamic history in a manner that simultaneously stood apart from clerical canons of thought while competing ideologically with Marxism. The result was the articulation of an open-ended and radically democratic collective subject through the enactment of insurrectionary violence and the reception of *shahādat*. Put differently, in his lectures Shari‘ati presented a practical manifestation — as idea and performance — of the mechanics behind a notion of popular sovereignty grounded in the divine will of the people.

These lectures received harsh criticism from some members of the clerical establishment, who publically questioned his Shi‘a faith.²¹⁷ Religion cast as political ethics could include adherents who were non-believers, as long as they espoused the spirit of social responsibility Shari‘ati had made a mission of articulating. By characterizing Islam as a universal, and thus determining what the standards of socially responsible inclusion and exclusion were himself, Shari‘ati risked threatening the authority and legitimacy of the *ulamā*. In contrast to the traditional clerical establishment, who were said to have acted in complicity with the status quo by rendering Islam a civic religion, for Shari‘ati the intellectual (*rawshanfīkr*) presented a righteous example to be followed. Those working in collaboration with an illegitimate regime by extinguishing the “fire” (or originary spirit) of Islam had transformed the religion into a

still had to contend with colonial powers. It is from the perspective of Iran’s indirect experience of colonialism — as distinct from the experience in Africa — that Shari‘ati articulates his contribution to the notion of a “return.”

²¹⁶ Shari‘ati, “Shahādat” in *Husayn, Vāris-i Ādam*, 126, 129.

²¹⁷ See Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 129; Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent*, 171-73.

particular manifestation of a universal order — a conceit that was complicit with international liberalism. By contrast, the Islam of Alid Shi‘ism (or “Muhammad Sunnism”) was meant to be grounded in its own social and political foundations.²¹⁸

In a similar vein, thought must be grounded in action: “In every society, behind action, thought is hidden ... Once thought is separated from action, action becomes a sterile and barren effort, thought becomes idealistic and imaginary, and both are rendered useless.”²¹⁹ In this light, the intellectual becomes a modern day Prometheus; he provides the “fire of God” to society, spurring others to act by indicating what thought-in-action and religion-in-society could look like.²²⁰

Shari‘ati’s definition of the new human through *shahādat* deliberately exceeded the logic of a liberal demarcation between the universal and the particular. In his most provocative and popular remarks on insurrectionary violence, delivered in the time span covering his courses on *Islāmshināsī*, Shari‘ati attempted to not only provide the kind of ‘thought’ that could procure subjective conditions necessary for revolution; his discussion of *shahādat* also sought to incite the ‘action’ that might begin the revolution itself. The timing of the speeches — in the month of Muharram, during the two years when it corresponded with official state holidays celebrating the birth of the Shah and his crown prince — was imbued with further significance by the concurrent

²¹⁸ See Shari‘ati, *Husayn, Vāris-i Ādam*, 136-37, 180. Notably, Shari‘ati uses the word *dīn* to refer to religion here as opposed to the term *mazhab* used in “Bāzgasht be Khīshān,” arguing that those who engaged in “passive worship” during the Umayyad dynasty were “polluted.” According to the Shi‘a, the Umayyad dynasty held an illegitimate claim to the leadership of the Muslim community. References to the Umayyads hold a double meaning in this context, as both a challenge to the Pahlavi regime as well as those members of the clerical establishment who worked in collusion with it. In articulating true Islam in opposition to the Umayyad dynasty, however, Shari‘ati carefully avoids any semblance of sectarianism. His distinction between “Umayyad Sunnism” and “Muhammad Sunnism” mirrors his distinction between Safavid and Alid Shi‘ism. See Shari‘ati, *Islāmshināsī*, 174-75.

²¹⁹ See Shari‘ati, *Islāmshināsī*, 165.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 166. Prometheus is a trickster figure who defies the Greek gods by stealing fire for humanity. He is credited with teaching humans to foresee the future, to think, and to see. See William Hansen, *Classical Mythology*, 142.

revolutionary suicide of one of Shari‘ati’s students (Ahmad Rezā‘i), and the sentencing and execution of a number of significant guerrilla leaders.²²¹

Shari‘ati’s speeches presented a radical intervention in the discourse surrounding the figure of Husayn.²²² Arguing against the celebration of Husayn’s charisma — a tendency characteristic of annual rituals where believers mourned his death — Shari‘ati instead insisted that his audience consider the “concept of the sacrifice” Husayn had made, the concept of *shahādat*.²²³ For Shari‘ati, Husayn stood in contrast to the complacency of religious figures who had failed to stand against the Umayyad regime.

What is his responsibility? In the face of the elimination of truth, the abolition of the people’s rights, the annihilation of all values, the destruction of *the memory* of that revolution and the disappearance of *that message*, the instrumental use of the people’s most beloved culture and faith by the people’s most filthy enemies ... his responsibility is that of resistance and struggle with all of these acts of treason against thought, crimes against humanity, blows to the people. A holy war against a new form of reactionary [politics], to guard that great godly revolution — all on the shoulders of one body [*bar dūsh-i yik tan*]! One lonely body [*yik tanhā*]!²²⁴

In defining Husayn’s role as preserving the “memory” of Islam, Shari‘ati agreed and disagreed with his anti-colonial interlocutors’ discussion of history. Memory — the manifestation of the past in the present — exists against limitations from the historical past; we may forget things. At the same time, it exists in collusion with the historical past. Most obviously, it is not the racial

²²¹ The first lecture for *Islāmshināsī* took place on February 4, 1972. Rezā‘i, who had conflicted with Shari‘ati over his unwillingness to directly incite insurrectionary attacks against the regime (in response to which Shari‘ati insisted on the need to create the “subjective conditions” for revolutionary change), died on February 1. The founders of the OIPM were tried on February 15. “*Shahādat*” was delivered on February 25, 1972. “Pas az Shahādat” (“After Shahādat”) followed suit less than three weeks later, on the occasion of the execution of members of the OIPFG. See Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 287, 298-99.

²²² Husayn, a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, was the third Shi’a Imam. According to the Shi’a, his claim to leadership of the Muslim community was blocked by the Umayyad dynasty in their attempt to establish a form of political rule based on profane inheritance. His challenge to this authority culminated in his martyrdom at the Battle of Karbala, an event that Shi’a Muslims commemorate on an annual basis in the month of Muharram. See also fn24 above.

²²³ See Shari‘ati, *Husayn, Vāris-i Ādam*, 125-26.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

amnesia that characterizes the body of Fanon’s “new man.” In this regard, playing with the dual significations of “body” (*tan*) and “lonely” (*tanhā*), Shari‘ati linked Husayn’s physical sacrifice with a communal spirit in the future. Husayn is not actually alone: in becoming “thought” — both messenger and “message” — he does his part in a collective mission meant to be realized through his perpetual remembrance in the future.

The ethical qualities of this call for insurrectionary violence — or in other words, the point at which *bāzgasht* and *shahādat* become indistinguishable — emerges in Shari‘ati’s discussion of Husayn as both means and ends. Husayn’s story presents a paradox: his is an action that is not directed against the state or undertaken to seize power in the here-and-now but that nevertheless remains political.²²⁵ The paradox unravels its complexity once we understand the *shahīd*’s choice to die as both a means (an effort to “expose” that which has been hidden from the “hearts and minds of the people”) and an ends (that which has been hidden).²²⁶ As means, *shahādat* is a form of insurrectionary violence that necessarily culminates in the physical death of the revolutionary acting to expose a hidden history; as a result, the masses who bear witness to his act may rediscover their truth as well. Like Shari‘ati’s conception of *bāzgasht*, which is predicated on the possibility of returning to a self that has been transformed and disfigured (*maskh*) by colonialism, the purpose of *shahādat* is to return by way of re-education: “[Husayn’s enemies] conquered but only the bodies of the *shuhadā*. Yet the thought [*afkār*] of the *shuhadā* ... removed all the masks and drew all the curtains of deception.”²²⁷ At the same time, just as his

²²⁵ According to Shari‘ati, Husayn’s *shahādat* was neither a defeated *jihād* (or struggle) that aspired to victory nor was it martyrdom in the conventional sense. Whereas Hallaj and Jesus Christ die in a pre-determined fashion for the sins of humanity, Husayn chooses to die with no guarantee of his message being delivered. See *ibid.*, 149-51, 188-89. As I demonstrate below, this uncertainty is central to Shari‘ati’s concept of *shahādat* as refiguration.

²²⁶ See *ibid.*, 203, 215-19.

²²⁷ See Shari‘ati, *ibid.*, 188. *Shuhadā* is the plural form of *shahīd*.

shahādat facilitates a return, the *shahīd* is also the self to which the return occurs; his story, in being the story that constructs who we are, is the very thing that has undergone a kind of metamorphosis in the “colonial” context of Iran. In short, he becomes the means to realizing himself as an end.

While we might be hard-pressed to identify an indisputable line of ‘influence,’ it is noteworthy that Fanon’s discussion of violence in the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* — a text Shari‘ati is credited with having translated — similarly presents the violence of the colonized as both means and ends. Through an adaptation of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, however, Fanon characterizes this process as corporeal.²²⁸

For the colonized, this violence [against the colonizer] represents the absolute praxis. The militant therefore is one who works. The questions which the organization asks the militant bear the mark of this vision of things: ‘Where have you worked? With whom? What have you accomplished?’ The group requires each individual to have performed an irreversible act ... Everyone was therefore personally responsible for the death of the victim. To work means to work towards the death of the colonist. Claiming responsibility for the violence also allows those members of the group who have strayed or have been outlawed to come back, to retake their place and be reintegrated. Violence can thus be understood to be the perfect mediation. The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence. This praxis enlightens the militant because it shows him the means and the end.²²⁹

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon interpreted Hegel’s account of liberation-through-work as an impossible option for the former slave, who instead is left to contend with formal recognition under the banner of what proves to be an empty version of humanism.²³⁰ In *Wretched*, however, the colonized plays the role the settler imagines, speaking back to him in his own language —

²²⁸ Hegel famously describes a process of recognition whereby an emerging self-consciousness realizes itself as independent and autonomous — when everything it encounters represents nothing more than a vanishing moment. See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 114, para. 187. In this process, self-consciousness itself signifies nothing more than a middle term, affirming being-for-another (negativity, certainty) as its being-in-itself (truth), or in other words being-for-self (para. 184). The final synthesis requires that two reciprocal consciousnesses confront one another in a “life-and-death struggle” where one ends up as lord and the other as bondsman (para. 187).

²²⁹ See Fanon, *Wretched*, 44.

²³⁰ For a description of this dynamic in detail, see fn194 above.

the language of force.²³¹ In this new form of work, “working towards the death of the colonist,” he not only fulfills the only identity available to him but in the process defies it. In an “ironic turning of the tables” that parallels the moment of self-realization for Hegel’s bondsman, this labor produces the absolute identity of the colonized.²³² Where Hegel’s bondsman produced a world filled with objects that reflected his essential activity, the “irreversible act” of killing the colonist and publicly claiming responsibility breaks the colonized from a previous relationship of dependence. Insofar as the act severs any attachment to his former identity as colonized subject, violence-as-work is both a means in the struggle for decolonization and also an end.

In order to distinguish his discussion of insurrectionary violence from Fanon’s commitment to corporeality, Shari‘ati turns to Heidegger. More to the point, unlike Fanon’s characterization of the colonized or the *fidai* — who “at no moment chooses death” — Husayn does in fact choose to die.²³³ The significance of this “choice” lies in Shari‘ati’s reference to the concept of *existence authentique*:

Heidegger says that every individual possesses two kinds of being. One refers to when we say “I” as a living creature in society. It is in reference to this being that I may be counted as one individual among the 30 million who comprise Iran’s population, that I may sense myself as one of those 30 million. All humans are equal at this level of being ... This is man’s figurative existence. The other, in Heidegger’s words, is authentic existence ... It is this second form of being that some do not have or that some may have but in varying degrees. This secondary being is comprised of and generated by culture over the course of history. It is man’s true, real, and human state. Our figurative existence lasts for the 30 or 40 year period of “my” birth certificate. But real or authentic being lasts for many centuries — over the entire course of history as culture, civilization, and art take shape. It crystallizes in me. That which gives me a cultural “birth

²³¹ See Fanon, *Wretched*, 42.

²³² Hegel resolves the tensions endemic to the imbalanced relationship between lord and bondsman through an ironic turn of events. The bondsman, by virtue of his work producing the objects of consumption that the lord fleetingly desires, eventually comes to recognize itself as a truly absolute — hence autonomous and independent — form of self-consciousness. See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 117-19, paras. 195-96.

²³³ Fanon’s description of the Algerian *fidai* in *L’An Cinq* is similar to his description of the colonized in *Les Damnés de la Terre*: “The ‘terrorist,’ from the moment he undertakes an assignment, allows death to enter into his soul. He has a rendezvous with death. The *fidai*, on the other hand, has a rendezvous with the life of the Revolution, and with his own life. The *fidai* is not one of the sacrificed. To be sure, he does not shrink before the possibility of losing his life or the independence of his country, but at no moment does he choose death.” See Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 57-58.

certificate” over and against other cultures — Western, Eastern, American, or African — is my secondary being.²³⁴

The distinction between our physical (“primary”) and our authentic non-physical (or “secondary”) existence maps onto Shari’ati’s previously noted distinction between Iranian and African experiences of colonization. He accordingly defines the *shahīd* as having become universal “thought itself.”

A particular [relative, *nisbī*] man becomes a universal [absolute, *mutlaq*] man. Because he is no longer a human, a person, an individual. He is thought. He was an individual who sacrificed himself in the pursuit of his thought and as a result has been transformed into thought itself. For this reason, we do not recognize Husayn as a particular person who is the son of Ali. Husayn is a name that signifies Islam, justice, *imāmat*, and *tawhīd*. On account of this, we do not praise in him an individual, so that later we might compare and rank him in relation to other *shuhadā*. Such discussions are not even remotely relevant. When we speak of Husayn, we are no longer referring to “Husayn.” Husayn signified an individual who negated himself under the most splendid circumstances that a human could imagine — with absolute sincerity in the pursuit of an absolute sanctity. As a result, he has become an absolute sanctity himself. All that remains of him is a name. His substance is no longer an individual. He has become a source and a *maktab* [school of thought, ideology] — meaning he has become tantamount to a *maktab*.²³⁵

Husayn’s actions — in fact, his entire material person — become “secondary characteristics” that continue to exist even though his “primary” being does not. The finite spatial and temporal dimensions of our lives — among which Shari’ati lists our money, time, and physical existence — constitute expendable forces whose negation turns into an affirmation of an ideal.²³⁶ Like “kerosene,” these forces are meant to be “sacrificed” and “transformed into a spiritual energy” whose source exists in the purpose for which one sacrifices. In his more revisionist, less insurrectionary guise, the separation between action and thought sustained Shari’ati’s effort to differentiate between political ethics (or the conditioning of a revolutionary state of mind) and

²³⁴ Shari’ati, *Bāzgasht*, 17-8. In a lecture discussing the *shahīd*, Shari’ati repeats almost verbatim the reference to Heidegger made in “Bāzgasht be Khīshān,” stating that the traditions of existentialist thought in Europe and *wilāyat* in Shi’ism similarly define the human in terms of an “essential character” (*shakhsīyat-i zāti*) and a “secondary shaping character” (*shakhsīyat-i takvīnī-yi ba’dī*). See Shari’ati, *Husayn, Vāris-i Ādam*, 212.

²³⁵ Shari’ati, *Husayn, Vāris-i Ādam*, 215.

²³⁶ See Shari’ati, *Husayn, Vāris-i Ādam*, 214, 216.

direct political action (or insurrectionary violence directed at changing the state). His discussion of *shahādat*, however, provides a model of action that not only influences but also *is* thought — the “name” in relation to which we form our “secondary” being.

In this manner, Shari‘ati offers yet another significant revision to Fanon’s characterization of violence. In *Wretched*, the end-like quality of decolonial violence produces a leveling within the emerging nation according to which the masses recognize their victory as the product of all: “Violence hoists the people up to the level of the leader.”²³⁷ The distinction between leaders and the led collapses, resulting in a radically democratic project, if only for a moment. In Shari‘ati’s hands the leader/led dynamic is similarly set aside through the formation of a unified community. Yet instead of being entirely negated, it is transformed into a relationship of exemplarity. In this regard, the distinctions among the *shahīd* as message, those who deliver that message, and finally those who receive it are essential.

To tease through these distinctions we must return to Shari‘ati’s insistence on different experiences of colonization — and consequently different understandings of corporeality and temporality. Fanon’s characterization of colonization in *Wretched* is known for being uncompromisingly dichotomous:

The colonized world is a world divided in two. The dividing line, the border, is represented by the barracks and the police stations. In the colonies, the official, legitimate agent, the spokesperson for the colonizer and the regime of oppression, is the police officer or the soldier. In capitalist societies, education, whether secular or religious ... instills in the exploited a mood of submission and inhibition which considerably eases the task of the agents of law and order ... In colonial regions, however, the proximity and frequent, direct intervention by the police and the military ensure the colonized are kept under close scrutiny, and contained by rifle butts and napalm.²³⁸

²³⁷ Fanon, *Wretched*, 51.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

Under these circumstances — where force, not education, separate the two sides — the attempt to engage in counterhegemonic activity proves to be nothing more than the temporary release of a “muscular tension.” This tension, instilled within the body and psyche of the colonized by the colonial system, can only be resolved through the absolute act of killing the colonizer: “With his back to the wall, the knife at his throat, or to be more exact the electrode on his genitals, the colonized subject is bound *to stop telling stories* [*le colonisé va être sommé de ne plus raconter d’histoires*].”²³⁹ For Fanon, the working-class and the colonized masses embody an immediacy in the present that renders their work “transfigurative.” They are the ones who have stopped “telling stories.” And yet, interestingly enough, Fanon — as the intellectual recounting their radical break from colonial systems of power — remains embedded within the very (Hegelian) language of those systems. In this light, his efforts to draw a sharp line between the limits of the intellectual and the exalted spontaneity of the masses come across as an act of disclosure. The intellectual (read: Fanon) remains stuck in the realm of “refiguration” with nothing but stories to tell.²⁴⁰

In Shari‘ati’s colonized world — where the problem of alienation is one of metamorphosis (*maskh shawdan*), with colonial power operating through the mechanism of misrepresentation — the importance of narrative is inescapable. Responding to those who might challenge the accuracy of his discourse, Shari‘ati argued against the distinction between

²³⁹ Ibid., 20, emphasis mine; cf. Fanon, *Les Damnés*, 58-59.

²⁴⁰ This language belongs to Ato Sekyi-Otu, who argues that “Concerning Violence” does not involve the kind of dialectical “refiguration” found in Hegel’s account of lordship and bondage (where the bondsman’s existential condition can be interpreted otherwise en route to his freedom), but rather a “transfiguration.” The colonized quite simply makes “a radical leap ‘from one life to another.’” See Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience*, 61. My discussion of the colonized’s violence as “work” suggests that a Hegelian dynamic in fact persists in *Wretched*. In this regard, at least the colonized’s activity remains “refigurative.” Sekyi-Otu borrows the term refiguration from Paul Ricœur; transfiguration, however, is not Ricœur’s term.

historical fact and fiction. Unconcerned with the particular events “which they call history,” he presented himself as searching for a truth “above reality.”

In this context, if this story [of Husayn] is not factual, it is demonstrated more clearly that it holds true. For if it actually happened, it would be an ‘event’ — a negligible and singular incident, indicating an exclusive and particular prejudice. If it does not possess actuality, it indicates a totality, a general truth, and a universal condition that manifests itself in these narratives. Public thoughts, a shared collective spirit, and social consciousness construct these types of stories.²⁴¹

The end of narrative described in “Concerning Violence” becomes in Shari‘ati’s hands the “public thoughts, shared collective spirit and social consciousness” of the people who retell Husayn’s story. This construct emerges almost directly out of Shari‘ati’s earlier discussions of *bāzgasht* where the authentic Iranian and Muslim self, disfigured by colonialism, continues to “live” among the masses.

The return to a historical self of which I speak ... is a return to a practical and present self in the individual and the social conscience that, like a substance or resource of energy, through the medium of the intellectual, may be sewn open and extracted, brought to life, and thrown into activity. It is this self which is living ... This self boils forth from the text of the masses.²⁴²

In a rhetorical pattern that mimics the description of muscular tension inhibited by the colonial system in Fanon’s *Wretched*, this self — the palpable vitality of the community, “living” among the masses — is latently present.²⁴³ But for Shari‘ati, in an act of naming that promises to continue rewriting history, the self is only “brought to life” when the individual realizes itself in “the text of the masses.” As he puts it in his discussion of *shahādat*, the well-spring of Islam’s continued life — the “heart of the fire” — exists in “the people’s hearts and minds.”²⁴⁴ The fire

²⁴¹ Shari‘ati, *Husayn, Vāris-i Ādam*, 175.

²⁴² Shari‘ati, *Bāzgasht*, 30.

²⁴³ “But deep down the colonized subject acknowledges no authority. He is dominated but not domesticated... The muscles of the colonized are always tensed [*Dans ses muscles, le colonisé est toujours en attente*].” See Fanon, *Wretched*, 16; cf. Fanon, *Les Damnés*, 54.

²⁴⁴ Shari‘ati, *Husayn, Vāris-i Ādam*, 142-43.

Prometheus provides is to be sought here; Prometheus in turn must become the source and hence “thought” of that fire himself. In the process, the masses too become who they are.

Shahādat thus reaches its culmination as a model for others to follow; or, to use the anti-colonial language from Shari‘ati’s discussion of *bāzgasht*, as a new universal. The members of a society are said to engage in a process of self-formation where they reconstruct themselves (*bāz-sāzī*) in the shadow cast by the *shahīd*’s example. In turn, the resulting “*shahīd* community” presents a model for others to follow: “We must be the axis and intermediary of time, at the center of the issue. Let us not be a group cowering in a corner of the Middle East, loitering away, neglecting the theatre of time. Neglecting intellectual problems, neglecting the fateful issues that construct *humanity’s present* and *tomorrow’s history* — the issues that give shape to everything ... We must be in the middle of the field.”²⁴⁵ Just as material objects and physical bodies may be spent in an instrumental fashion to augment the value and visibility of a sacred principle — like “kerosene,” fueling the Promethean fire of a righteous cause — so too may time be reconfigured as “history” for the sake of “humanity’s present.”²⁴⁶ In this regard, where Fanon’s emphasis on the corporeal presents a break from history’s bonds, Shari‘ati’s discussion of insurrectionary violence as *shahādat* involves a direct engagement with history — albeit in the form and for the sake of “tomorrow’s history.” Instead of killing the colonizer, Husayn chooses to die. The effects of this choice are written on “the text of the masses,” like marks on the collective conscience of a body politic.

²⁴⁵ Shari‘ati, “*Bahsi Rāj-e Bi Shahīd*” in *Husayn Vāris-i Ādam*, 220. This concept is repeated, albeit in a less developed form, in the better known “After Shahādat.” See “Pas az Shahādat” in *Husayn, Vāris-i Ādam*, 200.

²⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, 213-15.

For Shari‘ati, unlike Fanon, these marks were to be read by intellectuals broadly defined to include the masses themselves. The need to rewrite rather than escape history leads Shari‘ati to apply the principle of exemplarity to the ethical formation of the masses as intellectuals. The fourteenth lecture of *Islāmshināsī* is a case in point insofar as Shari‘ati deliberately presents himself as an example on public display for his audience to replicate.²⁴⁷ In these instances, Shari‘ati’s rhetorical performance was not simply directed at inviting his audience to read “the text of the masses” as he did; he was also and essentially inviting them to read themselves as he did.

Throughout this process of self-formation, the distinctions between exemplar and masses — like the “name” Husayn — persist. Deploying the various significations of the term *shahādat*, Shari‘ati declared that Husayn has borne witness (*shāhid būdan*) in the “trial of history” on behalf of all of those who have “never had a testimonial given on their behalf, who have remained silent and without defense.” “Doesn’t he know that there isn’t anyone left to accompany him and to get his revenge? This question [of revenge] is a question posed to human history’s tomorrow [*tārīkh-i fardā-yi basharī*]. Its response is from the future, from all of us.”²⁴⁸ The *shahīd*’s “testimony” — what Husayn “exposes” of a history that has been disfigured beyond recognition — is only relevant insofar as it remains “present” (*hāzīr*), not only for God

²⁴⁷ The lecture unfolds self-reflexively. Shari‘ati presents his personal challenges, arguing that the personal is not personal for him; rather to speak of personal issues as a public figure necessarily means to speak of broader social conditions in contemporary times. See Shari‘ati, *Islāmshināsī*, 151. The lecture is a performative act on Shari‘ati’s part. He undergoes personal reflection in a public forum so that those who share his condition may similarly engage their harshest critiques and thereby emerge from the process as changed subjects.

²⁴⁸ See Shari‘ati, *Husayn, Vāris-i Ādam*, 203. To emphasize the testimonial features of the concept, Shari‘ati argues that Husayn is a *shahīd* even before his physical passing. His *shahādat* occurred once he rejected Yazid’s rule as caliph; the actual death could have occurred well after he chose it by “bearing witness.” See *ibid.*, 201-2, 223.

but also for “the people” (*khalq*) who are to arrive in the future.²⁴⁹ Insofar as Husayn represents a thought that has emerged from the text of the masses — that is, their secondary and shaping character as human beings — Shari‘ati’s conception of *shahādat* constitutes a direct call to the masses to act as readers of themselves and thus to “return” to who they are in the now.

Husayn’s story then remains incomplete. If the message of *shahādat* were to be read by the remaining, living community in a pre-established fashion, we would be right to interpret Shari‘ati’s views as a particular manifestation of Heidegger’s thought in the Iran. Accordingly, the ideal to which Husayn as exemplar (or any *shahīd* for that matter) bears witness would be eternal and unaffected by changing circumstances within historical time. If anything, in this regard, Shari‘ati adds the force of a mass political movement to a narrowly nationalist ideology. However, his emphasis on the act of choosing — for Husayn the *shahīd*, for Zaynab the messenger, for the intellectual as *rawshanfikir* emerging from the hearts and the minds of the people, for the masses constructed in the image of the intellectual — tells a different story.

Any person, if they have chosen the responsibility of truth — any person who knows what the responsibility of being Shia means, what the responsibility of being a free human being means — must know that in the eternal historical and global struggle — where everywhere is Karbala, all months are Muharram, and all days are Ashura — that we must choose: either blood or the message, either being Husayn or being Zaynab, either dying in that manner or remaining [alive] in the other. If they do not wish to absent from the stage...²⁵⁰

Read in light of his emphasis on the people’s hearts and minds as an originary source, as well as his reinterpretation of history as the stories that emerge from that collective spirit, Shari‘ati’s discussion of “choice” evinces a significantly democratic spirit; here, the act of choosing is what

²⁴⁹ Shari‘ati’s debts to the anti-colonial tradition of political thought (and its corresponding debts to Hegel) are apparent in his use of vitalist metaphors to describe the *shahīd* as a truly living entity: “The *shahīd* like a heart delivers its blood to the dry, dead, and lifeless limbs of this society.” See *ibid.*, 204.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 207-8. There are two aspects to this characterization of *shahādat*: Husayn and Zaynab, the testimony and the message. Zaynab’s role is central here, communicating Husayn’s message across generations in time. When he dies, it is her duty to convey his actions; she is the “intellectual” to his mass movement. See *ibid.*, 206.

remains eternal. In the context of his broader reflections on *bāzgasht* and *shahādat*, “being Husayn or being Zaynab” can remain undefined categories, changeable in response to contemporary mass conditions and yet bound by an eternally consistent obligation to respond to the activity of those masses — a democratic ethos only limited by its commitment to itself and its social responsibility.²⁵¹

IV

Ummat, or the Articulation of an Indeterminate Collective Subject

There is more to a name than just a name.

The pattern in which Shari‘ati re-imagined the significance of historical fact in *Islāmshināsī* — blurring the line that separated fact from fiction and in the process revaluing fictional ideas based on belief in the immediate present — appears in his reflections on *ummat* (community) and *imāmat* (leadership). The pattern appears in these lectures as three separate citations to one Professor Chandelle. Understanding the lectures as rhetorical performance (and not simply the transference of substantive content), these citations suggestively articulate an indeterminate, or non-teleological, collective subject.

To ask “Who is Professor Chandelle?” is to ask “Who is Ali Shari‘ati?” Chandelle, which means “candle” in French, did not exist beyond Shari‘ati’s imagination and by extension the imaginations and beliefs of his audience. When Shari‘ati referred to or quoted Professor Chandelle, he was actually quoting himself. Earlier in his life, he had published articles under the penname *sham* — again, “candle,” this time in Persian. In his later lectures, he created a new

²⁵¹ Farzin Vahdat discusses the democratic and anti-democratic arguments variously spread across Shari‘ati’s collected works. He associates Shari‘ati’s views on leadership solely in conjunction with the latter. See Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut*, 150-52. What I have presented here is an alternate take on leadership within Shari‘ati’s work that coheres with the arguments he made in favor of popular sovereignty.

character of his former secret identity, referencing himself while giving his audiences the impression that he was referring to the authority of a French professor.²⁵²

The status of this rhetorical trope in *Ummat va Imāmat* shares a great deal with his so-called exchange of letters with Fanon — records of which do not exist anywhere but Shari‘ati’s references to them in his *Islāmshināsī* lectures. This historical fact (an actual one in this case) has led some historians to reject or at least minimize the connection between Fanon and Shari‘ati. Yet the dubious and fictional nature of his references to Fanon actually did something very concrete: they reflected and performed Shari‘ati’s re-definition of historical “fact” as that which is felt or believed to be true by the masses. They accordingly added to Fanon’s notion of “a return to self” as *not* being a return to an actual and factual self in the temporal past, but rather an indeterminate one in the future-present.²⁵³

Professor Chandelle’s appearances in *Ummat va Imāmat* mark a similar rhetorical and performative act meant to shape the meaning of the text. A simultaneous reiteration of and departure from Hegelian dialectics occurs at the most pivotal argumentative points in these

²⁵² For the biographical details of Shari‘ati’s pennames, see Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*, 161-75; Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, 107. Chandelle is also notably an aeronautical term used to describe an airplane maneuver that involves a 180-degree turn during a maximum rate climb. See Dale Crane (ed.), *Dictionary of Aeronautical Terms*, 117. I am grateful to Kirstie McClure for bringing this point to my attention. The resonances between a 180-degree turn at full speed and Shari‘ati’s use of Professor Chandelle’s character make this reading of the pseudonym equally viable.

²⁵³ These performances bear an important and striking resemblance to *ta‘zīyih* theatrical practices, which in turn are “the unconscious avant-garde of the ‘poor theatre.’” With reference to Grotowski, Chelkowski describes “poor theatre” as a response to the crisis in theatre induced by the introduction of modern film and television. Theatre could survive by emphasizing the intimacy between actor and spectator, a sensation that could not be substituted by any other form. *Ta‘zīyih* similarly holds “no barriers of time and space.” Its script is not fixed but rather changes to accommodate “the mood of the actors, the audience, and the weather.” More to the point, the pretention to historical realism is absent; figures from different points in factual historical time may appear at once on stage. See Chelkowski, “Ta‘ziyeh,” 9-10. In other words, “poor theatre” and *ta‘zīyih* signaled a “return” to the immediacy of the present moment — much akin to the “returns” articulated by Fanon and Shari‘ati. Shari‘ati’s performances of his various lectures — with their references to nonexistent letter exchanges with Fanon and citations to himself as Professor Chandelle — reflect this sensibility. Fittingly, the lectures took place in a *husaynīyih* — a site normally reserved for *ta‘zīyih* productions but now (with Ershād, in particular) reconfigured for politically charged lectures that initially appeared to be “non-political.”

lectures. At each turn, Shari‘ati cites Professor Chandelle (or rather, himself) in order to affect what would seem to be a synthesis (or determinate negation). In each case, however, the unity that emerges is held together by fiction and belief as opposed to logical necessity. The reinterpretation of Hegelianism occurs in light of the “particular” particular of Iranian “colonization” — in other words, through an emphasis on religion (specifically, Islam) as ethical practice. By virtue of its emphasis on collective belief, this dynamic introduces an abiding element of indeterminacy: we can never fully know or predict where collective belief will lead.

These rhetorical performances suggest a simultaneous affirmation of and departure from liberal subjectivity.²⁵⁴ Insofar as autonomous subjectivity — the return to a non-disfigured or alienated self — forms the basis for participation in a “true” democracy, Shari‘ati’s lingering affiliation with Hegel appears in step with a lingering affirmation of liberal democracy. Despite his incessant critiques of it, we are simply being “guided” to locate authentic and self-determined grounds on which it may exist. And yet, the ambivalent and ambiguous affirmation of these principles through Professor Chandelle immediately fosters a sense of distance. On these terms, the presentation of individual and popular sovereignty echoes the neoliberal ethos of negation that paralleled the emergence of Iranian resistance to the Pahlavi regime.

In his first appearance, Professor Chandelle helps Shari‘ati model a method of inquiry predicated on the blurred line between fact and fiction. In the Preface under a sub-section entitled “Research Method,” Professor Chandelle asks: “The human? What does that mean? Say who and I’ll tell you what [it is]. [*Bigū kī, tā man bigam chī*].”²⁵⁵ The irony here should not be

²⁵⁴ Referencing Hegel’s notion of subjectivity as the “ontological foundation of the rights-bearing individual,” Farzin Vahdat presents Shari‘ati as articulating a “mediated subjectivity” between autonomous individuality and the divine. Vahdat, “Metaphysical Foundations,” 51-52, 54-55. Where Vahdat, however, identifies “contradictions” in these articulations (a thoroughly Hegelian mode of critique), we may instead find the production of indeterminacy.

²⁵⁵ Shari‘ati, *Ummat va Imāmat*, 28.

lost on us. Shari‘ati criticizes abstract liberal humanism and instead calls for a “return to self” in the tradition of anti-colonial thought. In effect, he calls for particularity, for grounding, for the objectification of abstract universals — for the kind of dialectical step pursued by Hegel and Marx before him. And yet, he uses a fictional version of himself — an actual abstract human — in order to make the point. Where “engaged democracy” appears to be a reiteration of the early Marx’s discussion of political freedom, the introduction of Professor Chandelle suggests that Hegelian determinate negation has been infiltrated. Objectification occurs here by way of an un-objective and fictional figure we *believe* to be objective — a performance that reiterates Shari‘ati’s point about *shahādat* as a return to a collective self found in the “text of the masses” by the masses themselves. We are to become who we are by believing in a being who is not.

Professor Chandelle makes his second appearance as Shari‘ati criticizes the prospect of leaderless social orders. After rejecting them in their various religious forms — which are in actuality signifiers for Western liberal democracy — Shari‘ati introduces a paradoxical affirmation of their emphasis on individual ethics. Chandelle is quoted as lamenting an irretrievable temporal past we decidedly cannot return to:

We have defeated all of the heroes of the past — all of the great and holy figures who could complete us in perpetuity through our desire for proximity to them. With reference to them, with praise, worship, and love for them, we approached virtue. We made ourselves disposed to value and virtue.

Shari‘ati then immediately inserts his own voice to explain Professor Chandelle (or “himself”): “When I praise a collection of values, when I like them, when I get close to and think about he who possesses them, *I cultivate them in myself*.”²⁵⁶ In so doing, he refers to a defining feature of the liberal order he criticizes in order to discuss the prospect of undermining that very order — the cultivation of the individual self by the individual. Again, Shari‘ati attenuates the

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 91, *emphasis mine*.

“perplexing” or contradictory aspects of this formulation by citing the apparent authority of Professor Chandelle — or in other words, by enacting belief.

In his third and final appearance, Chandelle washes away any remaining ambiguity with regard to Shari‘ati’s affirmation of the autonomous enactment of liberal principles. For the entirety of *Ummat va Imāmat*, Shari‘ati has suggested that liberal democracy only really befits Western socio-political contexts (as *politique*). In so doing, he insinuates an essential difference between the West, on the one hand, and those peoples and political communities present at the Bandung Conference, on the other. With a Chandelle quote, however, the text suddenly introduces a comparison between Iran and Islamic history and republican France: “The greatest enemy to freedom and democracy, in its Western form, is democracy itself, liberalism itself, individual freedom itself.” And then, later, in the text’s conclusion: “Democracy in a backward and unaware society that needs revolutionary leadership and guidance is the enemy of democracy itself.”²⁵⁷ Shari‘ati goes on to argue that the ultimate end-goal or telos of the *ummah* (or Muslim political community) is a yet-to-be defined iteration of liberal democracy. To make that utopian vision “realistic,” Shari‘ati enlists the authority of Professor Chandelle in the effort to cultivate our belief.

Through Chandelle, Shari‘ati de-centers himself. In a discussion about leadership, he cites the authority of someone other than himself to make his point so as not to aggrandize himself in the act of. The point is made all the more forcefully because Chandelle is Shari‘ati but we, as his audience, believe him to be someone else; searching for Chandelle as a source of pure authority would result in disappointment. The model of leadership, as it is modeled for us, is contingent and partial. In a discussion that emphasizes individual responsibility in crafting the

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 156, 184.

self in the image of an exemplary leader; where, despite the invectives against liberal democracy, we ultimately arrive at its mediated affirmation; where a “particular” version of the liberal individual is, ultimately, affirmed as ideal; Shari‘ati presents that ideal as partial. It both is and is not.

The ambiguous assessment of (individual or popular) sovereignty expressed through Chandelle reflects a broader suspicion in Islamist thought regarding the relationship between sovereignty and secularism. According to Talal Asad, the history of modern power is tied to the history of the secular — or, in other words, the ability of human agents in this temporal world to order and manage that which occurs within the finite realms of time and space in this world.²⁵⁸ The correspondence — between a secular optic directed at managing and controlling material entities in this world and the irreducible primacy of those material entities — precedes and produces the state. The correspondence, moreover, limits the radical potential of popular sovereignty cast as corporal primacy.²⁵⁹ Understood on these terms, the *ummah* stands apart from and against the sovereignty of the modern state. In classical theological formulations, the *ummah* is neither limited — because “it can and eventually should embrace all of humanity” — nor sovereign — “for it is subject to God’s authority.” This tradition “predicates distinctive modes of

²⁵⁸ “On secular grounds, humans appear as the self-conscious makers of history (in which calendrical time provides a measure and direction for human events) and as the unshakable foundation of universally valid knowledge about nature and society. The human as agent is now responsible — answerable — not only for acts he or she has performed (or refrained from performing) but for events he or she was unaware of — or falsely conscious of. The domain in which acts of God (accidents) occur without human responsibility is increasingly restricted. Chance is now considered to be tamable.” See Asad, “Religion, Nation-State, Secularism,” 186.

²⁵⁹ Extending an insight articulated by Fanon, Judith Butler has recently discussed popular sovereignty as an indeterminate political force. For Butler, the freedom of assembly (“we, the people”) emerges not because a state grants the right to free association but rather as the foundation of the state as such. A state making claims to legitimacy based on popular sovereignty is thus grounded (and potentially undone) by the unregulated presence of physical bodies. See Butler, *Notes*, 154-92. Just as Shari‘ati’s views exceeded Fanon’s discussion of insurrectionary violence by affirming religion, affirming embodiment as finitude by moving beyond the necessity of the body, so too does his discussion of community as *ummat* challenge and extend Butler’s discussion of popular sovereignty as rooted in corporeality.

being and acting” for those political actors in the contemporary period (i.e. “Islamists”) contending with modern state sovereignty and its secular claim to “regulate all aspects of individual life.” Challenges to state sovereignty formulated on these terms presuppose “individuals who are self-governing but not autonomous.”²⁶⁰

Yet, as Shari‘ati’s discussion of *shahādat* demonstrates, Islam and popular sovereignty are not as irreconcilably opposed to one another as Asad’s reference to classical theological formulations would have us assume.²⁶¹ In other words, when his discussion of *ummat* is read in continuity with the open-ended articulation of collectivity found in his discussion of *shahādat*, Shari‘ati’s discussion of Bandung-style self-determination is not merely instrumental. Moreover, when combined, these appeals cancel out the teleological nature of each. Popular sovereignty as an end is exceeded by the possibility of a community that is not and cannot be sovereign. The prospect of killing any and all potential bodies that might collectively gather to enact a radical democratic right in opposition to or in excess of the state ostensibly puts an end to popular sovereignty. *Shahādat* takes that possibility away, rendering popular sovereignty infinite and indeterminate. At the same, the “return” to Muslim practice in Shari‘ati’s formulation refuses teleology. The instantiation of a Shi‘a community is itself rendered indeterminate by the centrality of popular sovereignty as a means.

Put simply, this combination of popular sovereignty with Islam — a combination that both Shari‘ati and Khomeini suggested in grounding the legitimacy of leadership within the

²⁶⁰ All of this quotes are taken from Asad, “Religion, Nation-State, Secularism,” 189-91. For Asad, individuals are self-governing but not autonomous insofar as they possess the ability to discover the rules of the *sharia* (which is morally binding and exists independently of the individual) and “conform to them.”

²⁶¹ Asad readily discusses Islam in Foucaultian terms; and yet, despite their critical edge, governmentality and subject-formation are decidedly Western concepts. In light of this interpretive practice, it would be inconsistent to suggest that sovereignty, because of *its* Western origins, is fundamentally precluded from similar comparative analysis — in short, that it is incommensurably different.

divine will of the people — intentionally or otherwise, produces an indeterminate collective subject. It is only fitting that Shari‘ati expressed indeterminate collectivity through the figuration of himself as an(other) individual. Shari‘ati’s references to himself as Professor Chandelle — again, intentionally or otherwise — astutely capture the ideational byproduct. In the chapter that follows, I elaborate on this rhetorical gesture, presenting neoliberal individualism as a pivotal trope in secular forums of popular culture from 1968 onward. It was on these terms that an indeterminate, or non-teleological, collective subject emerged and acted in the revolutionary uprising of 1977-79.

CHAPTER 3 | NEO-INDIVIDUALISM

CHIEF JUDGE OF MILITARY COURT: I kindly ask that you defend yourself.

KHOSROW GOLESORKHI: I'm defending my people [*khalqam*].

JUDGE: As a last defense, defend yourself. And don't ask me any questions. You've been given notice: as a last defense, you may present information that relates to the accusations leveled against you, [information] that you think will be in your interest.

GOLESORKHI: I have nothing to say in my own interest. I only speak in the interest of my people [*khalqam*]. If the freedom to speak on these terms does not exist, I can take a seat.

JUDGE: You have as much freedom as needed to defend yourself as a last defense.

GOLESORKHI: I will sit. I will sit. I will not speak.²⁶²

This dramatic turn of events was broadcast on Iranian national television in October of 1973. The scene was from the last defense of Khosrow Golesorkhi — a poet and avowed Marxist-Leninist dissident on trial for an alleged plot to assassinate the Shah and kidnap the Empress, Farah, and crown prince, Rezā. Two of the twelve accused — Golesorkhi and Karāmatollah Dāneshiān, a filmmaker — were tried in a military hearing broadcast on live television. The proceedings were one of many similar SAVAK show trials aired at the time in the effort to exhibit state power and discourage radical activism.²⁶³ In this particular instance, the tactic backfired. The public executions of Golesorkhi and Dāneshiān in 1974 led to a series of short-lived protests by university students.²⁶⁴ More importantly, the event took on lasting

²⁶² Khusraw Gulisurkhī, *Bishih-yi Bidār*, 203-4, my translation. I have supplemented this transcript with available video footage from the event. For a copy of the broadcast, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyvjhUsJyNg> (accessed on 10 February 2015). For an alternate translation of this exchange, see Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 2, 410.

²⁶³ For a detailed discussion of the accusations and show trials at the time, see *ibid.*, 407-12.

²⁶⁴ CISNU publication printed in the United States describe demonstrations held at high schools and the University of Tehran in response as an “uprising” that “called for the overthrow of the Shah’s regime and demanded democratic

symbolic significance. It has since been remembered as an enduring act of resistance against the Pahlavi regime in the years preceding the 1979 revolution.

Everything about Golesorkhi's defense speaks of collectivism, no part more so than the finale. The judge's requirement that he speak as an individual ends in his refusal to speak at all. The act affirms his earlier statement: "I will not bargain for my soul in this court nor even for my life. I am an irrelevant drop [*qatri-yi nāchīz*] in the grandeur and despair of Iran's struggling masses [*khalq-hā*]." ²⁶⁵ And yet, the overt denial of individuality within the act contrasts with the implicit status of the act itself as an exemplar of individual defiance. While others in a similar position had also made a choice to defy the state (including Daneshiān), the rhetorical quality of Golesorkhi's defiance managed to express an emergent ethos. The denial of individual interest in favor of the collective became a political act of defiance through the paradoxical assertion of individuality. Golesorkhi demonstratively broke from what he was allowed to say, do, and be as an individual citizen in a manner that openly and overtly denied the court's [i.e. state's] ability to determine what an individual subject could say, do, or be. Yet in his complete refusal to participate, he was acting as an autonomous individual vis-à-vis the state. For a moment, he appeared free.

What does it mean to enact individual freedom and autonomy while negating one's own presence as an individual? In the following chapter, I present this rhetorical act as a mode of resistance in parallel with a neoliberal periodic shift. According to this mode of resistance, the expression of collective justice claims manifests on individualist terms. The assertion of

rights for the people." See *Resistance* 2, no. 4 (June 1974), 16. The same publications reported that the other ten accused received three-year prison terms. See *Resistance* 2, no. 3 (April 1974), 1; *CAIFI Newsletter* 1, n. 1 (March 1975), 8.

²⁶⁵ Gulisurkhī, *Bishih-yi Bīdar*, 199.

individuality through the negation of individuality facilitates the process by turning the individual into a seemingly empty signifier. As a result, the collective comes to be imagined as if it were an unhindered and uninhibited individual.²⁶⁶ I call this configuration neo-individualism.

This concept runs against prevalent readings of the 1979 revolution as a primarily ideological event in which the masses were interpellated by a populist Islamic ideology.²⁶⁷

Instead, the configuration of neo-individualism in Iran mirrors Rancière's discussion of dissensus. For Rancière, politics is aesthetic insofar as it makes visible or audible that which is not visible or audible in the existing normative order.²⁶⁸ In Iran, a related process involved a rupture within the existing police order of the Pahlavi state. As the windows available for formal political opposition closed in 1968, the Pahlavis increasingly depended on the reproduction of symbolic conformity.²⁶⁹ By consequence, the only truly free expressions of individualism in the

²⁶⁶ If this formulation appears to echo representations of the state in natural law theory, it is because it in fact does. As Seyla Benhabib has argued vis-à-vis Samuel Moyn, the kind of individual human rights discourse that became prevalent post-1968 — which Moyn claims to be an unheralded phenomenon — was actually a reiteration of tropes from early modern political thought. See Benhabib, "Moving beyond False Binarisms," 81-93. Insofar as my argument follows Moyn — adding to his account by characterizing the shift he depicts as part of a periodic shift to neoliberalism — Benhabib's critique applies here as well. What is nevertheless distinct about the reiteration of natural law theory in our contemporary period is the absence of an imagined and shared metaphysical foundation for a universal condition beyond nation-states.

²⁶⁷ Golesorkhi's defense is a case in point. His simultaneous reference to Imam Husayn and Marxism have led to interpretations of the event as a quintessential moment of interpellation, setting the grounds for what eventually became an Islamic Revolution. By way of illustration, Naficy reads Golesorkhi's statement as an example of "the discourses of authenticity and nativism... mobilized in defense of 'the masses' and 'the people', and that others like Ayatollah Khomeini would later mobilize in defense of the Islamic community." Dabashi describes the presence within it of "a Karbala complex." See Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 2, 409-10; Dabashi, *Shi'ism*, 73-99.

²⁶⁸ See Rancière, *Disagreement*, 27-30, 57-58; Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 226.

²⁶⁹ Lisa Wedeen's study of the rhetorical foundations of the modern Syrian state provides an important model for the analysis of state power in Pahlavi Iran (an application Wedeen herself recommends). She describes the mechanisms of power in a noncharismatic authoritarian regime where legitimacy and hegemony (concepts that rely on belief and emotional commitment) were not present. In the absence of these phenomena, Wedeen argues that rhetoric and symbolism play a central role. If we are to take disbelief as the condition that makes obedience possible, then a regime's ability to make its citizens comply by reproducing visual and rhetorical displays of belief makes for a cost-effective and relatively stable means of securing power. Political membership may be ensured by playing along with the state's official rhetorical formulas, or in other words, by acting "as if" one believed them. See Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*, 6, 45-46, 67-86, 92, 157-58.

public sphere belonged to the Shah; moreover, by virtue of the Shah's increasingly arrogant claims to absolute sovereignty, that free individualism presented itself as uninhibited. In their response, radical expressions of resistance ironically emulated the Shah's individualism in the name of the collective (i.e. the nation, the people, the *ummah*). By enacting individuality beyond the state's definition of what it could be (that is, delimited and contained within the political community), a rupture appeared, challenging the all-encompassing projection of state power.

While the performance of uninhibited individualism mirrored the Shah in delivery, its content was distinctive by virtue of its projected dissolution of the individual within the collective. As Gulisurkhī declared: "I have nothing to say in my own interest. I only speak in the interest of my people." These tactics of resistance emerged in relation to the specific conditions of social and political life in the late Pahlavi state. They nevertheless unintentionally paralleled the emergence of a new global police order in neoliberalism. That order sought to co-opt the expression of self-determination as the basis for regulation, not resistance. By dissolving the individual in a projected collective through an act of individual defiance, Iranian revolutionary resistance put forth one of the earlier manifestations of a theme that would later come to define neoliberal political discourse across the spectrum: the expression of all claims to justice, including collective justice, in individualist terms.

Reading pre-revolutionary popular culture in Iran in this manner allows us to advance two related conceptual arguments. First, against historiographical renderings of the 1979 revolution as an ideological event, I make the case for a framework that challenges the notion of interpellation.²⁷⁰ Rancière's project famously breaks with Althusser's "religious mode of

²⁷⁰ Louis Althusser explains interpellation as a moment where a figure of authority hails an individual, thereby turning the individual into a subject. See Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus," 103-6. Accounts that emphasize the centrality of popular culture in pre-revolutionary Iran similarly understand culture as an appeal to an authentic self that may be interpellated and mobilized by elites. See Sreberny-Mohamadi and Mohammadi, *Small*

subjectification.” Instead of an authority figure hailing passive individuals (“Hey, you!”) in order to bring political subjects into existence, Rancière describes a police order that asks citizens to simply “move along” and maintain the status quo.²⁷¹ Following his model, in pre-revolutionary Iran resistance must be discerned in breaks from the Pahlavi’s police order of nonevents. The partial identification between the collective and the individual in neo-individualism coheres with this model. Second, against prevalent readings of Rancière in contemporary political theory that emphasize discontinuities in form in order to capture the notion of discontinuity inherent to the notion of a rupture, this chapter considers narrative as a form of dissensus.²⁷² The tendency to position radical democratic arguments against narrative because of its inherently ordering qualities prevents us from appreciating the relationship between power and resistance in authoritarian contexts like Pahlavi Iran where the “permission to narrate” simply did not exist.²⁷³

Section I establishes a basis for comparison between Shari‘ati’s discussion of *shahādat* and the more overtly secular iterations of neo-individualism in Iranian popular culture from 1968 to 1977. I do so through a close reading of Sādeq Hedāyat’s 1930 short story “Buried Alive.” The story provides an early articulation of what I call neo-individualism. Moreover, my analysis

Media, Big Revolution, 105-10; Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 3, 6-7; Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, 25-26, 32-34. Direct references to interpellation and Althusser are most prominently found in Naficy’s work, which refers to the “Islamist regime” as a “masterful manipulator,” organizing public spectacles that drew upon the Iranian populace’s tendency to act as a “performative nation.”

²⁷¹ For an insightful summary of the differences between Althusser and Rancière, see Panagia, “Why Film Matters to Political Theory,” 4.

²⁷² For a reading of Rancière’s dissensus against “narratocracy,” see Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation*, 6, 11-20, 40-44. Panagia rightly privileges interruption over figuration. However, as his use of the term “narratocracy” suggests, figuration may also act as a kind of interruption. It is my contention that in police orders where the permission to narrate does not exist narrative is “noise.” In this respect, narrative and dissensus are not mutually incompatible.

²⁷³ For a discussion of a similar dynamic with respect to the Palestinian experience, see Edward Said, “Permission to Narrate,” 27-48.

of a literary work lends itself to understandings of narrative as dissensus. Sections II and III extrapolate this framework to an analysis of another and more popular narrative medium, cinema. I consider Masoud Kimiāyi's 1969 film *Qaysar* in detail. Section II presents the merits and ultimate limits of interpellation as a framework for understanding Kimiāyi's film. Section III offers a new analysis of the film. According to this analysis, neo-individualism appears through a self-referential discussion of the cinematic form as a break with the existing normative order — or, in other words, an articulation of cinematic narrative as dissensus. I conclude by revisiting Golesorkhi's defense.

I

Neo-Individualism as Narrative Dissensus

The aesthetics of neo-individualism parallel the aesthetics of *shahādat*. As discussed by Shari'ati, *shahādat* makes visible a sense of despair and discontent all while making the collective visible to itself. Put differently, through the mediation of symbolic individualism, *shahādat* involves the making present (visible or heard) of that which already exists in the hearts and minds of the people but which has been hidden (*maskh shudan*, or disfiguration).²⁷⁴ The act by which one becomes a *shahīd* is itself of the present; it neither projects a return to a temporal past nor a determinate outcome in a teleological future. Instead, Shari'ati places an emphasis on the creative potential of the act itself — a displaced authorship where the individual *shahīd* speaks the collective in the here and now and in so doing makes the collective visible to itself.

In describing *shahādat*, Shari'ati emphasizes individual choice and responsibility.

Husayn and Zaynab, in particular, are understood to have made the right kinds of individual

²⁷⁴ Again, Shari'ati understands the third Shi'a Imam, Husayn, as having become a *shahīd* at the moment in which he is willing to die. This moment differs from his actual physical death; it also importantly differs from the effects of that death either here or in the hereafter.

choices for the sake of their faith and community. In other words, in Shari‘ati’s account, the preservation of the collective is based on individual action — a direct rejoinder to those who identified the Shi‘a faith with quietism or submission to predetermined fate. His rendering invokes familiar debates around Sufism regarding the relationship between free will and predestination. Here, the truth of a predestined fate (the Shi‘a collective or community) is realized through an exercise of free will that ultimately negates the physical individual who exercises free will. By dissolving that individual into the community (whether or not the individual physically dies), the “individual” is forever alive.

And yet, in theorizing neo-individualism, we can only go so far with Shari‘ati. In *shahādat*, Husayn symbolizes resolution. Thus, despite Shari‘ati’s emphasis on Husayn’s individual choice (and the democratic consequences that follow), Husayn’s exemplary status in popular memory may distract attention from the uncertainty emblematic of individual choice. Notably, the other instance of individual choice manifest in these depictions is Shari‘ati’s — the choice of aesthetic creation and narrative configuration, of including some elements in a story while leaving others out, and (in Shari‘ati’s case) of performing that story in a particular register. He emphasizes this dynamic, conveying the intricacies of his individual psychological interiority as they manifest in the creative process.²⁷⁵ Yet he does so indirectly. As I showed in Chapter 2, we must read across the deliberate equivocations and inconsistencies within his speeches and writings in order to discern that process at work.

²⁷⁵ The echoes of literary modernism in Shari‘ati’s performances are notable. Virginia Woolf’s “Modern Fiction” represents one lasting effort to describe the process of representing in-depth explorations of individual psychological interiority. Written when the turn to literary modernism occurred in European letters, Woolf describes the kind of creative activity required (in novelistic writing, in particular) to capture life as it is lived and experienced, i.e. psychologically. See *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 159-62.

Latent within Shari‘ati’s performances is a suggested conceptual pattern regarding the dissolution of an individual within a collective through an act of individual creation that ultimately reasserts individuality. That suggestion may be pursued more concretely and concisely in other corners of modern Iranian intellectual life, including its most staunchly secular corners. In particular, the writings of Sādeq Hedāyat — twentieth-century Iran’s most prominent modern prose author and, ironically, one its most virulent and racist critics of Islam and Arab Muslims²⁷⁶ — provide a forthright reflection on the relationship between the negation of the physical individual and aesthetics — in particular, narrative, *the* medium for the exploration of individual interiority. Along these lines, we may identify striking parallels between Hedāyat’s representations of suicide (an act strictly forbidden in Islam and, perhaps for this very reason, treated by Hedāyat with empathy and detail) and Shari‘ati’s articulation of *shahādat*. Doing so allows for an appreciation of the broader ideational pool dissidents in 1970s Iran like Golesorkhi drew from as they configured what unexpectedly and unintentionally became neo-individual political discourse. At the same time, because of its direct engagement with aesthetics (as opposed to the unstated elements of literary modernism implicit in Shari‘ati’s performances), reading Hedāyat allows for a clearer articulation of neo-individualism as narrative dissensus.

Many of Hedāyat’s stories express efforts to escape a state of fatalism that, either directly or indirectly, parallels Shi‘a quietism.²⁷⁷ Of those stories where Hedāyat’s fatalism leads to

²⁷⁶ A number of short stories exhibit Hedāyat’s anti-religious, and specifically anti-Muslim and anti-Arab, sentiments. For a representative example, see Hidāyat, “Talab-i Āmūrzish.” For an English translation, see Southgate’s “Seeking Absolution.” “Seeking Absolution” tells the story of a group of pilgrims en route to visit the holy Shi‘a city of Karbala. For a critical assessment of the story’s move from Orientalist social realism to a general indictment of Islamic religion and culture, see Beard, *Hedayat’s Blind Owl as a Western Novel*, 24.

²⁷⁷ Without death, life for Hedāyat was an unbearable trap, perpetually incapable of satisfying his strict standards; in its absence, humans would have no choice but to find recourse in the very self-imposed illusions Hedāyat subjects to critique. Death arrives as a saving grace precisely when one tires of deceiving themselves — the kind of release furnished by metaphysics without itself being an abstract metaphysical resolution. Death thus is not a return to or

suicide, 1930's "Buried Alive" ["*Zindih Bi Gūr*"], offers an explicitly self-conscious reflection on aesthetics and narrative. The story adopts a first-person narrative voice from which it communicates the repeated failed efforts of its protagonist in committing suicide. The protagonist ultimately succeeds when he gives up — a fact that we, as readers, come to know through a sudden change in the story's voice. In the end, an unidentified narrator reveals that the story we had read was in fact the compiled notes found next to the protagonist's dead body after he had "forgotten to breathe."²⁷⁸ In other words, narrative literally makes that which had not been visible appear.

Throughout the story, Hedāyat refrains from giving his protagonist a name. In so doing, he deprives him of the most obvious symbol of individuality. In the absence of a name, readers are only able to identify the protagonist by his desire to die. In a twist, the protagonist realizes his objective (that is, his individual identity, impoverished as it may be) when he no longer desires it — in other words, when he finally and fully negates himself as an individual. Like Golesorkhi, he becomes who he is in the performative act of releasing himself from any attachment to individuality.²⁷⁹

As the insertion of the third-person narrator's voice at the end of the story demonstrates, "Buried Alive" is equally a reflection on its own condition as aesthetic production and narrative.

arrival at an ideal; it is simply the sole means by which an individual ends a current state of despair. See Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature*, 140-41.

²⁷⁸ Hedāyat, "Buried Alive," 162.

²⁷⁹ This dynamic may also be expressed in terms of the story's discussion of free will and predestination: "No, suicide is not a thing you decide to do. It is just in some people. It is in their temperament, their nature. Oh yes, everyone's fate is written on their forehead and suicide is born with some." See *ibid.*, 154. Ironically, a freely willed suicide occurs when absolutely nothing holds meaning — not even the act of suicide itself. In other words, when absolute despair conquers Hedāyat's protagonist through a negation of his identity, the protagonist realizes his free will (the marker of identity).

Instances of death in Hedāyat's creative work can be interpreted as celebrations of lost ideals no longer available under current conditions; but they are also, more broadly, reflections on the absurdity of life itself.²⁸⁰ Hedāyat's protagonist carries with the prospect of finding recourse in the act of writing from the despair brought about by the realization of this absurdity. He ultimately loses faith, however, when he recalls the limits of communication:

Now that I have written these things down, I feel a bit quieter. It has consoled me. It is as though a heavy load has been taken off my shoulders. How good it would be if one could write everything. If I could get my thoughts across to someone else, if I could say to them... No, there are sentiments, there are things, which it is impossible to explain to another person, which can't be said. They would laugh at you. Everybody judges other people according to their own ideas. A man's tongue is defective and weak like himself.²⁸¹

There is a gap between the protagonist's attempted creativity and the meta-authorial narrative voice that appears at the end of the story. While for the protagonist creativity fails to deliver cathartic release, we as readers experience the meaning of the creative efforts that created the protagonist's creativity — an invisible process made apparent through the insertion of the story's third person narrative voice and the closure that insertion grants to the narrative as a whole. In other words, by stating the fact of suicide at the end of the story, Hedāyat gives the written narrative coherence. Where the protagonist fails, the author enacts and ostensibly experiences the cathartic release of aesthetic creation — its utility in coping with an otherwise hopeless, fatalistic predicament. Death cannot speak on its own. In this scenario, Hedāyat is Zaynab, the messenger, to the protagonist's Husayn.

The stakes of not writing at all — of not having one's words received — are to risk death in despair without recognition. As Deirdre Lashgari argues, "In the very act of depicting a

²⁸⁰ Lashgari, "Absurdity and Creation," 38-39.

²⁸¹ Hedāyat, "Buried Alive," 156; cf. Hedāyat, *Zindih bi Gūr*, 20. The impossibility of an audience receiving one's words as intended is a prospect interpreters of Golesorkhi and an interpellating Islamic ideology too readily forget. Hedāyat conveys this point, but does not end on it. He instead expresses an open-ended sense of possibility that echoes Shari'ati's discussion of choice in *shahādat*.

universe without meaning, the artist implicitly contributes meaning of his own.”²⁸² Insofar as the “suicide” in “Buried Alive” helps the artist (Hedāyat) communicate a sense of despair, the protagonist’s paradoxical assertion of individuality is the author’s meaningful configuration of the world (albeit as meaningless). In both instances, the point of emphasis is the act — *how* it speaks, not *what* it says. And yet, the seeming celebration of aesthetics and narrative belies the story’s sense of closure. Hedāyat, the author, can only actually achieve the cathartic release intimated by his protagonist if we read his story and appreciate his condition exactly as he intended it. In light of that tenuous wager, the story remains open-ended. In other words, as in Shari‘ati’s account of *shahādat*, the individual subject is only able to achieve realization as an individual through the reception of the story in such a way that the collective identifies with the individual.

II

Qaysar and the Limits of Interpellation

What Hedāyat expresses in strictly individual terms, film director Masoud Kimiāyi developed into a social phenomenon. Kimiāyi’s *Qaysar* [*Caesar*], released in 1969, arrived at the height of two related developments: an increase in rural to urban migration and a related increase in the popularity of cinema.²⁸³ A noticeable transition occurs in Iran’s domestically produced

²⁸² Lashgari, “Absurdity and Creation,” 31.

²⁸³ Parviz Ejlāli goes so far as to argue that cinema was *the* most popular form of recreation in the decades leading up to the 1979 Revolution, comparing the amount of money spent per individual on movie tickets with the entire amount spent per individual on theatre tickets, magazines, newspapers, and books. See Ejlāli, “*Ashā‘ih va Pazīrish-i Sinamā*,” 121-24. The article is a more recent and concise version of the argument made in *Diḡargūnī-yi Ijtimā‘ī va Fīlm-hāyih Sīnamā‘ī Dar Īrān*. For a similar argument made with less detailed analysis, see Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 2, 155-59.

popular cinema in the Fall of 1348 [1969] with the film's release.²⁸⁴ If, as film scholar Hamid Naficy argues, the “industrializing period” of Iranian cinema from 1941 to 1978 is defined by a “hybrid” production style, then *Qaysar* is the hybrid of all hybrids.²⁸⁵ Kimiāyi's film straddles a divide between commercial cinema that solely presented character types without any semblance of individuality and an Iranian “new wave” that was oriented toward the investigation and expression of individuality in direct opposition to earlier forms.

By virtue of its transitional quality, specifically with regards to the articulation of individuality, *Qaysar* exemplified an emerging ethos of neo-individualism. It did so by drawing out potentialities latent in Hedāyat's “Buried Alive.” In *Qaysar*, the “suicidal” actions of an individual in pursuit of personal revenge signal a break with domestic cinematic forms and a possible template for collective uprising. The film used similarly self-conscious cinematic effects in order to suggest the production of an indeterminate collective affect, a pattern that Golesorkhi's defense repeated in real time. The by-product of these spectacles was their potential reception as revolutionary content in neo-individual form — or rather, the configuration of a collective revolutionary subject on individualist terms.

The reading of a popular film like *Qaysar* as interpellation is readily available. In what follows, I present the parameters and context of this reading, relying heavily on film criticism in both English and Persian. I then turn to the shortcomings of this interpretation. In the end, readings of *Qaysar* as interpellation fails to adequately capture the film's hybrid qualities as

²⁸⁴ At the time of its release, numerous critics proclaimed that *Qaysar* marked a shift in Iranian domestic cinema (albeit with varying perspectives as to what that shift signaled). See Qūkāsiyān, *Majmu'ah-'i Maqālāt*, 97-98, 114, 118-19.

²⁸⁵ In writing a specifically social history of Iranian cinema, Naficy attends to the overlaps between modes of production in the economic sector and related artistic production in cinema. An industrializing period of economic activity is accordingly reflected in montage-based hybrid cinematic production. See Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 2, 177, 204, 333, 350.

neither *fīlmfārsī* nor a clear marker of the new-wave. Instead, *Qaysar*'s ill-fit signals a different kind of disruptive politics fit for an as-yet emergent historical period.

Qaysar's audience was far-reaching.²⁸⁶ But it seemed to appeal in particular to one of the more significant demographics to first support domestically produced commercial cinema (*fīlmfārsī*) — the *hāshīyih nishīn* (literally, those who sit on the margins; more figuratively, urban squatters). Following the Shah's 1963 White Revolution, displaced rural-to-urban migrants gathered in major metropolitan centers. The land reforms of the White Revolution attempted to end feudal social organization by repossessing large tracts of land — often land that was hard to cultivate or unproductive — and redistributing it to peasants. In addition to standard pull factors drawing migrants to economic opportunities in cities, these reforms compelled many peasants to become migrants in search of employment; Iran's "new poor" squatted in temporary homes organized around rural affiliation, while periodically returning to work newly owned land in their villages whenever they could.²⁸⁷ An informal laboring class, these migrants laid provisional roots on the outskirts of cities.²⁸⁸ Their existence was both literally and figuratively on the margins (*hāshīyih*) of Iranian cities.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Daryābandarī argues that *Qaysar* was the first film by an Iranian film-maker to resonate with both elite [*khavās*] and common [*avām*] people. See Qūkāsiyān, *Majmū'ah-i Maqālāt*, 118.

²⁸⁷ Asef Bayat, *Street Politics*, 29-30. One interviewee, who moved to Tehran as a child, shared memories about one hundred families sharing a single bathroom. He noted that families gathered in housing according to rural affiliation, thereby retaining links to their villages. Interview with author, May 2015.

²⁸⁸ This process was notably accelerated after 1966 with the approval of Provision 100 of the Municipality Law, which "authorized demolition of unlawful constructions both within the city limits as well as in the buffer zones ... created around cities." As a result, informal settlements grew on the literal outskirts (i.e. margins) of cities or in enclosed locations within them. See Bayat, *Street Politics*, 25, 41.

²⁸⁹ Bayat makes note of this dynamic in direct contrast to critics of the term "marginality." See *ibid.*, 24-5.

Cinemas were built in large cities at rates that matched rural to urban migration.²⁹⁰ There were different types of theatres that showed different types of films for audiences with different viewing patterns, generally categorized in accordance with social class.²⁹¹ Cleaner cinemas in the affluent neighborhoods of large cities showed foreign-language films from Britain, France, the U.S.A., Russia, and Italy; these films were attended by men and women alike. Cinemas in city centers showed action films, like American Westerns, and were attended by middle and working-class men. Finally, cinemas in poorer neighborhoods and smaller towns showed Iranian, Arab, and Indian films; they were most likely visited by traditional middle class and working-class audiences who would attend as a family. From 1344 [1965-66] onward, the latter began to show almost exclusively domestically produced commercial cinema (called *filmfārsī*). The *hāshīyih nishīn* and members of the urban lower middle class were ardent and avid supporters of these Persian language films; if there was one aesthetic form that “hailed” them both, this was it.²⁹² These patterns eventually changed over the course of the long 1970s in response to the mass importation of commercially successful foreign action films (mostly Hong Kong produced, starring Bruce Lee) and sex films (mostly Italian and Spanish).²⁹³

Qaysar stands out as a crystallization of the various and often-conflicting cinematic styles that came both immediately before and after its release in 1969. Vis-à-vis the domestically

²⁹⁰ The number of migrants between 1345 [1966-7] and 1355 [1976-7] was 78% greater than the number between 1335 [1956-7] and 1345. The number of cinemas built matched the rates of migration, so that throughout the period before the 1979 Revolution there was consistently one cinema per 35,000-40,000 people in the city of Tehran. Ejlāli, “*Ashā ‘ih va Pazīrish-i Sinamā*,” 119-21.

²⁹¹ See *ibid.*, 121-24, 129-32; Naficy, *A Social History, Volume 2*, 155-56, 161-62, 422.

²⁹² Naficy argues that *filmfārsī* interpellated lowbrow audience and highbrow critics alike. See *ibid.*, 152.

²⁹³ Both Ejlāli and Naficy attribute this later development as the cause for the burning of cinemas in the years leading up to the Revolution. Naficy complicates this account, however, by showing that the culprits of the fires in the early months of Revolution are not easily identifiable. See Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 3, 15-22.

produced cinema that preceded it, *Qaysar* may be read as a direct response and challenge to the popular *Qāroun's Treasure* [*Ganj-i Qārūn*, or *Croesus's Treasure*, 1965] and the broader cinematic style (*filmfārsī*) and genre (the “stewpot” or *ab gūshī* genre) it represented.²⁹⁴ The exemplar of the “stewpot” genres — which was a distinctly Iranian version of family melodrama — *Qāroun's Treasure* provided an influential expression of the marginality experienced by Tehran's newly formed and rapidly increasing population of urban squatters. It developed and solidified the convention of displaying character types as opposed to representing individual subjectivity — a convention prevalent in *filmfārsī*.²⁹⁵ Its star, Fardin, “expressed the desires and aspirations of the spectators” who he both represented and served as a spectacle for — a spectacle that assuaged “their worries” about the hardships of everyday life.²⁹⁶

In an echo of Hedāyat's “Buried Alive,” the plot in *Qaroun's Treasure* revolves around an ultimately failed suicide attempt. The film tells the story of a disenchanted wealthy man (Qāroun) who falls into a state of despair. By sheer luck and accident, just as he is about to jump off of a bridge, he is happened upon and saved by his long-abandoned son — Ali (played by Fardin). Ali and his companion not only save Qāroun's physical life; they also restore his spirit for living. Not knowing who or how wealthy he is, they treat him to the simple pleasures of Iran's impoverished masses as if Qāroun were one of their own. The lesson here is clear: wealth does not ensure happiness.

²⁹⁴ The conventions characteristic of *filmfārsī* included artisanal multifunctionality; a predominantly male star system; a proto-avant-garde and distinctly Iranian improvisational poetics; oral narrative and miniature painting roots and influences; and an emphasis on repetition and familiarity, as opposed to originality and innovation. See Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 2, 197-229.

²⁹⁵ Naficy discusses this dynamic when describing similarities between miniature painting and *filmfārsī*. He also attributes the characteristic to the effects of an industrializing period in cinematic production suddenly geared toward mass consumption. See *ibid.*, 228-29, 304, 350.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 206.

It also, moreover, does not ensure virtue; the film intertwines a parallel subplot into the first, affirming the moral character of its lead protagonist and the unity of the nation as a whole. This point is conveyed through romantic relations between Ali and a young woman from a wealthy family named Shirin. At first, Shirin dismisses Ali after he helps her with her car troubles by the road. Unbeknownst to both characters, in an effort to avoid an arranged marriage, Shirin has told her parents that Qāroun's long-lost son (who all of the characters later find out is Ali) has asked for her hand. Ali (not yet identified as Qāroun's son) later plays the part of who he actually is in order to assist her. Shirin ends up falling in love with the real Ali in full awareness of his poverty; all the while, Ali maintains a chivalrous disposition, helping without ever pursuing an ulterior or self-serving motive. The film ends with the restoration of the nuclear family in an enhanced and even stronger form. Ali comes to realize who Qāroun is and, after at first refusing to forgive his father, reconciles his differences with him while winning his ultimate object of desire (Shirin).

Fardin's films and characters presented a "non-political" resolution to potentially explosive social problems. In this sense, *Qāroun's Treasure* imagined harmonious coexistence across class difference. By 1965, those differences were on full display in Iranian cities where urban squatters and the disaffected lower middle class rubbed shoulders with increasingly well-off middle class consumers. In the midst of a Cold War that positioned Iran as a frontline, social disparities were perceived as a political threat by the Pahlavi state. Films like *Qāroun's Treasure* served state ideology by redirecting the source material for imagined and/or organized leftist discontent. For the *hāshīyih nishīn*, the lower middle class, and others who repeatedly went to theaters to watch *Qāroun's Treasure*, identification with Fardin's characters reconciled the impoverished yet culturally rich reality of their everyday lives with the promise of a modern

dream. The prospective realization of that dream — which spoke of wealth and the spoils of modernity without, however, compromising recognition and dignity — was regularly on display in city life yet perpetually deferred in actual experience.²⁹⁷

Qaysar directly inverted this imaginary.²⁹⁸ As such, it marked a break not only from the interpellation suggested by “stewpot” family melodramas, but also the causal logic underlying interpellation in general. Critics’ efforts to read pre-revolutionary cinema and popular culture in terms of interpellation hit an impasse here. In what follows I present *Qaysar* as a new form of interpellation. I then present the shortcomings of this reading in anticipation of my argument in the following section where I consider *Qaysar* beyond the notion of interpellation.

In his depiction of a “hybrid” mode of production in Iran’s industrializing period, film scholar Hamid Naficy categorizes *Qaysar* as the exemplar of *jāhili* films, a sub-genre within the broader “tough-guy” genre. “Tough-guy” films, “the most indigenous of all Iranian film genres,” present a fantasy world inhabited by the *lūtī* and the *lāt*. These figures express “ancient Iranian character ideals.” On the one hand, they were righteous individuals fighting on behalf of the dispossessed in the name of virtue (*lūtīs*) and on the other reactionary groups of thugs acting as political middlemen at the service of competing power elites (*lāts*). Within the “tough-guy” genre, *dāsh mashī* films present an optimistic sense of return to lost ideals where, in a rural setting, *lūtīs* win out over *lāts*. *Jāhili* films offered a more pessimistic rendering of similar dynamics in an urban setting. In these films, despite a hero’s best efforts to abide by *lūtī* virtues, a return to lost ideals is impossible. *Jāhils*, in particular, were popular among the *hāshīyih nishān*

²⁹⁷ In this sense, the reconciliation occurs in form but not in substance. After all, unlike the audiences watching the film, Fardin’s character (Ali) was always in actuality Qāroun’s son (that is, wealthy). See *ibid.*, 235-36.

²⁹⁸ In a context of rising global radicalism, “*Qarun’s Treasure*’s wave conceded its place to *Qaysar*’s wave of uprising-inspired individual revenge.” See Abbas Baharlū and Ghulām Haydarī, *Rūzshumār-i sīnimā-yi Īrān az āghāz tā inqirāz-i Qājāriyah* (Tehran: Matn, 1389/2011) as cited in Ejlālī, “*Ashā’ih va Pazīrish-i Sinamā*,” 131.

in that they reflected a similar displacement of rural customs onto an urban context — or rather, the impossibility of a return to the literal past.²⁹⁹

Qaysar, like *Qāroun's Treasure*, begins with the premise of a family torn apart.³⁰⁰ In this case, however, the circumstances are such that the family can never be put back together again. The promised realization at the end of *Qāroun's Treasure* is immediately foreclosed. At the very beginning of *Qaysar*, an attempted suicide succeeds. Qaysar's sister, Fāti (short for Fātimah), is rushed to a hospital where she dies; we learn from a nurse that Fāti has taken pills to kill herself and has left behind a note describing how a neighborhood tough, Mansour Āq-Mangul, raped her and refused to marry her after she became pregnant. Qaysar's older brother, Farmān, responds to the news by confronting Mansour in front of his two brothers, Karim and Rahim. Farmān attacks Mansour with his bare hands — a gesture that reflects the ancient *lūtī* code — in an effort to take revenge upon his sister's death. The two other Āq-Mangul brothers rescue Mansour, stabbing Farmān and dropping his corpse on a roof where they place a knife in his hand so as to frame the death as yet another suicide.

The Āq-Mangul brothers' actions epitomize *Qaysar's* inversion of the allegory underlying *Qāroun's Treasure* and the related promise of national reconciliation it conveys. Before attacking Mansour, Farmān appeals to his brothers' sense of ethical virtue, asking them to stand with him against Mansour; the brothers choose their allegiance to family instead in a caricatured mockery of the melodramatic ending to *Qāroun's Treasure*.³⁰¹ In the ruins of this

²⁹⁹ Naficy, *A Social History, Volume 2*, 266-69, 278, 281, 294, 305, 310.

³⁰⁰ For an English language summary different from mine, see *ibid.*, 295-301. For a detailed summary interspersed with analyses of *Qaysar* as tragedy, see Pierre Balducchi and Bahrām Shīrāvazhn, *Sang-i Qaysar*, 33-54. For an online copy of the full film, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsMED4BWn68>. Accessed on 5 January 2016.

³⁰¹ According to Naficy, the “best of the *jaheli* movies [which would include *Qaysar*] were the noir versions of the stewpot films.” Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 2, 305.

context — where national reconciliation has been rendered impossible — Qaysar arrives in the city and takes revenge by killing each of the Āq-Mangul brothers individually. The allegory in *Qāroun's Treasure*, where one family symbolizes the nation or the people, is replaced in *Qaysar* by the allegorical figure of an outlaw individual. Here, we find the nation or the people standing over and against both itself (in its depraved manifestations) and the state.³⁰² The film ends with Qaysar surrounded and captured by police in an abandoned railcar after he has killed Mansour with a knife.

Within the film there are two parallel declarations of changing times. The police, as representatives of the state, deliver the first; the second comes from Qaysar. Both declarations occur immediately after Qaysar's first killing (Karim Āq-Mangul). Among the police who arrive on the scene is an officer who states: "I will make this town quiet again. The time for this behavior [literally: these words] has passed [*dīgih dawrih-yi īn harfā guzashtih*]." The statement resonated beyond movie theaters. In 1968, the Pahlavi state increasingly stifled any political action that rested outside of its purview — a *modus operandi* that reached its pinnacle with the creation of a one-party political system. As a result, any and all political opposition was treated as a criminal act. The police in *Qaysar* accordingly conflate the Āq-Mangul brothers' unjust (i.e. criminal) killing of Farmān with Qaysar's just (i.e. politically coded) killing of Karīm. In fact, Qaysar explicitly depicts the state as unable to deliver justice. This suggestion in turn allows the audience to infer that Qaysar's acts of personal revenge perform the state's duties and obligations in the wake of its failures and limitations. By way of indirection, the framing makes the acts political.³⁰³ Moreover, precisely because Qaysar does not adopt an overt ideological agenda in

³⁰² For a discussion of how Qaysar's individuality and isolation are communicated through shot composition, see Balducchi and Shīrāvazhn, *Sang-i Qaysar*, 38, 42-43, 49.

³⁰³ Qukāsiyān, *Majmū'ah-i Maqālāt*, 112.

doing so, his actions resemble the “non-political” activity described as emergent in Chapter 1 — the form of social practice defining political activity in a neoliberal period.³⁰⁴

Qaysar’s own declaration of changing times appears as part of an extended speech in the scene that immediately follows. He arrives at his familial home where his mother and uncle confront him about the news of Karīm’s death. He had earlier stated his intention to kill all three brothers — a direct rejection of his fiancé’s appeal to the delivery of judgment in the afterlife and his mother’s related appeal to trust in the state’s ability to deliver justice. Qaysar is now confronted by his uncle, who appeals to the principles of the *lūtī*, telling Qaysar that his actions are far from *insāf* [a term that may be translated as justice and/or straight-shooting] and *mardānigī* [a term that may be translated as manliness, valor, courage, and/or generosity].

Qaysar responds with a statement that, both in form and content, asserts his radical individualism.³⁰⁵

Much due respect Uncle, but don’t speak of valor [*mardānigī*] because I don’t like that kind of talk one bit. Has anyone shown me the slightest bit of valor [*mardānigī*] for me to give him a ton of it in return? For me, this world has been nothing but deceit and cowardice. To every person I said, “Ok, of course, I’ll back you,” they turned around and stabbed me in the back. Farmān — who could rearrange a neighborhood when somebody even so much as inconvenienced him; who when he drank and let loose a yell, would make walls shake; who could have whatever coward in his vicinity hide in their holes like mice — went on pilgrimage and set it all aside. He started a legal trade and started living off of clean [*hallāl*] money. But they wouldn’t let him be. It’s today’s system. It’s the way of the world, Unc. If you don’t strike first, they’ll hit you. Where’s my brother Farmān? Where’s my Fātī? Fātī, who didn’t bother a living soul. Her joy in this world was her family and her only amusement that radio. May God shine a light on their graves. How many Ramadan nights did brother Farmān and I walk around town and use whatever money he’d made in his business to purchase *saharī* [food eaten before dawn in the month of fasting] for the poor and then give them money for the next day’s *iftār* [food eaten to break one’s fast at dusk]? Now, what’s happened? Three of them, unmannered and ignorant — three of them, unaware of God — sent them to their graves for nothing. I’m going to do this. I too will send them underground. This was only the first one. He fell to my feet — you couldn’t begin to imagine how he pleaded for his life, Mom. His eyes were popping out of his head. I’m going to take care of each and every one of them. You two shouldn’t be upset. You’ve already lived your lives. I’ve got two little problems left in mine. One is that I’ve promised Naneh Mashhadi to take

³⁰⁴ It also, notably, parallels the political activity of the *hāshīyih nishīn*. While avoiding formal politics, the *hāshīyih nishīn* engaged in “individual and quiet” acts of survival that pitted their “autonomy in the practice of everyday life” against the authority of the modern state. Bayat, *Street Politics*, 44-46.

³⁰⁵ Over the course of the speech, we never see the faces of his mother and uncle, even when the place where they are seated is shown. As Balducci and Shīrāvazhn argue, this rendering emphasizes Qaysar’s sense of isolation and individuality. See *Sang-i Qaysar*, 43.

her on a pilgrimage to Mashhad, and the other is to somehow convince Azam to stop loving me. That's all. What do you think would happen, Unc? Do you think anybody would be so much as upset if I died? No, Mom. As soon as the sun sets on that wall [*dīfāl*] three times, as soon as they say the evening call to prayer three times, everyone will forget what we were and what we died for. Just as we have forgotten. In this day and age, no one has the patience anymore for stories.³⁰⁶

Qaysar's declaration of changing times — “In this day and age, no one has the patience anymore for stories” — is more nostalgic and backward-looking than the declaration made by the police. It longs for a past time. And yet it shares in the police officer's resolution and forward-looking orientation. As his uncle suggests, Qaysar's actions do not reflect a return to the temporal past or a restoration of old ways of being. Rather, Qaysar articulates an allegorical break from his family — a separation created in the effort to assert a truer expression of familial affiliation. If we are to understand Qaysar as a direct engagement with and response to *Qāroun's Treasure*, this declaration suggests that genuine national reconciliation can only occur in and through a break from the very values that said national reconciliation must embody.

In part, Qaysar's vision mirrors Pahlavi state ideology. In state ideology, the potential tensions between the replication of foreign-inspired modernization via the West and the celebration of a projected indigenous national identity were reconciled by projecting a future time where the realization of a past ideal would occur through the instrumental use of modern means.³⁰⁷ Qaysar's declaration of changing times similarly projected a departure from a set of principles in action in order to assert and secure those very same principles in principle.

And yet, Qaysar's failures — his ultimate capture and the related devastation of his family — emplot the impossibility of a return to the past, even in projected future time. In this regard, the film's message fundamentally differed from state ideology, which understood a return

³⁰⁶ For a full Persian-language transcript of Qaysar's declaration, see *ibid.*, 43-44. What I have included here is my translation of that transcript. Note the deliberate reference to a shared *jāhilī* idiom with the use of terms such as *dīfāl*, instead of *dīvār*, for “wall.”

³⁰⁷ Ejlāli, “*Ashā'ih va Pazīrish-i Sinamā*,” 118.

to the temporal past as a viable possibility. In fact, a sense of irretrievably lost ideals made the lead personages in *Qaysar* comparable to the *hāshīyih nishīn*. Tough guys were, traditionally speaking, exceptional figures. Their heroism followed from their distinction not only in ethical purity but also, quite literally, in their social position outside of the ordinary. In *Qaysar*, however, the two brothers have each given up the life of the *lūti*. After returning from *hājī*, Farmān is now a butcher, making honest money; Qaysar similarly works an honest job in Abadan (a port city in the south of Iran). The film’s melodramatic mode results from the suggestion, repeated throughout, that the family had done everything right — that even in a situation where one minds one’s own business, social depravity intrudes and prevents the continuation of the ordinary.³⁰⁸ In other words, they are not targeted because of their exceptional qualities as toughs; they are, like their audiences, innocent and ordinary victims.³⁰⁹ Through the communication of this impasse — the film’s defining problematic — the characters appear familiar, paving the way for identification and interpellation. In other words, Farmān and Qaysar live the everyday lives of the newly formed *hāshīyih nishīn*. The latter similarly gave up a lifestyle (in this case, a rural way of life) in response to changing times (the White Revolution) that required them to migrate to cities in order to survive.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Linda Williams makes a distinction between melodrama as genre and a broader melodramatic mode in American cinema. According to Williams, films with increasingly realist settings and complex character depictions can nevertheless continue to sound “emotional and moral registers,” invite “us to feel sympathy for the virtues of beset victims,” and present a narrative that is “ultimately more concerned with a retrieval and staging of innocence than with the psychological causes of motives and actions.” See Williams, “Melodrama Revised,” 42-43.

³⁰⁹ I take this interpretation from Parvīz Davāyī’s “Qaysar: Marsīyī’ī Barāyi Arzish-hāyi Az Dast Raftih” [Qaysar: An Elegy for Lost Values] in Qukāsiyān, *Majmū’ah-’i Maqālāt*, 95.

³¹⁰ Even Qaysar’s transient movement for work resembles the ongoing migratory existence of urban squatters, who moved back and forth between urban jobs (where they worked) and tilling their rural lands (which they continued to understand as home). For a different yet related discussion of these resemblances, see Qukāsiyān, *Majmū’ah-’i Maqālāt*, 117.

In light of this identification, Qaysar's call for changing times may be read as a call for the *hāshīyih nishīn* to adopt a different — and revolutionary — relationship with their political community. As indicated by his refusal to trust in the delivery of justice through civil institutions, the state's efforts to create social harmony were failing to include this dispossessed class. If the times were changing, then the dispossessed too had to change with them. The continuation of traditional (rural) ways of being in a new (urban) context would not suffice. A new — as yet indeterminate — social practice was required.

Yet the reading of *Qaysar* as an interpellation of the *hāshīyih nishīn* as revolutionary subjects — a reading advanced by most film scholars — overlooks a key facet of the revolution: the *hāshīyih nishīn* did not participate in uprisings and demonstrations until *after* February 11, 1979.³¹¹ If we are to abide by the logic of interpellation, the revolutionary message in the film may more accurately be read as an interpellation of middle class intellectuals who sought to speak for the *hāshīyih nishīn*.³¹² But more so than its successes and failures in interpellation, *Qaysar*'s value for an analysis of revolutionary politics lies in its projected break from the logic of interpellation. In other words, instead of constituting an oppositional call to counter the coercive power of the state (“Hey, you!”), *Qaysar* comprised a break in a symbolic order that rested on its ability to tell people to *not* look or to simply “move along.”³¹³ In this regard, the call

³¹¹ Against the notion that the urban poor formed the basis of the revolutionary movement mobilized by Muslim discourses which appealed to their presumably unrefined religious sensibilities, Bayat argues that the *hāshīyih nishīn* were not active in extraordinary moment of revolutionary uprising or actively mobilized by it until its latest stages. They instead engaged in “parallel struggles” — what Bayat calls “the quiet encroachment of the ordinary.” See Bayat, *Street Politics*, 35-58, especially 38-44.

³¹² Along these lines, Nasser Pākdāman's discussion of the 10-nights of poetry readings at the beginning of the revolutionary uprising (a central event for secular middle-class intellectuals) begins with a discussion of the *hāshīyih nishīn*. See Pākdāman, *Dah Shab-i Sh 'ir*, 126. For a more critical discussion of pre-revolutionary public discourse that, even in defense of the *hāshīyih nishīn* depicted them as powerless, see Bayat, *Street Politics*, 32-33.

³¹³ Panagia, “Why Film Matters to Political Theory,” 4.

for new political subjects in *Qaysar* is overshadowed by the film's call for new modes of cinematic expression.

We may discern the difference in these interpretive frameworks with reference to inconsistencies in film scholar Hamid Naficy's prominent account. For Naficy, *Qaysar* is a pivotal step in a teleological process of evolution within domestically produced and consumed Iranian cinema from "tradition" to "modernity."³¹⁴ That process of evolution involved an inversion. Where earlier *filmfārsī* imitated Western (i.e. "modern") content through "traditional" forms, the new-wave presented "traditional" content through the use of "modern" formalistic elements.³¹⁵ In this interpretation, *Qaysar* signaled a "tentative emergence of individuality" that would later come to be realized in the new-wave.³¹⁶ Framed by his reliance on Althusser's theory of ideology, Naficy makes the argument that these increasingly modern expressions of tradition called for and eventually brought about a nativist revolution in 1979.³¹⁷

The articulation of this transition through a "tough-guy" genre was not coincidental. According to Naficy, it reflected a "multipart negotiation" in response to Western-style modernization of the White Revolution. The figurative toughs' values were reasserted in popular and reactionary fashion while the real-life toughs' turned to personal revenge in the absence of their previous power base as political middlemen.³¹⁸ And yet, insofar as this development

³¹⁴ Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 2, 404.

³¹⁵ Naficy defines the Iranian "new-wave" as a "counter-cinema" unified by a commitment to "reality" and "realism" in direct opposition to "the fiction of the official culture of spectacle perpetrated by the government and the commercial cinema." See *ibid.*, 340.

³¹⁶ Naficy singles Kimiāyi's films out as "more sophisticated tough-guy movies" that "endow their dichotomous characters with individual subjectivity, doubt, and choice." See *ibid.*, 278, 348.

³¹⁷ This is a more sophisticated iteration of the same historiographical operation that discredits mass agency by reducing it to the mobilization of Islam discussed in Chapter 2.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 310.

resulted from increased state power and consolidation — reflected, as I argue in Chapter 1, by the Pahlavi state’s actions in parallel with the NIEO — the response to that power may similarly be interpreted as paralleling emergent global social practices oriented against state power. Thus, unlike the Iranian new-wave, which self-consciously signaled a break with *filmfārsī* (including the “tough-guy” genre), *Qaysar* presented a break while repeating commercial cinema’s defining conventions. In other words, where the new-wave (despite its professed opposition to the state) repeated the patterns of state ideology — i.e. a return to a traditional and past way of life through modern means — *Qaysar*’s hybrid qualities suggested a new relationship to the normative order.

To appreciate this difference, a different understanding of modernity, and the relationship between aesthetics and politics therein, is required. Naficy’s conflation of modernity with individualism repeats one of modernity’s own ideological tropes, according to which “tradition” is imagined wholesale as collective. A more precise understanding of modernity requires that we analyze the specific relationships it fosters between the individual and the collective. Modern rights discourse, for instance, imagines the full realization of the individual within the collective in accordance with the narrative structure of a *bildungsroman*.³¹⁹ Along these lines, *Qāroun’s Treasure* — the epitome of “traditional” *filmfarsi* — is in fact a quintessentially modern film: in line with the *bildungsroman*, Ali becomes who he is (as rights-bearing person) through familial (read: national) reconciliation. From this perspective, expressions of traditionalism in a modern era may instead be read as responses to and thus manifestations of modernity.

Qaysar’s declaration of changing times acknowledges this dynamic by virtue of the fact that it rejects an actual return to the past. What does this mean for our interpretation of *Qaysar* as film? If it is not a step in a teleological process from “tradition” to “modernity,” how are we to

³¹⁹ See Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*, 86-95.

read it? How might *Qaysar* — as the hybrid of all hybrids — instead furnish a step from which to discern the emergence of a periodic shift within an already existing and globally shared modern epoch?

III

Qaysar and Narrative Dissensus

The pattern invoked by Qaysar’s declaration of changing times directly recalls the framework of anti-colonial “return” articulated by Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Ali Shari‘ati.³²⁰ Among the Iranian film critics who spoke favorably about *Qaysar* upon its release, these resonances were noted in how uniquely “Iranian” the film was — a quality that at least one critic attributed to the film’s ability to speak to disparate domestic audiences at once about a current, shared condition.³²¹ In film criticism more broadly conceived, the framework of “return” refers to a process Teshome Gabriel coined as “Third Aesthetics.”³²² Unlike the narrative pattern found in classical films produced in the West, “which contains and separates the work from

³²⁰ On this point as well, my interpretation runs counter to the one offered by Naficy, who reads the concept of “return” in Fanon and Shari‘ati as a return to a nativist, authentic, and temporal past. Naficy’s reading is shaped by his reference to Teshome Gabriel’s discussion of Phase II (the remembrance phase) in Third World films (which cites Fanon). See Gabriel, “Towards a critical theory,” 32-33; Naficy, *A Social History, Volume 2*, 303-4, 368, 409-10. This framework leads Naficy to correctly read Kimiāyi’s *Dāsh Ākul* (which echoes a Hedāyat story of the same name) as a call for a return to a lost temporal past and, then, to inconsistently read *Qaysar*, in the face of the impossibility of that temporal/authentic return, as either an expression of despair (quietism) or a call to “mobilize” the “masses” or “the people” in defense of “the Islamic community” (reactionary activism). See *ibid.*, 299-300, 302, 409-10. These inconsistencies may be mitigated by using a different framework. As I see it, *Qaysar* instead indicates a “return” in the sense of *bāzgasht*, which while indebted to Fanon also departs from a strictly Fanonian perspective (see my Chapter 2). On these terms, what Naficy presents as individual “unbridled thuggery,” “vigilantism,” and “chaos” — because of the impossibility of a temporal return — are actually the symptoms of a new configuration of collective resistance, i.e. neo-individualism.

³²¹ See Parvīz Davāyī, “*Balih, ‘Qaysar’ Bi Rāstī Mawjizih Kardih Ast*” [Yes, ‘Qaysar’ Truly Has Performed a Miracle] in Qukāsiyān, *Majmu‘ah-‘i Maqālāt*, 138. From the same volume, see also Davāyī, “Qaysar: Marsiyi‘ī Barāyi Arzish-hāyi Az Dast Raftih,” 97-98; Ali Hamdāni, “*Hamāsīh-yi Qaysar va Sim-i Ākhar*” [Qaysar’s Epic and the Last Straw], 130.

³²² Gabriel, “Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory,” 53-64. Gabriel does not directly cite Fanon in this article. Note that the entire process of production and reception surrounding Third Cinema comprises Third Aesthetics, a point that highlights the concept’s extra-cinematic quality.

everyday life,” Third Cinema does not offer closure within the film itself. Instead, an “extra-cinematic” aesthetic relationship exists from production to reception. In a parallel fashion, where narratives in Western film culture revolve around the comings and goings of an individual hero, Third Cinema — and the reception of that cinema, i.e. Third Aesthetics — focuses on context. Similarly, autobiography is “symbolic autobiography” that presents a collective subject.

In the following section, I consider *Qaysar*’s form on these terms. I argue that, within one and the same film, *Qaysar* presents a transitional movement from Western film culture to Third Aesthetics. The film bears strong echoes of American Westerns. And yet it stretches beyond these conventions to indeterminately “close” as Third Cinema would. The effect of this transition in the same film is the configuration of neo-individualism as collective affect.

As a *jāhili* “tough-guy” film set in an urban-context, *Qaysar* echoes John Cawelti’s category of the “Post-Western” — albeit in a revised and expanded sense.³²³ The American Western famously presents rugged individualism as a national allegory for American exceptionalism.³²⁴ In these films, a marginal figure asserts his individual sovereignty, performing violence contrary to an existing system of law and order in order to ultimately maintain the sovereignty of the existing system in both principle and practice. Cawelti defines the “Post-Western” as de-territorialized iterations (i.e. Italian, Indian, etc.) of the same basic conventions (including the imagined setting of the West); he then separately adds to the category American-

³²³ As noted above, American Westerns — among other types of “action films” — were popular attractions for predominantly male audiences, shown in central Tehran’s movie theaters. See Ejlāli, “*Ashā’ih va Pazīrish-i Sinamā*,” 123-24.

³²⁴ The genre at first justified the violence of its expansionist frontier with an ethical claim to civilization over savagery, casting tales in a romantic register. Once American borders were set, the Western came to represent — and again justify — the nation’s international presence. It did so now, however, in a more tragic register — as the underappreciated savior for foreign peoples in need of American aid (in order to maintain autonomy), yet ungrateful for that aid when it arrived (again, in the name of autonomy). See John Cawelti, *Six-Gun Mystique*, 20, 22-23, 53-54, 95-96.

made treatments of the city as a heroic frontier.³²⁵ We might further add to Cawelti's category a consideration of American films depicting urban crime from the perspective of criminals as well as related de-territorialized iterations of the heroic outlaw living by a code that challenges existing systems of law and order.³²⁶

Elements of American Westerns are replete in *Qaysar*.³²⁷ In particular, its tone of despair resonates with Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (released in the same year).³²⁸ Peckinpah's film employed the conventions of the American Western in order to declare the end of the genre and the world it stood for as national allegory.³²⁹ *Qaysar* similarly depicted its contemporary context as an impossibly fallen state of ideals. Like *The Wild Bunch*, its adoption of American Western conventions was their inversion.

The inversion is most apparent in the portrayal of *Qaysar*'s romantic relationships. In *dāsh mashī* "tough-guy" films, as in American Westerns, chaste women are loved and married while those women who mirror the *lūtī*'s (i.e. cowboy's) independence merely satisfy the hero's fleeting passions. In both cases, these conventions are racialized. In American Westerns, blond women are objects of virtue while brunette and Mexican women are objects of desire. In *dāsh*

³²⁵ Cawelti, *Six-Gun Mystique*, 103, 120.

³²⁶ For an analysis of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* along these lines, see Jonathan Latimer, "The Godfather," 206.

³²⁷ Houshang Kāvousi derides *Qaysar* as a poor copy of *Dodge City*. See Qūkāsiyān, *Majmu'ah-i Maqālāt*, 102. Hamdāni, more accurately, argues that *Qaysar* reiterates the pattern of good versus evil found in American Westerns but in so doing depicts the "system" [*nizām*] as having entirely abandoned the good — unlike the conventional formula found in American Westerns. See *ibid.*, 129.

³²⁸ Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 2, 295.

³²⁹ *The Wild Bunch* carries "the theme of the end of the Wild West to its ultimate completion." See Cawelti, *Six-Gun Mystique*, 94. For a discussion of *The Wild Bunch* as "practicing history" (1914 Mexico) "so that it becomes allegory" (a more accurate historical portrayal of the Vietnam War than *The Deer Hunter*, a film actually set in that war), see William Galperin, "History into Allegory," 165-72. The film is, according to Galperin, a commentary on the dangers of American idealism in the wake of the Vietnam War's failures.

mashti films, a parallel process of racialization occurs vis-à-vis Islam and Arabs. Women with Persian names represent chastity and virtue while women with Muslim and Arab names represent lust.³³⁰ *Qaysar*'s depiction of women inverts these patterns.³³¹ The lead character's sister and his beloved — both of whom are represented as virtuous — bear Arabic and devoutly Muslim names: Fātimah and Azam. The one woman he sleeps with, a cabaret singer associated with the villain Mansour, bears a Persian name: Sohaylā.³³²

However, *Qaysar*'s use of *filmfārsī* conventions was less nostalgic than the *The Wild Bunch*'s parallel use of American Western conventions. *Qaysar* instead signals how commercial cinema prevented the realization of lost ideals.³³³ If we take commercial cinema as a marker of a modern urban condition, *Qaysar* argues for a closed circle where the enactment of urban modernity — a necessary condition of survival — is the further destruction of past ideals. *The Wild Bunch* intimates this dynamic but ultimately stops short of affirming it, instead suggesting that past ideals are not entirely lost but rather may be partially enacted.³³⁴

³³⁰ Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 2, 290. While he notes these naming patterns, Naficy does not attribute them to iterations of American Westerns nor does he interpret the names given to different types of women as a process of Muslim racialization.

³³¹ Ibid., 299. Naficy confuses this point, conflating *Qaysar*'s naming patterns with “the generic formula.” It is not clear if he is referring to the broader “tough-guy” genre or (more accurately) the *jāhili* sub-genre.

³³² Female cabaret singers in *filmfārsī* are rarely depicted like Sohaylā: tired, weary, and bitter. See Balducci and Shīrāvazhn, *Sang-i Qaysar*, 52-53. While the authors note her condition, the translator (Arjmand) notes the significance of the portrayal vis-à-vis *filmfārsī*.

³³³ Davāyī notes that many audiences watching *Qaysar* failed to notice its clever use of standard *filmfārsī* conventions as anything more than a reiteration of the conventions. See Davāyī, “Qaysar: Marsīyī’ī Barāyī Arzish-hāyī Az Dast Raftih,” in Qūkāsiyan, *Majmū’ah-’i Maqālāt*, 96.

³³⁴ Like *Qaysar*, *The Wild Bunch* opposes a previous generation's sense of idealism (which ultimately fails, resulting in suicidal death) against the relativist compromises required for survival in contemporary times. See Galperin, “History into Allegory,” 168-69. And yet in that compromise, the surviving cowboy still has a space — or an open frontier — in which to be a cowboy. As Sikes tells Thornton before they too ride off into a sunset, “It ain’t like it used to be, but it’ll do.” In *Qaysar*, by contrast, the lead character's relativist compromise with modern times is his suicidal mission, leaving no room for conditional survival.

Instead, *Qaysar* more accurately parallels the narrative patterns of a specific kind of post-western: the post-1968 gangster film. As exemplified by Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Godfather: Part II* (1974), this period in gangster cinema alternates between romantic and tragic narrative accounts. An unintended romance, *The Godfather* portrayed Michael Corleone as an object of identification and national allegory for American audiences, who came away feeling a sense of vindication. In the wake of the disastrous failures of the Vietnam War, their identification implied that any act is justified as long as it upholds American values.³³⁵ As overt tragedy, *The Godfather: Part II* challenged this sense of vindication. It directly and deliberately equated Michael's "monstrosity" with the fallen condition of global capitalism; Michael was America and America was the torchbearer of the destruction wrought by a capitalist system.³³⁶ This tragic narrative structure echoes the circular tragedy found in *Qaysar*.³³⁷

These readings, however, do not capture the potential modes of reception available to either post-1968 gangster films or *Qaysar*. The post-1968 gangster film, and its widespread appeal, may be read differently if we move beyond perspectives of dominance (i.e. Michael Corleone as allegory for American global power). As Sohail Daulatzai argues, with the post-1968 gangster figure, the individual outlaw is now cast as an Other in search of upward mobility

³³⁵ Latimer, "The Godfather: Metaphor and Microcosm," 207.

³³⁶ See John Hess, "A Deal Coppola Couldn't Refuse," 99-109. As Hess points out, this depiction differs from Robert Warshow's characterization of the American gangster as tragic hero. For Warshow, the (pre-1968) gangster ultimately fails because of his freakish arrogance (which at first led to his success). In *The Godfather: Part II*, however, we witness destruction wrought by ordinary everyday success itself. See *ibid.*, 106; Warshow, *The Immediate Experience*, 127-33. Nevertheless, the routine nature of devastation in *The Godfather, Part II* — as opposed to the freakish quality of Warshow's tragic heroes — resembles the everyday quality of *Qaysar* and *Farmān* in Kimiāyi's film. The description of this condition as tragic is mine and not Hess's.

³³⁷ Numerous critics have described *Qaysar* as tragic. See Balducchi and Shīrāzhūn, *Sang-i Qaysar*, 44; Qūkāsiyān, *Majmū'ah-i Maqālāt*, 111-12.

— at first ethnic (Italian, Irish) in relation to race as whiteness and later racialized as black and brown.³³⁸ It is true that in the hegemonic framework indexed by the popularity of the American Western, upward mobility meant achieving whiteness, i.e. the “monstrosity” of American racial capital. Yet this did not mean that the ethnic or racial Other depicted shared equal responsibility in attempting to survive by enacting that system’s logic. Rather, in an echo of Fanon’s discussion of decolonial violence, the “monstrosity” enacted by the marginalized (i.e. off-white and, later, non-white gangsters) is a reflection of the only path available to self-determination. Just as settlers in a colonial context never simply concede the comforts accrued through the exploitation of native populations, so too must marginalized populations in the heart of Western civilization (i.e. its urban centers) take what they can, however they can. Thus, from the perspective of the “natives” (i.e. the marginalized populations the gangster represents), the power to enact the violence of Western civilization is the momentary triumph of achieved recognition, subjectivity, and agency.

And yet, just as Fanon was limited by a colonized epistemological framework in his representation of these dynamics, so too are post-1968 gangster films — *as* films — limited in their conception of a liberated order.³³⁹ *Qaysar* offers a different iteration of the same. Like the gangster film, *Qaysar*’s identification with an outlaw is a passive commentary on a broader state of despair — the inescapable “monstrosity” or savagery of a larger social condition (civilization). Also, like the post-1968 gangster, *Qaysar* is *not solely* a tragic figure. He experiences a deep

³³⁸ I am indebted to Sohail Daulatzai for sharing an unpublished draft of an article that considers the figure of the gangster in American cinema and popular culture. Daulatzai’s analysis shows how American films responded to not only the failures of the Vietnam War but also the emergence of the war on crime, white flight, and the “blackening” of urban space following civil rights legislation and the rise of black power.

³³⁹ As I point out in Chapter 2, the tragedy in Fanon’s *Wretched* lies in the disjuncture between the described experience of the native’s liberation (through violence) and the inescapable limitations of the author describing that experience (i.e. the colonized intellectual, or Fanon).

satisfaction in killing each of the three brothers or, in other words, exerting his agency as an individual. By abandoning past ideals as well as conformity with state edicts, Qaysar suffers a loss; he also, however, attains a sense of negative freedom from the restrictions of those ideals and edicts. Yet unlike the American Western and its various “Post-Western” offshoots, including the post-1968 figure of the gangster, *Qaysar* imagines a radical break from existing conceptions of law and order; it instead projects the founding of a new, indeterminate system to-come. In an echo of “Third Aesthetics,” that projection is based on a self-referential portrayal of cinema as a distinct form of open-ended storytelling.

In this sense, unlike Fanon and more like Shari‘ati’s discussion of *shahādat*, *Qaysar*’s depiction of violence as a radical break is expressed through a self-referential depiction of its own process of representation. In an echo of the meta-authorial moment at the end of “Buried Alive,” Kimiāyi’s film is rife with symbolism that compels its audience to consider the medium communicating the message at hand. Most prominently, Qaysar’s statement at the end of the response to his uncle — “In this day and age, no-one has the patience anymore for stories” — is undermined by the non-diegetic fact of the film itself. “In this day and age,” Kimiāyi’s film tells a story that record-breaking audiences patiently took in.

The film uses mirrors to emphasize the amplified effect of cinematic storytelling. In the two scenes in which mirrors prominently appear, Kimiāyi employs representational techniques that make us aware of the story’s form as film. The first of these scenes takes place in the public bath where Qaysar finds and eventually kills Karim Āq-Mangul. Throughout the scene, we literally follow Qaysar’s eyes as he looks around. Eventually, through the use of mirrors attached to a wall, he identifies his victim without being identified in turn. The scene is unlike any other in the rest of the film in that the camera adopts Qaysar’s perspective. As he plots his attack, we

walk with him — a maneuver that slyly equates the audience with Qaysar outside of the bounds of law and order.³⁴⁰

The second concerns the expression of collective emotion. Qaysar returns from a brief pilgrimage to Mashhad to discover that his mother has died.³⁴¹ The news is never verbally communicated to him, but rather through the looks of his mourning family members. At first, they look away when he addresses them. Then, upon seeing his gaze, each begins to uncontrollably sob in a manner that belies their earlier subdued state. It is as if the anticipation of Qaysar's as yet non-existent emotional reaction to the news of his mother's death causes them to feel an even greater well of emotion themselves. In other words, they experience an amplification of affect through mutual observation — one set of eyes looking upon another.

The director's point is made all the more explicit when Qaysar finally receives the news. As he collapses to the floor in a flood of emotion, the camera at first focuses directly on him. It then shifts to focus on his weeping image in a mirror across the room (see Figure 1 below). We might take the shot composition as an invitation to reflect on the broader affective experience of film, i.e. a new form of storytelling “in this day and age.”³⁴² The eyes of an audience are trained on a projection of the images captured by the eye of a camera lens. Through the medium of film, we infinitely look into one another's “eyes” as if in a hall of mirrors — an act that results in an

³⁴⁰ Balducchi and Shīrāvazhn, *Sang-i Qaysar*, 41. The literary equivalent would be a temporary change from third-person to first-person narrative. Writing *Qaysar* as is entirely in first-person would be impossible, considering that the deaths of his sister and brother in the first part of the film occur in his absence. We only begin to follow the lead when he arrives in the city.

³⁴¹ Mashhad houses a shrine for the 8th Shi'a Imam, Rezā. It is the only shrine of an Imam in Iran.

³⁴² This argument builds on an insight made by Parviz Davāyi upon *Qaysar*'s release — that the film is simultaneously both “an epic of defeat” and the beginning of “genuinely Iranian cinema.” See Qūkāsīyān, *Majmū'ah-i Maqālāt*, 93, 97-98.

amplification of shared affect.³⁴³ That act echoes the non-teleological and indeterminate collective belief Charles Kurzman posits as the “cause” of the 1979 Revolution, only now on affective as opposed to strictly cognitive terms.



Figure 1. *Qaysar collapses to the floor in sobs upon “hearing” news of his mother’s death. He is shown through a mirror on the opposite wall, while his fiancée (Azam) stands over him and Azam’s brother (Abbas) and Qaysar’s uncle cover their face as they cry.*

The result of these meta-authorial moments is less a state of nihilistic despair (i.e. no-one has the patience anymore for *any* stories) and more a shift in aesthetic medium for changing times (i.e. no-one has the patience anymore for *those kinds* of stories). In fact, Qaysar’s statement at the end of his earlier monologue is punctuated when his uncle closes the book he was reading: the *Shahnāme* by Ferdowsi, an epic poem central to Iranian national identity in general and particularly evocative of the lost ideals of the *lūtī*. The film accordingly suggests a new form of national storytelling (cinema) and the potential it holds for changing times through audience reception and amplified affect, a pattern that resonates with Third Aesthetics.³⁴⁴

³⁴³ My analysis develops a point initially and provisionally made by Balducchi and Shīrāzihūn. They interpret the prevalence of mirrors throughout the film as suggesting an emphasis on collective, as opposed to individual, subjectivity. See Balducchi and Shīrāvazhn, *Sang-i Qaysar*, 50-52. Instead of choosing between individuality and collectivity, my reading shows how collective formations appear in individualist terms.

³⁴⁴ This reading runs counter to Naficy’s analysis of the film’s political dimensions. With reference to *Qaysar*, Naficy argues that “the problem” with coding social protest as personal revenge was that social protest was then

Yet precisely because the film communicates a transition from American Westerns to Third Aesthetics within itself — or, to use Naficy’s description of domestic conventions, from *filmfārsī* to the Iranian new-wave — it does not rest at its destination (be it, Third Aesthetics or the Iranian new-wave). Rather, by virtue of the movement internal to it, *Qaysar* as a whole configures neo-individualism. This dynamic emerges through an identification between Qaysar’s on-screen individualism and *Qaysar*’s extra-cinematic relationship with its collective audience. To be more precise: if we take the message in *Qaysar* to be the celebration of uninhibited individual agency, a legacy of its affinities with American Westerns, then the film’s use of mirrors suggests the configuration of a collective in individualist terms.

Qaysar’s “suicidal” pursuit of personal revenge, a path taken in full knowledge of the risks involved, ensures the impossibility of complete identification with the protagonist.³⁴⁵ In other words, the audiences watching the film are not “hailed” to identify with Qaysar in a reductive equation. In fact, for *Qaysar* to function as a film encouraging resistance and rebellion, complete identification is impossible precisely because of Qaysar’s inevitable demise. Rather, the film’s ironic commentary on storytelling and its related placement of mirrors — its meta-authorial or non-diegetic moments — suggest an awareness of the distance between the events

seen as “localized rebellions that did not affect the corrupt governing system.” See Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 2, 374. I suggest instead that this coding constructed a new mode of resistance for an emerging historical period — one that required different types of social protest than the traditional ones presumed in Naficy’s assessment.

³⁴⁵ When Qaysar confirms his first killing, his mother says: “So this is my fate — that each of my children will destroy [*niflih*] themselves at their own hands.” See Balducchi and Shīrāvazhn, *Sang-i Qaysar*, 43. Her equation of Qaysar’s impending death at the hands of the state in response to his actions as well as Farmān’s death with Fāti’s suicide is significant. The implication here is that if Qaysar were to not seek revenge, he could avoid death; similarly, if Farmān had either not attacked or even chosen to approach Mansūr with a weapon in hand he too could have avoided death. Again, in a recall of the analytical pattern underlying Linda Williams’ discussion of a melodramatic mode, Qaysar and Farmān’s action-oriented deaths are fundamentally the same as Fāti’s more passive death. All three perform acts that knowingly lead to death; either all three commit a kind of “suicide” or Fāti’s death is not actually suicidal. In this regard, note the mother’s use of the word *niflih*. *Niflih* is a slang term that implies complete annihilation. Its use reflects the film’s *jāhilī* milieu. It also allows for a communication of what appears to be suicide without using or suggesting the term suicide — *khud kushī*, or literally “self-killing.”

taking place on the screen and real-life audiences. If there is any interpellation and identification at all, the collective is to remain a collective — a hall of mirrors, observing their current condition by looking into the eye of the camera as it looks upon the scenes that transpire. It is only in the process of experiencing film that the audience (as collective) forges a strictly partial identification with Qaysar, who for his part acts with uninhibited individual freedom.

There is a potential paradox at the heart of this formulation, the resolution of which facilitates the film's expression of neo-individualism. Qaysar acts in a selfish way, asserting his will in order to counteract a selfish world. Because the assertion of the self occurs in the name of selflessness however, it can only occur without irony if the self is given up entirely. In other words, one must even relinquish the attachment to the individual assertion of selflessness in order for it to succeed. This paradox, like the parallel one found in Hedāyat's "Buried Alive," recalls debates in Sufism regarding the relationship between free will and predestination. The film addresses the potential paradox by showing Qaysar in a process of development that stretches from freely willed and defiant individual action to the gradual acceptance of his fate. The process unfolds vis-à-vis his relationship with his fiancée, Azam.

A detailed examination of that relationship illustrates my point. When Qaysar first declares his intention to take revenge upon the Āq-Mangul brothers, he refuses to concede the exercise of justice to any higher power — be it the promise of the hereafter or the state.³⁴⁶ And yet, by taking justice into his own hands, his assertion of responsibility and ethical virtue

³⁴⁶ Qaysar is shown sitting with his mother, his uncle, and his fiancée, Azam. Azam sets him off by sharing that she had a dream the previous night where Farmān was being fanned by angels in a garden: "This world no longer has loyalty [*vafā*] for anyone ... Those who have left have been released from the suffering [*'azāb*] of being in this world." Qaysar responds to the quietism implicit in Azam's faith by asserting his delivery of justice (i.e. his individual agency): "I have nothing left to do in this world but one thing — actually, three things. To send each and every one of them [the three Aq-Manqul brothers] to that other world where they may fulfill their desires as angels fan them." To this his mother responds by asking Qaysar to place his faith in yet another higher power — the state — insisting that the government [*dawlat*] will catch and punish the brothers. Qaysar rejects this option as well.

[*mardānigī*] is simultaneously the abdication of responsibility and ethical virtue — i.e. leaving Azam alone after having publically promised her his hand in marriage, leaving her in a position where she may never be able to marry. In order to mitigate this tension, Qaysar repeatedly insists that he is acting out of his own control in his conversations with Azam. This qualification only becomes convincing, however, in light of Qaysar’s eventual reluctance to carry through his quest for personal revenge. Before his third and final killing, Qaysar tells Azam that he will turn himself in the next day. In the scene that immediately follows, a young man selling fortunes approaches Qaysar. After some initial hesitation, he accepts the young man’s offer, selects a fortune from the stack, and reads it with a wry smile. (The audience does not see what it says.) Qaysar then proceeds to plan and execute Mansour’s death. In these final scenes, his earlier self-assured and defiant attitude gives way to reluctance and, finally, resignation. In a pattern that recalls the protagonist in “Buried Alive,” the assertion of selflessness through defiant individual action is not the product of individual will but rather of an accepted fate. It marks the full annihilation of the individual before his actual death.

The effects of this dynamic are two-fold. On the one hand, it asserts a broader emergent state of affairs defined by individuality. In accepting his fate, what Qaysar submits to is not a higher order, the state, or superstition (all of which he overtly rejects throughout the film) but rather the changing ethos of his times (which he overtly acknowledges as resting outside of his control). As he points out to his uncle in his extended monologue, Qaysar too is part of those changing times. An absolute assertion of individual agency (or free will) would show Qaysar acting against the changing tide; he would not kill, but rather hold on to and enact the anachronistic ideals of a previous generation (his uncle’s) against what his time requires and dictates. Instead, his assertion of individuality — in acting against the existing system of law and

order — is actually an assertion of conformity to a new historical period defined by individualism and action — one that reneges on the lost ideals of his uncle (by striking before others hit you first). Like the post-1968 gangster figure, Qaysar reiterates the “civilized” (but, in truth, savage) order while operating at odds with it (as “savage”).

At the same time, as a result of its self-reflective and non-diegetic commentaries on aesthetics, the now entirely selfless individual (Qaysar) is configured as an empty signifier for its collective audiences. In other words, the effect of the above process — Qaysar giving himself over to changing times defined by individualism — is the annihilation of his individuality in substance. This gesture is affirmed by his presumed and impending death in the film’s closing scene. Building on the model of reflexive storytelling in “Buried Alive,” this annihilation does not amount to the annihilation of Qaysar’s actions. Rather, as cinematic form (a hall of mirrors), Qaysar’s defiant brand of individualism sets a template for the collective to follow *as a collective*. The audience is not simply one with Qaysar; it is encouraged to act as he does without losing its distinct character. When rendered an empty signifier, the portrait of a radical individual (Qaysar) may function as the operative mechanism of collective action. In this sense, *Qaysar* — more so than any of the new-wave films that adopted an explicitly political and collective posture of defiance — was the aesthetic model of an already occurring neoliberal revolution in Iran. The outline for non-teleological, or indeterminate, collective action may be found therein.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁷ My interpretation draws from and brings together recent developments in political theory concerning the analysis of film. Arguments have been made for the democratic and anti-democratic qualities of film — arguments that draw on the aesthetic qualities of particular films as films. See Panagia, “Why Film Matters to Political Theory,” 2-25; Dienstag, “*Blade Runner*’s Humanism,” 101-19. These arguments set a framework in which we may understand political life in light of the effects produced by the cinematic experience in general. A different, albeit complimentary, approach employs an analysis of narratives found in popular cinema as one component in a larger effort to identify and critique a contemporary political discursive formation. See Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*. In my analysis of *Qaysar*, I am suggesting a synthesis of both approaches. A particular type of political discourse may be identified in the film’s story (i.e. neo-individualism). At the same time, we may identify the ways in which the

From 1968 onward, as Third World state power grew exponentially, official political discourse in Iran increasingly revolved around the person of the Shah. In *Qaysar*, the same kind of individualism appears apart from the state. It is no small coincidence that the lead character's name is Caesar — a veiled reference to the Shah if there ever was one. Yet just as its lead character does not act at direct odds with the state — but rather does so indirectly, as a kind of replacement for the state in the void left by its failure to deliver justice — the film's depiction was not solely a matter of opposition (i.e. resistance to power). It was instead a kind of “non-political” political resistance that simultaneously reproduced the state's broader logic. By virtue of appearing as personal revenge, the assertion of individuality in *Qaysar* was never a direct threat to state power; instead, it operated outside of the economy of state action/reaction. In addition to the lack of homogeneity and limited reach of censors at the time, this dynamic explains why, despite its coding as a marker of dissent, *Qaysar* was openly shown and seen upon its release.

Despite its bombast and outright rejection of the Pahlavi state, Golesorkhi's act of individual defiance similarly echoed (and reproduced) the logic of individualism found in official Pahlavi state discourse. What Gulisurkhi's defense made visible was a different way of invoking that individualism. In his refusal to speak as an individual before the court, Golesorkhi — like the protagonist in “Buried Alive” and the lead character in *Qaysar* — annihilates any pretension to individuality. Yet, again in parallel with each of those texts, the act itself ironically asserts his individuality as “free will.” There is no hint of compromise to be found in Golesurkhī's performance; his defense is through and through an act of individual defiance. The refusal to

cinematic experience of the film facilitate the emergence of that particular discursive formation with reference to the film's own non-diegetic, or meta-authorial, reflections on cinema as a distinct form of storytelling.

speak speaks the reiteration of the individual “free will” in and through the willed and willing annihilation of the individual.

In this regard, Golesorkhi’s performance broke with an existing spectacular regime, making visible that which had no part in the police order through individual defiance. In response to increased transnational guerrilla warfare by Iranian dissidents, the Pahlavi state organized televised recantations and show trials that communicated little of substance. The programs’ message lay in the performance of the recantations: a projection of omnipresent state power and influence.³⁴⁸ According to Lisa Wedeen, these demonstrative displays buttress the power of noncharismatic authoritarian regimes through low-cost mechanisms that orient individual social practice; the repetition of state-sanctioned rhetoric (no matter how absurd) guarantees safe passage, all the while reproducing the state-effect through disciplined social practice.³⁴⁹ By showing no sign of recantation in a live television broadcast, Golesorkhi made visible to mass audiences a breach within the state’s symbolic order. In fact, the act itself constituted a breach. If, following Wedeen, we interpret SAVAK’s show trials as organizing mass social practices by providing clues as to how one was supposed to act in order to avoid trouble, then Golesorkhi’s performance — operating in response to that symbolic economy — provided cues for mass action in defiance of the state. In short, the performance made explicit what *Qaysar* suggested implicitly with regards to collective action cast in individualist terms.

³⁴⁸ See Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 2, 407-8.

³⁴⁹ See fn269 above.

CHAPTER 4 | AUTO-EMPATHY

One of the more telling historical accidents of the Iranian Revolution took place on 10 December 1978. Since 1948, the date has signaled (for some) International Human Rights day — a symbolic gesture meant to commemorate the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1978, the same date on the Gregorian solar calendar corresponded with the 9th and 10th of Muharram on the Islamic lunar calendar — days that are more commonly referred to as Tāsu‘ā and Ashura. In the Shi‘a tradition of Islam, Tāsu‘ā and Ashura are the two days marking the attack upon and death of the third Imam, Husayn, and his companions in Karbala — the tradition’s paradigmatic story of individual sacrifice and communal survival, referred to as *shahādat*.

In revolutionary Iran, where confusion often took precedence over cohesion, 1978’s calendrical coincidence was accompanied by a related accidental convergence between activist factions separately mobilizing against the Pahlavi regime. From at least one month before, the *Jimā’at-i Difā az Azādi va Hūqūq Bashār* (The Society for the Defense of Freedom and Human Rights, hereafter the Society) — a group that had officially proclaimed its existence in an open letter to then UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim one year earlier, on 10 December 1977 — decided to organize its first public demonstration.³⁵⁰ The demonstration would involve a march in Tehran accompanied by the families of Iranian political prisoners. The group again chose the anniversary of the UDHR for the occasion.

³⁵⁰ All historical references to the genesis of this Society and the events recounted in this introductory section are based on Abdolkarim Lāhiji, in discussion with the author, Paris, France, July 2015. For separate brief histories of the organization, see Milani, *The Making of Iran’s Islamic Revolution*, 189; *The Iranian Bulletins*, vi.

In overlooking the calendrical coincidence, the Society had turned a blind eye to a recently constructed repertoire of resistance — almost as new as the Society itself. On 20-21 December 1977, Islamist activists organized demonstrations on Tāsu‘ā and Ashura around the country, “turning the annual religious processions ... into political demonstrations.”³⁵¹ Indeed, beginning just a few weeks before and continuing over the course of 1978, Iran witnessed a series of protests that drew upon the mourning practices associated with Tāsu‘ā and ‘Ashura in a creative fashion meant to orient public demonstrations of political resistance. Mourning commemorations routinely held forty days after a death became the temporal marker for the next series of demonstrations, in effect rekeying state repression as a pretext for continued unrest. In 1978, Tāsu‘ā and ‘Ashura signaled opportunities for political protest that could not be overlooked.

The accidental convergence set off disputes between activists — disputes that were ultimately negotiated through the intervention of Ayatollah Mahmoud Tāleqāni.³⁵² Tāleqāni, himself a long-time political prisoner and a leading figure for both the clerical and the nationalist opposition, had been released just a week after the Society’s decision to hold their demonstration. Through his intervention, a conversation began where activists from the Society and from among oppositional clerics sat together to reach a coordinated settlement so that both parties could participate in a single demonstration on Tāsu‘ā. The only slogan they agreed upon for 10 December would be “Free All Political Prisoners,” leaving the organization of the demonstration on Ashura (the 11th of December) to oppositional clerics and their allies in the

³⁵¹ For a discussion of both December 1977 protests, see Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 28-30.

³⁵² Tāleqāni had a long history of working as a mediator across political factions both before and after this event. For a discussion of his efforts to foster a sense of belonging among political prisoners during his two tenures in Qasr prison, see Khalili, “Az Mānīfist Tā Zindān,” 100. For a biographical sketch and an overview of Tāleqāni’s political thought, see Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 216-72.

bazaar.³⁵³ The compromise was reflected in the language of Tāleqāni’s statement calling for the demonstration:

At 9 in the morning on the day of Sunday (Tāsu‘ā), which coincides with the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I, the undersigned, with intent, knowledge, and consciousness of all facets and requirements pertaining to the matter, will begin this demonstration from my home.³⁵⁴

Was this negotiated settlement an instance of democratic pluralism at work, of solidarity across deep difference? If so, the basis for solidarity seems rather thin. Rather than work together on both days, for instance, the Society was begrudgingly given its day before what appears to have been an inevitable Islamic Revolution continued on its course. Was the negotiated settlement, then, simply a momentary and strategic compromise between irreconcilable parties? That reading seems an overstatement as well. There were, after all, other emerging factions within the opposition — most notably, the various leftist groups — who were absent, suggesting that there were more irreconcilable positions than those present in the room.³⁵⁵

Instead, a different and more profound sense of solidarity may be discerned despite continued acrimony. We would do well to consider the broader implications of what at first

³⁵³ Lāhiji was a founder of the Society as well as its spokesperson. In his account of events, he visited Tāleqāni upon his release from prison — not for the purposes of coordinating the protest but rather as a sign of friendship. The two had developed a relationship in prison in the early 1960s. Tāleqāni brought the coincidence between International Human Rights Day and Tāsu‘ā to Lāhiji’s attention. A five-person commission was formed within which a debate ensued over which chants and slogans would be encouraged and allowed on the day of. The committee included Lāhiji (representing various human rights based coalitions), Ezatullāh Sahābi (representing the opposition’s political class), Asgarolādi (representing bazaar merchants), Hāshemi Rafsanjāni and Musavi Ardebili (both of whom represented the oppositional clerical class). In the meeting, Lāhiji insisted on maintaining 10 December as a commemoration of human rights with only one chant: “Free All Political Prisoners.”

³⁵⁴ Reprinted in *Hambastigī*, n. 2, 16 Āzar 1357 [7 December 1978], 1. A separate declaration was issued by Ayatollah Soudouqi, calling for a demonstration against the regime on Ashura. It explicitly referenced the continuous theme of mourning in previous protests. See *ibid.*, 4. Later reportage of the events in the domestic press cite foreign media as estimating 1 million participants on Tāsu‘ā and 2 million on Ashura. Demonstrations on Tāsu‘ā are said to have occurred without any slogans chanted whatsoever whereas on Ashura an abundance of political slogans were chanted. See “*Rāhpaymā ‘ī-yi buzurg*” [“Large Demonstrations”] in *Sipīd u Sīāh*, no. 1091 (29 Āzar 1357/20 December 1978): 5.

³⁵⁵ A single slogan was chosen at the exclusion of others. In this sense, the event signaled a negation of pluralism by two sets of revolutionary factions: the Islamists and the liberals.

appears to be a simple calendrical convergence in the effort to appreciate the ease with which Tāleqāni referenced both in his call for a public march. What were the ideational overlaps between what would only later become distinct and overtly opposed political factions? How did configurations of a collective revolutionary subject over the course of Iran's uprising make this accidental convergence possible, less accidental? To be precise, what was shared between the discourse of human rights, manifest in the call to free all political prisoners, and the concurrent discourse of *shahādat* organizing the innovative efforts of Islamist activists at the time?

This chapter responds to these questions through a consideration of activist discourse in the years leading up to and including the revolution's first uprisings from Fall 1977 until August 1978. While I consider the influence of various iterations of activist discourse (including the leftists absent from the 10 December 1978 negotiations), I focus primarily on the two predominant discursive registers at this stage in events: those associated with pro-Khomeini Islamists and the liberal opposition.³⁵⁶ In the immediate context of Iran's revolutionary history, this first stage of protests was distinct in that it involved uprisings and unrest primarily through activist efforts.³⁵⁷ Despite attempts to configure one unified "people" in the exact image of

³⁵⁶ In this respect, my argument follows Kurzman's point — that Iran's vast "disorganized" leftists were primarily based in universities and ultimately unable to forge a connection with the population at large. See Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 148-50. For anecdotal confirmation of this point, see Ghamari, *Remembering Akbar*, 81-99. In the end, however, the analysis presented here is not interested in accounts of who led whom. For instance, where Kurzman suggests a clerical leadership ultimately in charge from beginning to end, Misagh Parsa refutes ideological explanations of the revolution by pointing to non-Islamist "major actors" (students, intellectuals, bazaaris) that he argues led the clerics. See Parsa, "Ideology and Political Action," 54-5, 57. By way of contrast, this chapter considers the production of unintended rhetorical effects on a mass-scale. In this respect, of the "major actors" Parsa discusses, leftist student discourse did not connect with the population at large as effectively when the uprising took hold, even if leftist student activists played a prominent role in organizing protest activity beforehand. My analysis of the liberal opposition does, however, include the discourse of intellectuals and bazaaris.

³⁵⁷ In their schematization of the revolutionary uprising's "proximate causes and events," Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi present a distinction between Stage 1 — which lasted from June to December 1977 — and Stage 2 — which lasted from January until August 1978. The distinction is based on the widening of the activist coalition, from the intelligentsia to clerics and the bazaar; a corresponding increase in their number; the spread of unrest to the provinces; and a spike in intensity and violence. See Ashraf and Banuazizi, "The State, Classes and Modes of Mobilization," 4-9. Despite these important differences, both of these stages were marked by activist mobilization as

activists — an identification predicated on shared suffering — the discursive resources deployed allowed for a dis-identification within the collective. That dis-identification involved a “non-political” politics of empathy, what I call auto-empathy.

Lynn Hunt offers a compelling formulation of the affective dimensions underlying modern human rights, situating empathy as central to their “invention.” To do so, Hunt adapts Benedict Anderson’s explanation for the rise of nationalism. Where Anderson focuses on the mechanics of the novel — how the reading of books put geographically distant peoples in contact with one another — Hunt focuses on the novel’s content.³⁵⁸ She accordingly advances a notion of “imagined empathy.” Aesthetics (in particular, the epistolary novel) fostered the rise of modern human rights by cultivating empathy for an unfamiliar, yet universally self-possessed and autonomous, individual.³⁵⁹

The development of revolutionary politics in Iran both affirms and, in an innovative manner, defies Hunt’s characterization of the affective content of human rights. While Hunt is concerned with the effects of discursive formations across distinct political and cultural units (e.g. states), the Iranian case demonstrates the varied manner in which similar discursive patterns can unfold within a single imagined community, geographically dispersed across the globe. In addition to a self-possessed and autonomous individual body as the subject of empathy, the most

opposed to mass participation. In the effort to focus on activist discourse, I treat the two stages as a single unit. This same focus leads me to reframe the beginnings of the stage with the incidence of demonstrations (which happened as early as October 1977) as opposed to changes in state policy such as political liberalization and less embodied forms of protest such as the distribution of public letters in protest (which began in June of that year).

³⁵⁸ Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, 32. Glenda Sluga refers to this mode of reading as an instance of nationalist metaphors extrapolated onto an emerging international domain. See Sluga, *Internationalism*, 9.

³⁵⁹ For Hunt, human rights depend both on “self-possession” (or individual autonomy) and “the recognition that all others are equally self-possessed” (or empathy). Her model of “imagined empathy” relies on our ability to take “a leap of faith” in imaging that somebody else is similarly autonomous and thus someone we can emotionally relate to. See Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, 29-32.

important accounts of individual rights abuse produced for a global Persian-language speaking audience presented a collective subject as body politic. The logic of neo-individualism played a crucial role in this revision. When describing transgressions against individuals, post-1968 Iranian oppositional discourse situated the Iranian *millat* [“nation” or “people”] front and center.³⁶⁰ If the audience experienced empathy, they were to hurt for this collective formation; an imagined national community became the subject of “imagined empathy.” Thus, where in Chapter 2 I presented Shari‘ati’s discussion of the self as a move beyond Fanon’s emphasis on the primacy of the body, this chapter follows a parallel move with regards to human rights discourse.

The notion that imagined empathy for a suffering “people” would inspire revolutionary action is nothing new. In a similar vein, melodramatic revolutionary discourse posits the suffering people as the primary subject of social transformation in a moral opposition between good and pure victims wronged by unjust villains. An activist or intellectual vanguard facilitates “the people’s” emergence as they march onto the stage of history in a teleological fashion.³⁶¹

The specifics of Iran’s historical moment and related cultural constructs, however, produced a distinct phenomenon. Self-determination (then in descent) and individual human rights (then in ascent) converged through the language of *shahādat*. The result was a dynamic

³⁶⁰ While many might translate the term *millat* as “nation,” the word contains an ambiguity that extends beyond nationalism per se to signify “a people.” I have chosen to retain this ambiguity in my translations.

³⁶¹ For a schematic account of revolutionary melodrama based on potential readings of *The Communist Manifesto*, see Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 211-16. Anker outlines how the manifesto may be read as melodrama “by molding historical relations into stark binaries, detailing the unjust suffering of the proletariat, promising the triumph of heroism, highlighting the righteousness of the oppressed, and employing all of these tropes with the aim to affectively motivate its reader into revolutionary action” (211). Yet, as she notes, by situating agency and responsibility for revolutionary change in the open-ended actions of the oppressed themselves (thereby defying teleology) and by understanding the content of revolutionary change as indeterminate (as opposed to a return to the nostalgic past) the manifesto also defies melodramatic conventions (221-22).

relationship between three protagonists — the people, an activist vanguard, and, most uniquely, an internal witness — that defied the teleology implicit in left melodrama.³⁶² An activist vanguard represented itself in a position of suffering that mirrored the suffering of the people, an identification that echoed the unity between the *shahīd* and the Muslim community in Shari‘ati’s discussion of *shahādat*. Like Shari‘ati’s portrait of Husayn, the figure of the activist disappeared as physical or embodied individual and instead reappeared as a vessel for the collective. Despite their efforts to interpellate the *millat* by equating the people’s suffering with the political prisoner and/or the *shahīd*, these renderings unintentionally left an opening for a third subject position: that of witness, the domestic human rights observer, or, quite simply, a part of the revolutionary mass as Zaynab. I refer to this dynamic — the interactive relationship between various segments of “the people” in Iran’s project revolutionary subject — as auto-empathy.

Section I identifies an approach to reading the history of the revolution where attention to the formative role played by its cultural constructs compliments an appreciation of the event’s processual quality. In so doing, we may recuperate the discourse of *shahādat* as an interpretive tool for understanding revolutionary action without reducing our analysis to cultural determinism, particularly when and where that revolutionary action is presented in terms of suffering. Section II rewrites the history of the *chihilum* (fortieth-day mourning practices) as instruments of political action. Identifying the origins of the practice in 1968 with the death of popular wrestler Gholāmrezā Takhti allows for an appreciation of “non-political” politics. Section III traces the evolution of activist discourse from 1968 into the revolutionary uprising, demonstrating how discourses of human rights and *shahādat* converged to form an identification

³⁶² For Anker, “left melodrama” is an expression of melancholic loss and attachment with regards to the promise of *The Communist Manifesto*. Disavowed loss leads to an incorporation of the manifesto’s melodramatic tropes without the manifesto’s open-ended and forward-looking ethos precisely because an attachment to the manifesto is itself nostalgic. What results is the reification of the manifesto as teleology. See *ibid.*, 209, 216-21.

between the activist and the people as a single suffering subject. Yet the nature of this melodramatic rendering, its peculiar deployment of human rights and *shahādat*, called for a witness to the suffering from within the community itself. Section IV examines the content of “non-political” politics in mourning practices-turned-demonstrations as a posture of bearing witness to suffering. As I suggest here, despite activist intentions, a third subject emerged on these terms. That subject went on to comprise the revolutionary mass in the uprising’s pivotal final stage from August 1978 until February 1979.

I

A Revolution’s Own Laws

The history of a revolution, like every other history, ought first of all to tell what happened and how. That, however, is little enough. From the very telling it ought to become clear why it happened thus and not otherwise. Events can neither be regarded as a series of adventures, nor strung on the thread of a preconceived moral. They must obey their own laws. The discovery of these laws is the author’s task.

- Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*³⁶³

The attempt to write the history of revolutionary social transformation must reckon with the challenge of conforming assumptions gleaned from descriptions of causality in ordinary time to the unpredictable twists of an extraordinary moment. Yet due to its exceptional and extraordinary status, discussing revolutionary time occasions a skeptical perspective vis-à-vis causal logic developed through the assessment of the ordinary. To write the history of revolutionary change requires that we attend to the experience of the moment — that we decipher the laws of the event as those laws are being made by the event itself.

Across the previous two chapters, I presented a link between the post-1968 logic of sacrifice as *shahādat*, best exemplified by Shari‘ati’s influential speeches as well as various non-

³⁶³ Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, xv.

Islamist expressions of neo-individualism. The latter rendered collective justice claims in terms of individualism through the paradoxical assertion of an imagined uninhibited individuality. The question remains as to whether or not this shared form reappears in the early stages of the revolutionary uprising and, more importantly, whether or not it provides a convincing reflection of those events as they occurred.

There is reason to imagine that it does. Beginning with the death in exile of Ayatollah Khomeini's son, Mostafā, on 23 October 1977, mourning practices were used to express political opposition, fueled by a rumor that the Shah's secret police had committed an act of murder.³⁶⁴ Within a matter of months, the reiteration of this practice cascaded into a revolution. *Chihilum* — non-political commemorations held in Iranian national culture and Shi'a Islam forty days after a death — constituted a prominent “contentious repertoire.”³⁶⁵ On 2 December 1977, a couple of commemorations on the fortieth-day of Mustafa Khomeini's death turned into explicitly political demonstrations organized by Islamist activists.³⁶⁶ Then, on 9 January 1978, when Qom protests in response to the defamation of Ayatollah Khomeini in a leading national periodical provoked violent repression, a series of fortieth-day mourning commemorations-turned-protest ensued. At each stage, the killing of protesters occasioned yet another fortieth day commemoration/protest.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁴ While the Tehran bazaar had begun to mobilize in March and July of that year, first in support of striking students and then to denounce the state's recent price-control policies, this event uniquely brought together leading members from diverse viewpoints. See Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, 109. And yet, only a handful of ceremonies seem to have been held at the time.

³⁶⁵ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly compare these instances of “innovative contention,” which normally occur at the beginning of social movements, to jazz performance. They involve slight alterations to existing “habitual practice.” See *Dynamics of Contention*, 48-50, 137-41.

³⁶⁶ Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 28-29.

³⁶⁷ The cycle began in Qom on 9 January 1978 and came to an end on 17 June 1978. It involved protests and deaths due to state repression in a number of provincial cities including Qom (9 January, 6-11 May), Tabriz (18 February),

And yet, there is equal reason to distrust the notion that cultural factors like these determined the logic of the Revolution's various uprisings. At its worst, this interpretive gesture risks attributing a univocal, timeless, and causal quality to shared Muslim practice and belief. Or, perhaps all the more dangerous because it involves an added layer of nuance, it has been suggested that Islamist activists and intellectuals created a distinct revolutionary culture that gave "new political meaning" to existing "rituals of penitence" thereby "masterfully reappropriat[ing]" them for the purposes of later "establishing an Islamist government."³⁶⁸ Here, cultural practices are understood in the way of ideology, as empty vessels crafty and manipulative elite actors fill with significance unbeknownst to popular masses; deluded by false consciousness, those masses follow the echoes of familiar forms without registering changes in hidden content.

We may read Charles Kurzman's assessment of an "unthinkable revolution" against both kinds of culturalist interpretation.³⁶⁹ Relying on an important intervention in Middle East studies — the ascription of rationality and pragmatism to masses of people who are otherwise all-too readily depicted as irrational³⁷⁰ — Kurzman presents an "anti-explanation" for why the event occurred when it did. According to Kurzman, the identification of a collective sensibility or

and Yazd (28-31 March). See Ashraf and Banuazizi, "The State, Classes, and Modes of Mobilization," 7-9; Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 50.

³⁶⁸ See Afary, "Shi'i Narratives of Karbalâ," 9.

³⁶⁹ For an argument against the recourse to martyrdom and sacrifice in particular, see Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 70-71.

³⁷⁰ In the case of the Iranian Revolution, Ervand Abrahamian similarly argues for an understanding of the Iranian revolutionary mass as a "crowd" (in the sense suggested by E.P. Thompson) and not a "mob." As a "crowd," the revolutionary masses were both self-organized (i.e. not manipulated by elites) and well-organized (i.e. disciplined). See Abrahamian, "The Crowd in the Iranian Revolution," 13-38.

“belief” regarding the “viability” of a mass-based revolutionary movement is, by virtue of the fact that it assesses belief, impossible to retroactively predict.

Kurzman’s argument is worth considering in detail on this point. When arguing against cultural explanations for why the revolution occurred — that is, the idea that mass uprising happened because a people’s sensibility as Shi‘a Muslims had been offended — he posits an irreconcilable tension between structural explanations of culture and culture as construction. Where the former understands culture as a static entity, one that seemingly moves us as its passive recipients, the latter understands culture to be dynamic and hence changed by the course of events it informs. Kurzman adopts an attenuated version of cultural construction in his account of events. On the one hand, the revolutionary movement pragmatically “constructed its own culture,” “shaping Iranian culture as much as the culture was shaping it.”³⁷¹ On the other, pragmatic survival instincts informed actions that contravened the revolution’s own cultural constructions.³⁷² In the end, pragmatism (defined as rational collective behavior) determines who we are and what we do. These determinations, notably, are indeterminate.³⁷³

But is pragmatism an inherent disposition? How do we become pragmatic? Is it the same across time and place? Is it unchangeable? Is it, in short, the only language available for the effort to describe historically-situated experience in the world? For his part, Kurzman’s account

³⁷¹ Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 55-58, 64.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 72-76.

³⁷³ Against structural explanations as well as a tendency in social movement literature to shun scholarship about collective behavior, Kurzman argues that individuals decided to participate in the revolution after “calculating the costs and prospects of protest,” and deciding that it would be safe to do so in the immediate moment and in the terms of an emerging power structure. See *ibid.*, 125-62, especially 131. In a similar vein, Behrooz Moazami adopts an “anti-culturalist” position — what is, in effect, a critique of culture as structure — by demonstrating the politicization of Khomeini’s claim to leadership over the course of the revolution. Without using the terms “pragmatism” or “cultural construction,” Moazami’s analysis echoes Kurzman’s. See Moazami, *State, Religion, and Revolution*, 117-34. For pragmatism in the development of Khomeini’s political thought, see the discussion in Chapter 2 of this dissertation regarding Ghamari-Tabrizi, “The Divine, the People, and the *Faqih*.”

separates pragmatism from cultural construction. Pragmatism is either that which compels cultural construction (as one among a series of possible strategic options) or that which marks the limits of its application. On the one hand, Kurzman's embrace of pragmatism further advances our understanding of Iran's revolutionary experience as arbitrary and indeterminate by positing an unpredictable limit to what even its "own laws" (its own cultural constructions) might determine. In so doing, however, the account assumes a universally pragmatic disposition that threatens to contravene the logic of arbitrariness and indeterminacy underlying cultural construction. Lost in the failure to reconcile the indeterminate quality of cultural construction and the indeterminate quality of pragmatism is a consideration of the kinds of cultural constructions that foster and further encourage a pragmatic sensibility.

Challenging the line that Kurzman draws between cultural construction and pragmatism risks ceding important normative grounds. In his account, pragmatism trades as a marker of universalism and common humanity — a necessary political position in a world where violence often functions through perceived dehumanization derived from the presumption of cultural difference. In other words, presenting Iran's revolutionary actors as essentially pragmatic — as engaged in rational action directed toward self-preservation and survival — amounts to undermining dangerously reductive efforts to depict culture as a determining feature of revolutionary practice. And yet, our universal categories come from particular cultures too. They, too, are artificial and constructed — albeit with reference to a system of symbols that have connotations and instrumental implications. To what extent, then, does the assumption of pragmatic rational action oriented toward self-preservation on behalf of all political actors preclude our ability to appreciate the revolutionary event's "own laws" mentioned in the epigraph above? How might we retain the critical spirit animating Kurzman's separation by

complimenting his analysis of pragmatism as shaping cultural construction with a related analysis of cultural construction shaping pragmatic action? In the sections that follow, I consider the particular cultural construction of Iranian oppositional politics post-1968 as fostering, cultivating, and encouraging pragmatic action.

II

The “Non-Political” Politics of Fortieth-Day Commemorations

In post-1968 Iran, an engagement with traditionally and symbolically non-political practice — practices that simultaneously signaled the reproduction of and resistance to the state — became necessary as the window for overt political opposition had almost entirely shut. What happens when all politics in the public sphere must traffic in terms of the “non-political”? Can the appeal to “non-political” politics, even if forged with pragmatic and instrumental intent, exceed the parameters of a universally inscribed pragmatism understood as natural to all? Do different types of pragmatic and strategic action differ in their consequences?

The response to these questions requires a reassessment of the archive. In his account, Kurzman points to 1963 as the first effort to organize against state repression on the fortieth day after its occurrence. His account is based on a flyer from an anonymous group referring to itself as the “Council of United Muslims” that called for a general strike on the fortieth-day (*chihilum*) of the 15 Khordād [5 June] uprising. Kurzman’s reading, if correct, reasserts historiographies of a distinctly Islamic Revolution that began in 1963. As he points out, the flyer draws its reader’s attention to the proximity between the *chihilum* of the 15th of Khordād uprising and the *chihilum* of that year’s Ashura, imbuing the potential strike with the religious significance of ‘*arba’ayn*’ (fortieth-day in Arabic, only used in Persian to refer to the fortieth-day commemorations of

Imam Husayn's death).³⁷⁴ Kurzman moves from this call to Mostafā Khomeini's fortieth-day commemoration in 1977, a rendering that allows for a pivotal argumentative distinction. From 1977 onwards, the cultural construct of fortieth-day commemorations-turned-protest — practices said to have been developed in the moment of the event itself — took on an active posture of public demonstration. By contrast, 1963's call for a general strike offered a tactic of withdrawal. The identification of pragmatism within the revolutionary uprising is made on the basis of this opposition. Two culturally constructed strategies were available for Islamist activists to navigate events as they unfolded. When need be, in response to the perceived risk of state repression, resistance took on either an active or a passive cast in the form of either political demonstrations or general strikes.

There are three features of this reading, however, that should raise our suspicion. First, as Kurzman himself notes, the 1963 call was not for a public demonstration of protest but rather a general strike, meaning that significant revisions to the practice had to occur in 1977. While this points to the constructed nature of revolutionary culture, it also suggests a rather tenuous link between 1963 and 1977-78. Second, no actual mobilization — even in the form of a general strike — occurred on the fortieth day after the uprising.³⁷⁵ As a result, it is difficult to assume the flyer had much of an effect on the development of later contentious repertoires. Third, and most

³⁷⁴ Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 54-55. The 1963 flyer referenced by Kurzman notably uses the term “*chihilum*” despite its gestures toward the event's religious significance. See Ali Davani, *Nihzat-i Ruhānīyūn*, 153-54.

³⁷⁵ The fortieth day after the uprising would have been 25 Tir 1342 [15 July 1963]. The flyer from the “Council of United Muslims” identifies the fortieth day as 23 Tir [13 July]. In either case, no significant protest action is reported until 31 Tir [21 July]. On 29 Tir [19 July], all of the clerics who were imprisoned after the uprising were released except for Ayatollahs Khomeini, Qomi, and Mahalāti. The protests that occurred in Tehran, Shiraz, and other provincial cities two days later are reported to have occurred against their continued imprisonment. See ‘Aqīlī, *Rūzshumār-i Tārīkh-i Īrān*, 159. In Aqīlī's account, there is no mention of even these protests occurring in terms of fortieth-day ceremonies, much less of the general strike called for by the “Council of United Muslims.” I am grateful to Nasser Mohajer for bringing this point to my attention.

important of all, December 1977 was not the first instance where the practice of fortieth-day commemorations was used to mark political demonstrations. An almost identical pattern occurred in 1968 when the popular wrestler Gholāmrezā Takhti passed away. This event is the first instance on record of a direct effort to mobilize a political demonstration on a *chihilum* (and not just in the vicinity of one) as well as the first actual and effective mobilization on these terms.

Takhti was born and raised in Khāni-Ābād — a poor neighborhood in the south of Tehran “notorious as a den of brigands and braggards.”³⁷⁶ He later went on to win four gold and six silver medals in international wrestling meets, including the Olympics. His death, ruled a suicide by state-controlled media at the time,³⁷⁷ incited rumors that he had been killed by the Shah’s secret police — much akin to the rumors surrounding the death of Mostafā Khomeini in the Fall of 1977.³⁷⁸ Takhti’s body was found on 18 Dey 1346 [8 January 1968] in the Atlantic Hotel in central Tehran. A number of commemorations ensued, including various seventh-day processions on 23 Dey 1346 [13 January 1968] as well as a large fortieth-day gathering at Ibn Bābviyeh (where Takhti was buried) on 26 Bahman 1346 [15 February 1968] primarily organized by university students.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁶ The turn of phrase is from Milani, *Eminent Persians*, vol. 2, 1070. Milani, however, writes this phrase about Nāzi Ābād, an area that is near Khāni Ābād but distinct from it, suggesting that Takhti was raised in the former. For other biographical sketches of Takhti that describe his childhood home as Khāni Ābād, see Chehabi, “Sports and Politics in Iran,” 51; Ja’farīān, *Takhtī*, 11; Safarī, *Hamasi-yi Jahān Pahlavān Takhtī*, 7. I have chosen to take Milani’s reference to Nāzi-Ābād as a typographical error.

³⁷⁷ For a poster from the time period that reproduces this story, see Appendix A.

³⁷⁸ For a discussion of the rumors surrounding Takhti’s death, see Milani, *Eminent Persians*, vol. 2, 1073; Chehabi, “Sports and Politics,” 55-56. In addition to Morteżā Khomeini and Takhti, Al-e Ahmad, Samad Behrangī, and Shari’ati were also rumored to have been killed by SAVAK. On the circumstances and rumors surrounding their deaths, see Hansen, “The ‘Westoxification’ of Iran,” 3, 20-1n12. On Behrangī in particular, see Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 45.

³⁷⁹ For accounts of these events, with reference to documentation from SAVAK, see Fātimī Nivīsī, *Zindigī va Marg*, 141-98. Per the genre of historical books published in post-revolutionary Iran, Fātimi Nevisi’s text contains an

Indeed, Takhti's death presented an opportunity for emerging groups of radical leftist university students. Some of these students had recently participated in Tehran University's student strikes. A number of them were leaders of networks that would go on to constitute Iran's guerrilla movement in the 1970s. At the time, they were searching for a chance to express and advertise their political views.³⁸⁰ As a result, fortieth-day commemorations for Takhti became the first iteration of a cultural construct that would later organize Islamist activism in the revolutionary uprising from Fall 1977 until Fall 1978: the enactment of a mourning ceremony on explicitly political terms. Chants on Takhti's fortieth-day included celebratory references to former leaders of Iran's communist (Tudeh) party, Taqi Arāni and Khosrow Rouzbeh, both of whom had been political prisoners; the Viet Cong; and political prisoners in Greece. Later in the same protests, activists from among the bazaar merchants added chants praising Khomeini, "the idol crusher," to the chorus.³⁸¹

Attempts to turn the protests into a site of overt political confrontation, however, were ultimately partial. Numerous attendees of Takhti's fortieth were demonstrably taken aback by the "communist chants," expressing fear for what the chants could mean for their personal safety the

extended appendix of primary documents organized around their appearance in the text's narrative account. At times, the references to documents made in his prose do not match the pagination in his appendix. At other times, Fātemi Nevisi does not refer to important parts of documents in the appendix. When and where I have cited observations made by the book's author, I have included the author's reference to the relevant documents as well. When and where I have cited observations not made in the book's prose, I have simply cited the relevant document number. When and where Fātemi Nevisi has not cited a document, I only cite the page number to his prose.

³⁸⁰ One group of leftist students organizing a protest for Takhti's seventh-day commemoration was infiltrated, taped, and imprisoned. Among others, the group included Masoud Ahmadzādeh, a founding figure of the OIPFG. See *ibid.*, 178-9, documents 124-26. The "Palestine Group" as well as the group led by Bizhan Jazani and Hasan Zia'-Zarifi, arrested shortly after in February 1968, were also involved. See Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 43-46. An internal SAVAK report, said to have been produced by a functionary named Nourizādeh, notes that the main student groups behind these efforts were the same groups behind the student strike at Tehran University in 1967. See Fātimī Nivīsī, *Zindigī va Marg*, 181-82 (no documents available).

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, document 60.

day after; the chants were reported as not having caught on.³⁸² If the event had been planned as an act of overt political defiance, why was there fear? Why did “communist chants” not catch on? Why was there not a similar fear about simply participating in the event?

To respond to these questions — or, what is the same, to account for variation within the crowd — we must consider points of incoherence over the forty days after Takhti’s death. Perhaps the most significant non-political call for attendance at a commemorative event came from “the youth of Khāni Ābād,” the neighborhood Takhti called home. The poster read as follows:

With the utmost grief, we express our condolences to the entirety of the Iranian people [*bi ūmūm-i millat-i Īrān*], in particular its athletes. On the eve of the deceased’s seventh, a gathering will assemble on Saturday 23 Dey 1346 in Ibn Bābviyeh.

Regret for Takhti, that valiant hero
Who became in life wretched and gloomy

He put an end to his life and passed away
With his death, all became tearful and distressed

Brought he from the fields of wrestling
Silver medals on behalf of the country

The eyes of our people [*khalq*] lit up
From the stature of the great champion

Those from Khāni Ābād in particular
Wear garments of mourning in grief

God give patience to his family
Forgive him beside the descendants of Haydar [*āl-i haydar*]

Associate him with the descendants of Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)
With thy mercy, living arbiter

We collectively ask of you, O God
To turn a blind eye for him on the day of judgment³⁸³

³⁸² Ibid., 194, document 60.

³⁸³ For an original copy of this poster accompanied by translation, see Appendix B.

The poem on this poster is notable for its characterization of Takhti's death as a suicide. By extension, the request that God turn a blind eye for Takhti on the day of judgment may be read as a request to pardon his suicide, a sin in Islam. Despite acknowledging suicide, the poster nevertheless asserted that mourning activities would proceed on the seventh and asked God to associate Takhti with the descendants of the Prophet (i.e. the Shi'a Imams).

Political activists could not abide these inconsistencies. Those who accepted official media accounts of the death as suicide simply withdrew from the opportunity to organize around it.³⁸⁴ Younger and more radical university students, by contrast, adopted a version of “the work of mourning.” “The work of mourning” may be understood to involve melancholic disavowal — in other words, the inescapable and insurmountable inevitability of loss — as the condition of possibility for mourning to occur.³⁸⁵ In this case, however, melancholic disavowal was more a matter of denial and less a matter of accepting inevitable loss in subject formation. In order for the commemorations to have political content, the death had to be a site of injury. Denial, or disavowal, of Takhti's suicide was a necessary condition for mourning to occur.

That “the youth of Khāni Ābād” appeared to accept the suicide as fact presented organizers with a dilemma. The effort to navigate this dilemma is apparent in the speeches given

³⁸⁴ SAVAK documents report Dāriush Forouhar as saying: “We are hopefully looking to the dead in search of an opportune moment to organize mourning.” Forouhar is reported to have considered Takhti's death to be a suicide and thus not opportune for the protests he had in mind. See Fatimī Nivīsī, *Zindigī va Marg*, 146, document 77. Similarly, the Liberation Movement (with the notable exception of Ayatollah Taleqani) understood Takhti as having committed suicide; labelling him an infidel or heretic (*kāfir*), they refrained from participating in the commemorations. See *ibid.*, 143, document 2.

³⁸⁵ “The work of mourning” first appears as a phrase in Sigmund Freud's “Mourning and Melancholia.” See Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, 163. Freud later reassessed his earlier position. See Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 23-25. In light of his reassessment, Judith Butler discusses “the identification with lost loves characteristic of melancholia” as “the precondition for the work of mourning.” See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 79. Similarly, for Jacques Derrida, “the work of mourning” is work or artifice in general; by extension, our presence — any presence — is always predicated on loss. See Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 121, 166.

by representatives from the university at Ibn Bābviyeh on the seventh-day commemoration. A representative from the students was quoted as saying: “We do not know if they killed Takhti directly or indirectly, but we agree with all of the people in saying that Takhti was martyred as a champion in the pursuit of freedom... Takhti did not die. He lives on in the hearts of each and every individual Iranian.”³⁸⁶ A university professor, speaking on the same occasion, echoed the point:

Takhti could not live in this country, a country that cultivates the unmanly [*nā-mard parvar*], a country that kills men [*mardkush*]. Takhti was no house cat, going to any available spread of food in search of a bite. He was a lion. He could not abide being reduced to a house cat by his environment. Takhti was killed because he was from the front for truth [*jibha-yi haq*]. Sirs, do you know who killed Takhti? The unmanly, the cowards [*nā-mardān*] killed him. In my view, Takhti committed two sins. First, he was Iranian by birth. Second, he was free. He was part of the front for truth [*jibha-yi haq*] and we have the right [*haq*] today to be as disturbed [*nā-rāhat*] as we are for him.³⁸⁷

According to this speech, Takhti’s “suicide” was not of his own doing. It was not an act of will, but rather the effect of broader structural circumstances for which those in attendance were collectively responsible.

The speeches in Takhti’s seventh-day commemoration recall “the work of mourning” on different terms. In his 1917 essay, “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud describes “the work of mourning” as a process of reality testing.³⁸⁸ Mourning is the response to “the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (243). Melancholia derives from identical exciting causes, although Freud specifies that its causal circumstances “extend for the most part beyond the clear case of a loss by death” (251). This distinction is pivotal. The “clear case of a loss by death” allows Freud to understand mourning as a process of overcoming, of letting go and moving on, facilitated by

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 173, document 119. For a first-hand account, further confirming this dilemma among student activists, see Abdī, *Junbish-i Dānishjū’ī*, 139-40.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 158, document 98.

³⁸⁸ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*.

the experience of a reality in future time where the lost object of love no longer exists. By contrast, the initial refusal to let go of deep libidinal attachments continues to haunt the melancholic. Whereas in mourning the world becomes “poor and empty,” in melancholia “it is the ego itself” (246). Thus, melancholia in response to grief amounts to blaming oneself for the loss at hand as a way to refuse accepting it.

Yet where Freud understands melancholia as an individualized condition of withdrawal, the collective rendering of self-blame in the seventh-day commemorations imagines a different social order. The same society could “cultivate” different — more “manly” and virtuous — subjects, thereby preventing the loss from occurring in the first place. This is a different kind of melancholic disavowal. In ordinary conditions, where reality appears given and unchangeable, melancholic disavowal (the individual refusal or inability to accept a death for what it is) appears pathological. In extraordinary conditions, however, the same refusal (if and when made as a collective) acts as a call to change one’s reality — as a call to revolution.

Following this event, rumors suggesting that Takhti did not commit suicide spread at such an alarming rate one SAVAK report regretted the state’s policy of not giving the event more media coverage.³⁸⁹ Had the reasoning of political activists, or at least the idea that Takhti had been “indirectly” killed, caught on? Perhaps. But we would be equally justified to posit that popular discourse about Takhti facilitated the spread of rumor — that people believed in these rumors because they accorded with popular belief about Takhti in general. Long before his death,

³⁸⁹ See Fatimī Nivīsī, *Zindigī va Marg*, 181, document 132. Security officials were particularly disturbed by military conscripts who, on the day of their conscription on 1 Bahman 1346 [21 January 1968], held a protest where they chanted in Takhti’s memory. See *ibid.*, 180, document 131. For an account of a SAVAK agent conceding the power of the rumor, see Abdī, *Junbish-i Dānishjū* 7, 144.

Takhti's popularity was predicated on rumors about his moral exemplarity.³⁹⁰ According to the logic of Takhti's legend, the notion that he committed suicide — an action that contravened Islamic edict — could not readily register as truth.³⁹¹

The logic of legend manifest in the spread of these rumors cohered with a distinct feature of sacrifice as *shahādat*. In contrast to the emphasis on fact in positivist science, the truths that mattered for Shari'ati were the truths people believed in their "hearts." This kind of truth differed from the truth sought out by the political activists discussed above. In commemorating Takhti, these activists attempted to expose the regime for what it actually was — to uncover scientific truth. The logic of legend also differed from the truth, or reality, of Freudian disavowal — where melancholic belief functions as a kind of false consciousness. Instead, what was operative here was a different order of "truth." While it cohered with the immediate objectives of the political activists — denying suicide and thus increasing the number of commemorations-turned-protest — it did so without adopting their logic. These rumors, like Takhti's legend, had a life of their own.

³⁹⁰ Chehabi, "Sports and Politics," 48, 54. Much of Takhti's popularity, based on both fact and often exaggerated popular lore, referred to his actions of principle and virtue against the temptations of fame and wealth. With reference to this appeal, Milani attributes Takhti's popularity to echoes of tropes from classical Persian letters. See Milani, *Eminent Persians*, vol. 2, 1069. But this attribution overlooks the historically situated quality of cultural life in the contemporary moment. A more dynamic reading of the same can be found in Adelpah's discussion of Takhti in line with a variable yet consistent ethic of *jāvānmardī* in Iranian culture. See *Being Modern in Iran*, 4, 142-43. We may just as readily interpret Takhti, who dies on the cusp of 1968, as the living embodiment of the ethic animating popular cultural production from 1968 onwards — what I called in the previous chapter neo-individualism. As myth, Takhti represented principled individual defiance to the point of individual detriment on behalf of a collective who stands both within and without a community.

³⁹¹ My analysis here follows Shahid Amin's example. Amin considers the spread of rumors about Mahatma Gandhi in the Gorakhpur countryside in 1921-1922, demonstrating how rumors caught on "because they accorded with existing beliefs about marvels and miracles, about right and wrong." See Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma," 309-11, 335.

This order of belief later played a pivotal role in the revolutionary uprising.³⁹² On 19 August 1978, a fire was set to the Rex Cinema in the port city of Abadan, killing hundreds of people inside. The arson was rumored to have been the act of SAVAK when later evidence suggests it was done by a radicalized faction among the Islamist opposition.³⁹³ Regardless of what the facts are, at the time they paled in the face of rumor. At a moment when the mobilization of uprisings in terms of fortieth-day ceremonies mourning the deaths of those killed in previous demonstrations had seemed to be exhausted and run its course, this event sparked a new series of now mass demonstrations, protest activity, and general strikes. Shortly thereafter, on 4 September 1978 or Ayd-e Fitr (that year's celebration of the end of Ramadan), the first of the revolution's mass actions occurred.³⁹⁴ Unlike the beliefs that animate Kurzman's discussion of "viability" (rationally inspired beliefs predicated on assessing whether or not others will demonstrate as a way to ensure one's safety), the belief that the Pahlavi regime had set the fire cohered with cultural constructs about who was (oppositional activists) and who was not (the Shah) virtuous — just as the spread of rumors in 1968 cohered with preexisting beliefs about the legend of Takhti.

Positing Takhti's death as the first iteration of public demonstrations on a fortieth-day begets a further point about the revolutionary uprising. At the time of, the "personnel and workers at the Pirouz institute of printing and publishing" produced a poster that spoke to

³⁹² Abrahamian, in particular, makes a case for taking rumor seriously in understanding the unfolding of the revolutionary uprising from 1977-79. See Abrahamian, "The Crowd in the Iranian Revolution," 17.

³⁹³ For a detailed account of the events as the work of a radicalized faction among the Islamist opposition, see Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 3, 1-4.

³⁹⁴ For an analysis of these processions as disciplined and organized from the bottom-up, see Abrahamian, "The Crowd in the Iranian Revolution," 21-23. Abrahamian's account also includes a list of the procession's (predominantly mocking) chants.

Takhti's moral exemplarity without any reference to the circumstances of his death or an instrumental call to engage in commemorative protests.³⁹⁵ From this perspective, the simple act of commemorating Takhti was a distinct kind of politics beyond the purview of activist machinations — a “non-political” politics responsive to openings provided by the state.

Relative state silence about the death of an individual who was, by all accounts, the most popular national athlete of his time could send a chilling message.³⁹⁶ Takhti had been an ardent and principled supporter of the National Front. While he had not taken an oppositional stance in the 1950s, he had clashed with the Pahlavi state throughout the 1960s.³⁹⁷ The state's choice to not rise above political differences when faced with an incident they themselves officially pronounced as non-political (i.e. a suicide), in addition to general distrust in the state, created ripe grounds for rumor to spread — that a *pahlavān* [champion] of Takhti's legendary stature would never take his own life willingly but rather must have been killed in some shape or form. These factors also created an opportunity for simple commemorative acts — “non-political” events — to function as indirect signals of opposition. On the one hand, some reports recount an atmosphere of fear, where people were scared to so much as mention Takhti's name.³⁹⁸ On the other, the proliferation of commemorative events across the country suggests that the spread of rumors was accompanied by the spread of “non-political” action. To cite the university professor

³⁹⁵ For an original copy of this poster accompanied by translation, see Appendix C.

³⁹⁶ For a SAVAK report that laments state silence as contributing to the spread of rumor, see Fatimī Nivīsī, *Zindigī va Marg*, 182, document 54.

³⁹⁷ Chehabi, “Sports and Politics,” 53-55. At least part of Takhti's popularity was predicated on a posture of principled individual defiance to his own detriment — a posture exemplified by his support for the National Front in the early 1960s. The act led to him being ostracized by the state, which in turn caused further financial hardship. See Milani, *Eminent Persians*, vol. 2, 1072.

³⁹⁸ Fātīmī Nivīsī, *Zindigī va Marg*, 190-91, document 140. This point is made in order to account for the relative lack of participation in Takhti's commemorations by those who had organized the 1963 uprising.

quoted above, the people simply exercised their “right” [*haq*] to be “as disturbed” as they were for Takhti.

The state further fanned these flames by wavering in its response. Alongside its relatively quiet treatment of the subject in the media and the related fear in some circles of consequences that might ensue from even speaking Takhti’s name, military officials are on record as having worked with protest organizers to regulate speech at commemorative events. If true, this means the state implicitly permitted the event’s occurrence. Even if not, the perception that it could have been true facilitated the emergence of “non-political” politics as rhetoric. In the seventh-day ceremony at Ibn Bābviyeh, one speaker praised Takhti’s support for the Shah. An organizer suddenly cut the amplified sound from his microphone. In response to the speaker’s protestations, the organizer justified what he had done in light of a promise made to state officials: there would be no “politics” at the event. Allowing a speech in praise of the Shah could lead to politically-charged protests from certain elements in the crowd, placing the event at risk.³⁹⁹ While it remains unclear as to whether the organizer’s actions were motivated by a genuine effort to comply with an actual general’s military edict or instead represented a cleverly-cloaked effort to block speech about Takhti’s earlier career as a darling of the state, the rhetoric of “non-politics” spoke loud and clear. One could speak as long as the quality of speech delivered was “non-political.” This message provided an ambiguous opportunity — an *irresolutely* ambiguous opportunity — to express political opposition without clearly presenting oneself as political. In this spirit, the very fact of holding commemorative events, even and especially those organized without overt political intent, could function at once as both resistance to the state as well as the reproduction of its logic.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 172-3, document 81.

This same pattern of activity — of both reproduction and resistance through the rhetoric of “non-politics” — defined mass participation as activists fought out the first year of revolutionary uprisings (i.e. from the Fall of 1977 to late Summer 1978). In the winter of 1976, the Pahlavi state attempted to coopt Muharram practices, running a nine-part special supplement to the daily periodical *Kayhān* regarding the life story and *shahādat* Imam Husayn.⁴⁰⁰ The series may have been an effort to preempt further religiously-inclined protest activity before it could occur — a response to recent unrest at the Fayiyeh seminary in Qom. Looking back, the series backfired. The state clearly failed to capture or subsume the popular appeal of religious symbols. Instead, once reimagined, mourning rituals like Muharram provided further occasion for the initial uprisings against the Shah. By the time *Kayhān* ran a similar series profiling the life story of Ali over the course of Ramadan in the late summer of 1978, religious discourse had already spiraled out of its control.⁴⁰¹

What, if anything, did the initial series accomplish? Right alongside it, human rights reforms made at the behest of the Carter administration led to inconsistent and temporary (yet nevertheless marked) gestures of political liberalization. Much has been written about political liberalization as a “proximate cause” of revolutionary activity.⁴⁰² Following Kurzman’s

⁴⁰⁰ The first issue in the series indicates that eight others will follow. See Sādiq Jalīlī, “Īn Khūn-i Pāk...: Zindigī u Shahādat-i Husayn” [“This Pure Blood...: The Life and *Shahādat* of Husayn”] in *Kayhān*, Special Supplement, no. 10047, 1 Dey 2535/22 December 1976. See Appendix D for a reproduction of its first page accompanied by translation.

⁴⁰¹ See *Kayhān*, Special Supplement, n. 10532 – 10548, 15 Mordād 2537/6 August 1978 – 2 Shahrivar 2537/24 August 1978.

⁴⁰² For instance, Ashraf and Banuazizi understand liberalization as presenting an opportunity for the opposition to “test the limits of the regime’s vulnerability and its own mobilizational capacity.” See “The State, Classes and Modes of Mobilization,” 5. For other representative examples referencing the “Carterite breeze” as “political opportunity structure” see Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 496-510; Hossein Bashiriyeh, *The State and Revolution*, 104-7; Milani, *The Making of Iran’s Islamic Revolution*, 179-90. For a critique of the Tocquevillian assumptions underlying analysis of both state structure and “political opportunity structure,” see Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 15-17.

suggestion about cultural construction, however, an analysis of “non-political” politics is less interested in the causes of revolutionary mobilization (proximate or otherwise) and more interested in how the process of its unfolding shaped what it became. In this regard, state signals about political liberalization and human rights may be read for strategies of indeterminately *both* reproducing *and* resisting the state — or, to put the matter differently, ways of enacting resistance that are nevertheless safe. Emphasizing the indeterminacy between reproduction and resistance, we may read these events beyond a causal logic; there is nothing about them that guarantees a particular outcome.

Instead, these practices signaled permitted behavior to the population at large. In authoritarian contexts where a protected space for open political dissent does not exist, sanctioned rhetorical practices allow for modes of resistance that also ambivalently reproduce state power.⁴⁰³ In other words, when and where direct political opposition was clearly not permitted, Muharram practices and the assertion of human rights could be read as resources for “non-political” politics without revolutionary intent. The following sections consider, first, how radical activists attempted to make the “non-political” overtly and explicitly political and, then, how despite these efforts a “non-political” politics remained throughout — and even grew as a result of — the revolution’s moment of configuration.

III

Husyan, or the Uprising’s Political Subjects

We’re revolutionaries, my friend. Suffering made us.
Suffering *for* the people is what we chose because we
sympathized so much *with* their suffering.

I know all this, I said.
- Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ See my discussion of Lisa Wedeen’s *Ambiguities of Domination* in fn269 above.

⁴⁰⁴ Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 337.

The following section considers the evolution of a strand in activist discourse from 1968 into the revolutionary uprising. Specifically, it traces the instrumental role played by the convergence of human rights discourse and references to *shahādat* in a gradual identification between the figure of a suffering activist and the figure of a suffering “people.” By virtue of this identification on these particular terms, activist discourse — or configurations — allowed for mass-based “non-political” politics: first, in a position of solidarity with riskier activist-based uprisings and, then, in the revolution’s later stages of widespread general strikes and popular demonstrations.

Activist literature post-1968 developed a long-standing theme in oppositional propaganda. For decades, political prisoners delivered searing critiques of the state through refutations of their trials before military tribunals, critiques that would be distributed on occasion by fellow activists beyond prison walls. The list included lengthy statements by communist leaders Taqī Arāni and Khosrow Rouzbeh as well as nationalists Mohammad Mossadeq and Mehdi Bazargan. “Defenses” or “last defenses” [*mudāfi’āt* or *ākharīn mudāfi’āt*] involved an extended monologue — a sort of accounting of the self. Each of these accounts invariably articulated a disjuncture between the existing legal framework of state sovereignty and other forms of political community. They also provided demonstrative examples of defiance — of the ways one could and should craft the self in opposition to the state.

Generally speaking, there were two strains of statements given by political prisoners during the Pahlavi era. The first strain (“defenses”) envisioned forms of political community that better implemented the principles underlying the existing political order — that is, the correct implementation of constitutional monarchy as it emerged in the written laws and founding spirit of the 1905-11 Constitutional Revolution and related supplemental legislation passed since. A

second strain (“last defenses”) posited other forms of political community that no longer referenced, much less affirmed, the existing constitutional system. These were delivered, much akin to Socrates’ remarks in Plato’s *Apology*, in anticipation of impending death at the hands of the state.⁴⁰⁵ Beginning in 1937 when Arāni delivered the first known “defense” in an Iranian criminal court, different types of defenses were given at different points in time depending on variations in context. In moments of extreme state repression, defenses tended to be “last defenses.” Dāneshiān and Golesorkhi’s televised comments, discussed in the previous chapter, reflect this latter strain.

The increasing number of “last defenses” delivered after 1968 were distinct in that they replaced the political prisoner as an individual deserving defense within the existing constitutional configuration of the state with a projected configuration of political community as the, now, primary subject of rights.⁴⁰⁶ Put differently, the effect of human rights doctrine-turned-discourse shaped the quality of post-1968 “last defenses.” To return to the discussion of human rights in Chapter 1: As *doctrine*, human rights sought to incorporate the individual into social conventions — in particular, the modern state — where she could properly appear as a rights-

⁴⁰⁵ In her insightful analysis, situated in light of televised recantations and show trials as public spectacle, Nikpour identifies two categories of guerrilla prison memoirs: “internal-tutelary” (for fellow political activists) and “external-political” (for propaganda purposes). See Nikpour, *Prison Days*, 166-90. My discussion of the defenses echoes and, I hope, adds to her theoretical framework. As a different genre of activist literature produced behind prison walls, aspects of “defenses” and “last defenses” served both “internal-tutelary” and “external-political” purposes. Generally speaking, “defenses” may be read as “internal-tutelary” texts advocating reform within an existing constitutional system. “Last defenses” may be read as “external-political” texts, using the platform provided by the tribunal to articulate an entirely different basis for political community (i.e. as an opportunity for political propaganda). The lines between “defense” and “last defense” and “internal-tutelary” and “external-political,” however, are not sharp and firm. I point to variation below.

⁴⁰⁶ Even Khosrow Rouzbeh’s “last defense,” which assumed the inevitability of a death sentence and thus openly declared its opposition to existing constitutional law, nevertheless insisted on the right to defense within the framework of that law. Rouzbeh reasoned that if constitutional law was so valuable as to accuse him of threatening to undermine it with a trial, then those laws should be implemented in the enactment of the trial for the accused. See *Khosrow Ruzbeh dar Dādghāh-i Nizāmī*, 10-11.

bearing entity. The notion of “personality” underlying human rights *doctrine* suggests that existing political communities and social conventions would ultimately furnish the conditions in which the individual could become who or what it is.⁴⁰⁷ In practice, however, human rights *doctrine* only gained global relevance when human rights *discourse* rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. This produced a paradox insofar as the proliferation of human rights *discourse* involved a challenge to the guaranteed, or sovereign, autonomy of the nation-state. The shift from *doctrine* to *discourse* marked a shift from “personality” to “individuality.” Along these lines, the rise of human rights *discourse* ostensibly circumvented states (and thus, state obstructionism) by imagining empathy across borders; it adopted publicity instead of law as its primary instrument of battle against violations.

In Pahlavi Iran, when and where foreign human rights observers were present, the efforts of Iranian political prisoners paralleled their sensibilities. Depending on circumstances, these appeals reflected the shifting logic of human rights as either *doctrine* or *discourse*. In the first instance, prisoners appealed to a shared state of injustice through rational and legalistic argumentation. This is most dramatically exemplified by the fact that, despite the concomitant rise in radical political activism and guerrilla warfare, the last prominent Pahlavi “defense” to speak “in the name of the law” occurred in late 1968 and early 1969. Bizhan Jazani and Hasan Ziā-Zarifi, two leaders of a network that would go on to form the OIPFG, followed Arāni’s example in outlining existing constitutional precepts circumvented by the event of the trial itself.⁴⁰⁸ Their efforts matched the sensibilities of the Amnesty International representative

⁴⁰⁷ For a discussion of “personhood” and “personality” as central to contemporary (i.e. after 1948) human rights doctrine and distinct from the “human” or “individuality,” see Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*, 55-63.

⁴⁰⁸ Against the oft-repeated trope that Mehdi Bazargan’s 1964 defense before a military court was the last hope for non-revolutionary reform within the framework of existing constitutional law, before the onset of guerrilla warfare, two of the more storied leaders of that guerrilla movement, Jazani and Ziā’-Zarifi, spoke before a military tribunal “in the name of the law.” For a discussion of this revision to the historical record, see Baba Ali and Mohajer, *Bi*

present during the trial, whose report — in line with human rights doctrine — emphasized working within the parameters of existing state law, going so far as to request that Amnesty avoid publicity altogether.⁴⁰⁹ When the option of working behind the scenes was no longer feasible — in other words, when human rights advocacy became a matter of publicity and propaganda — political prisoners efforts paralleled foreign observers quest for evidence to advocate in terms of universal empathy. In 1972, Masoud Ahmadzādeh (another prominent leader in the OIPFG) stood up during a session before the military tribunal and, addressing French lawyer Nuri Albala, lifted his sweater to reveal burns suffered through torture on his stomach and back. Albala was allowed to attend the trial on behalf of Amnesty International alongside Henri Libertalis from the International Federation of the Rights of Man. His report on the incident included a sketch of Ahmadzadeh’s burns, a sketch that circulated widely in oppositional publications abroad.⁴¹⁰

And yet, despite these moments of neat convergence, after 1968, foreign observers increasingly become an absent presence in Pahlavi Iran’s closed courts.⁴¹¹ Between 1969 and

Zabān-i Qānūn. Jazani was also among the organizers of Takhti’s fortieth-day commemoration where Arāni and Rouzbeh’s names were chanted. See Mohajer and Baba Ali, “*Bi rāhī ki justī-ash būdī bi pāy*,” *Arash* (forthcoming); Fātemi Nevisi, *Zindagī va Marg*, document 60. Arāni and Rouzbeh’s were the first “defense” and “last defense” given in Pahlavi courts, respectively.

⁴⁰⁹ See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

⁴¹⁰ IISH: Amnesty International Archive, Folder 441, Nuri Albala, “Report on Mission to Iran — January/February 1972.” This account is reproduced in *Resistance* 2, no. 1 (September 1973): 5. For accounts of the images distribution in the foreign press see *Resistance* 5, no. 2 (January 1977): 10.

⁴¹¹ Beginning in 1965, a range of organizations sent observers to investigate the plight of political prisoners in general, including the International Federation for Human Rights, the National Lawyers Guild, the Italian Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, and Amnesty International. See *Resistance* 1, no. 2 (April 1973): 4. Amnesty began sending observers to attend sessions of military tribunals in Iran in 1965. See IISH: Amnesty International Archive, Folder 441, “Iran – State of the Nation, May 1972,” pp. 1. Observers were able to attend some early sessions of military tribunals for 120 people arrested in 1971 held in February, March, and April of 1972. These included Albala, who in addition to Ahmadzādeh’s trial attended a trial on 3 February 1972 for five other political prisoners each of whom only agreed to speak “when time was allowed for their final declaration,” delivering statements citing articles 72 and 79 of the

1972 in particular, the possibility of their presence existed even if they were often nowhere to be found. The tenor of the early “last defenses” delivered and circulated after 1968 reflects the absent presence of these observers and the corresponding absent presence of human rights discourse. In line with this development, the subject of address in “last defenses” changed. They could no longer function as appeals to empathy made in terms of individual suffering, pitched to foreign audiences meant to identify with political prisoners as similarly autonomous and self-possessed individual human beings. Rather, the publicity and propaganda of post-1968 “last defenses” were directed toward a domestic and Persian-language audiences meant to lament its disparaging collective plight. At yet, perhaps because foreign observers could and at times did appear, rhetorical patterns that paralleled human rights doctrine and discourse were not abandoned altogether.

In this regard, in the “last defenses” distributed as political propaganda post-1968, the effects of this absent presence may be said to manifest in two forms. Both forms involved

Iranian Penal Code, which would have allowed for trials as political criminals before a jury). See IISH: Albala, “Report on Mission to Iran — January/February 1972,” pp. 3. After two of the aforementioned observers published a critical report of the proceedings in *Le Monde*, access to foreign journalists and jurists was denied. From March until August 1972, no foreign observers were permitted to attend trials. See IISH: Amnesty International Archive, Folder 441, “Iran – Background Paper,” 29 March 1972, pp. 11 and “Iran: Trial Procedures for Political Prisoners,” 14 August 1972. According to CISNU publications, however, Françoise Rozelaar-Vigier from the Paris Court of Appeals and U.S. attorney John Thorne observed proceedings in December 1972 and April-May 1974, respectively, on behalf of various national and international NGOs. See *Resistance* 2, n. 4 (June 1974): 18. This account aligns with Hedāyat Matin-Daftari’s memory of events, according to which a clear date before or after which foreign observers were not allowed in Iran cannot be identified because state policies fluctuated. Interview with author, July 2015. By contrast, Brian Wrobel, a British barrister who was allowed to attend the trial of 11 political prisoners in April 1977, claims that no foreign observers were allowed to observe trials between February 1972 and April 1977. See “Amnesty International Report, 1977” in The National Archives of the UK: FCO 8/3211, f 6; and “Human Rights in Iran: Testimony on Behalf of Amnesty International by Brian Wrobel,” Subcommittee on International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, U.S. Congress, 28 February 1978, pp. 10. For further confirmation (and a detailed account of the same April 1977 trial), see Pierre Noyes, *Report from Iran, Tehran, April 9-19, 1977* in Library of Congress: Iran Opposition Pamphlets in English. Civilian lawyers were not allowed to defend political prisoners in military tribunals until the premiership of Jafar Sharif-Emami, in the late summer and fall of 1978, at which point Lahiji had to sneak Albala into a proceeding as a legal assistant. Abdolkarim Lahiji, interview with author, Paris, France, July 2015. For a brief account of the restrictions placed before civilian defense lawyers seeking to practice in military tribunals, see *The Iranian Bulletins*, vii.

adaptations of human rights discourse as opposed to doctrine.⁴¹² The kind of empathy discerned here was for a collective and not the individual himself. In line with the logic of neo-individualism, the individual political prisoner could be read as presenting himself willing to die for the sake of the collective, now characterized as if it were an autonomous individual separate from the state. Yet the evolution of these representations increasingly relied on the presence of a domestic “non-political” third subject as witness. To operate within the ambit of human rights *discourse* without international appeals to universal humanity, thereby directing representations of the individual-turned-community (the neo-individual) to the community itself, implied the presence of a third subject — separate from the activist exemplar and the suffering people — who could act as internal witness to abuse. In this regard, even the most overtly political discourse came to rely on “non-political” politics in order to function.⁴¹³

While Gulisurkhi’s dramatic televised appearance exemplifies the neo-individualism of post-1968 defenses, less poetic and spectacular documents better expose the evolution of auto-empathy within oppositional political discourse. Arāni’s 1937 “defense” provides a point of reference — an example referred to and then eventually abandoned in post-1968 “last defenses.”

⁴¹² In line with the “external-political” quality of “last defenses” as instruments of political propaganda, these texts refused any semblance of accommodation with the state, thereby challenging the logic of “personhood” underlying human rights doctrine. See fn405 above for Nikpour’s discussion of the “external-political” in prison literature.

⁴¹³ It may be objected that the discourse of “last defenses” in the absence of foreign observers was a discourse directed toward the historical record — a point that is particularly convincing in light of the Marxism prevalent among nearly all of the Iranian political prisoners who delivered defenses at this point in time. The exemplary model here is Fidel Castro’s famous statement at the end of his 1953 defense in Cuba: “History will absolve me.” In this respect, the third subject mentioned above would be the reader of history (in humanist iterations of Marxism) or History itself; both signal a subject that is yet to-come. This objection is sound. It is nevertheless my contention that we may retain the point underlying this objection (particularly in its humanist guise) without relinquishing a parallel between historically-oriented declarations, on the one hand, and human rights discourse, on the other. After all, the practice of the historical scribe and the human rights observer bear a deep similarity: both write for distant audiences. While the former does so across *temporal* distance, the latter does so across *spatial* distance. In both cases, audiences are yet to to-come. For a discussion of the indeterminacy in Marxist thought suggested here, see Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*.

Arāni's "defense" sought to invoke sources of legitimacy beyond the state's existing practice of legality in order to make the state live up to the promise of legality written into the constitution.⁴¹⁴ Many of the assertions made in the defense meticulously cite existing law.⁴¹⁵ And yet, Arāni does not deliver a strictly legal case. Instead, to demonstrate the distance between the legal ideal and then current practices of governance, he appealed to the ethical sensibilities of the judiciary — their conscience, their feeling of shame, their sense of responsibility.⁴¹⁶ In recounting the effects of torture and abuse on his body, he declared:

Judges! Do you understand what I'm saying? Lifelong illness as a result of crimes committed by the executive branch! Who is ethically [*vujdānī*] responsible for these crimes? If it does not pursue the criminal, wouldn't the judiciary, meaning all of you, be complicit in this criminal's crime?⁴¹⁷

In addressing the judiciary in this manner, Arāni presented himself and his fellows as "the most select exemplars" of the people:

The present council knows well and good that the accused standing before it are the most select exemplars [*barguzīdi tarīn nimūnih*] of the Iranian nation/people [*millat*]; that none of them have done anything but to serve [that nation/people]; that they have continually been a source of pride for Iran; that even if the public prosecutor's claims are to be affirmed, even then, this same group, having established the living-ness [*zindeh būdan*] of the Iranian nation/people [*millat*], having become the substance of that nation's pride, will make you the judiciary of a living nation/people [*millat-i zindih*]. Thus, the behavior of that council must be precise. In defending myself here, it was never my intent to defend myself alone; my defense is all-encompassing. That which I say about myself more or less speaks the truth of others. It seems clear to me that, first of all, I am not a criminal and, second, rather, that I am a pious servant of the Iranian nation/people [*millat*].⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁴ He reasoned that since the Pahlavi regime was copying the West in other avenues of life (presumably, with regards to policies of development and modernization), it should similarly mimic the West (specifically, the constitutional monarchy in England) by allowing democratic debate and dialogue. See Arāni, *Ākharīn Difā*, 21.

⁴¹⁵ The laws referred to include, in full: *Qānūn-i Asāsi* [The Constitution]: Articles 20 and 21; *Mutamam-i Qānūn-i Asāsi* [Supplement to the Constitution]: Articles 9, 12, 13, 22, and 28; *Qānūn-i Mujāzāt-i Ūmūmī* [Public Penal Law]: Articles 7, 31, 79, 104, 136, 193, 266, 269, 333, and 759; and *Ūsūl-i Muhākīmāt-i Juzā'ī* [Precedence from Penal Proceedings]: Articles 18, 20, 76, 83, 88, 99, 123, 124, and 159. See *ibid.*

⁴¹⁶ We may link Arāni's appeal to shame to earlier modernist discourses of individual moral refinement as the basis of asserting political sovereignty in the 19th and early 20th century. Shame was a "central emotion" in that discursive framework, linking individual virtue to the fate of the political community. See Mana Kia, "Moral Refinement and Manhood," 146-65.

⁴¹⁷ Arāni, *Ākharīn Difā*, 26-27.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35. This passage comprises the entirety of the fourth section of Arāni's defense, the title of which may be roughly translated as "We, the People" or, less poetically, "Us and the National Branch" [*mā va quviyeh millī*]. The

Mistreating the nation's exemplars thus amounted to mistreating "the people" in general by a process of association. If they did this to the "most select," what might they do to others? The court was asked to respond for its shameful behavior.

Post-1968 defenses referenced Arāni but gradually abandoned appeals to empathy predicated on lawfulness. In his introductory remarks, Shokrollāh Pāknejād — whose "Palestine Group," appeared before a military tribunal after having been caught crossing the Iran-Iraq border in April 1970 in an effort to train and fight with Palestinian guerrillas — directly compared the occasion of his defense to Arāni's.⁴¹⁹ Arāni, too, had been tried as the representative of a larger group, the "Group of 53." Yet Pāknejād noted that as far as "implementing the constitution and observing human rights" goes, Iran has painfully "regressed" since his defense.⁴²⁰ Where Arāni appeared before a public court of justice, Pāknejād pointed out that he was tried as a criminal before a closed military tribunal and not as what he was, a political prisoner. In questioning the legality and legitimacy of the proceedings, Pāknejād invoked not only the Constitution (as Arāni had) but also the UN Charter.⁴²¹ Without definitively breaking from the nation-state framework espoused by the Pahlavi regime — whose 1968 conference on human rights *doctrine* reiterated the basic principle of state sovereignty — Pāknejād's additional reference to the UN Charter asserted founding principles beyond the scope of the state.

previous three sections of the defense addressed the three branches of government (the executive, the legislative, and the judicial).

⁴¹⁹ For an account of the arrest, see CAIFI Newsletter 1, n. 1 (March 1975): 9. On the Palestine Group, see Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 46.

⁴²⁰ *Ākharīn Difāh-i Gūrūh-i Filistīn dar Dādghāh-i Nizāmī*, 4.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

This pattern, of holding the judicial system subject to legal principles above and beyond its own constitutional framework, sanctioned the prospect of revolutionary violence when and where that system would not change. Houshang Taregol too referenced Arāni but only did so as one example among a list of names identifying “the people’s” will to resist.⁴²² Unlike Arāni, early in his defense Taregol states that “no court or trial has a right to review these kinds of cases” — cases of national liberation seeking “human welfare” [*sa’ādat-i bashari*] through the creation of a “new and human social order” [*nizām-i nuvīn va insānī*]. Rather, because it serves imperialist interests, legality can never serve justice; its “half-baked reforms and publicity stunts, the bells and whistles of social justice” only serve to cover up the “nation’s unrelenting struggle.” Taregol continues: “You may destroy us, but you do not possess the right to try us in a court.”⁴²³ The emphasis, in this case, is on the illegitimacy of any post-coup Pahlavi court — not simply a military tribunal.

Appeals to empathy within the political community change accordingly. These appeals were no longer based on lawfulness, where the innocence of a victim must be presented to convince members of an existing domestic institution. Instead, setting human rights doctrine and its corresponding ties to the current political community aside, these appeals now appeared in terms of lawlessness, referencing principles beyond the bounds of existing state law. In a direct inversion of the previous scheme, defiance became a measure of the extent to which public empathy could and should be felt for an individual facing injustice at the hands of the state; in other words, virtue was predicated on how committed one had been against its laws. In this

⁴²² Hūshang Tarigul, “Matn-i Difā’ī” in *Difā’iāt [Defenses]*, 17.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 6, 8.

situation, a new sense of shame emerged, meant to be felt not by the judiciary but rather a domestic audience beyond the state.

The inversion of virtue from lawfulness to lawlessness, from human rights doctrine to human rights discourse, accompanied a parallel inversion in the forms of “last defenses.” In response to the military tribunal’s demand that defendants give an individual account of themselves, post-1968 defenses set aside accounts about how individual action conformed to what was permitted within existing law. They instead presented accounts of how the individual arrived at a principled position of defiance.⁴²⁴ In this vein, following introductory remarks where he rejects the legitimacy of the proceedings as law, Taregol spends the rest of his defense responding to one of the questions that, he claims, was repeatedly posed to him during his interrogations: What motivated him to engage in armed resistance?⁴²⁵ Similarly, before his execution in Dey of 1351 (December 1972-January 1973), Mohammad Mofidi — a member of the OIPM — delivered a defiant “last defense” that began: “The first issue I must address here is my motivation [*angīzih-am*] for armed and violent struggle [*mubārīzih-yi musalahānih va qahr-āmīz*].”⁴²⁶

Where the state sought to compel discourse in terms of isolated individualism, Mofidi simply refused to participate: “We do not believe in contestation with superstructural factors [*avāmil-i rūbanā*]. This is a struggle that will continue until the complete abolition of the exploitation of man by man [*bahri kishi-ye insān az insān*].”⁴²⁷ For his part, Taregol justified his

⁴²⁴ Of these documents, the ones produced by members of the OIPM in particular contain the “internal-tutelary” dimension Nikpour identifies in prison memoirs, teaching others how to prepare for armed struggle. For a discussion of Nikpour’s formulation, see fn405 above.

⁴²⁵ Tarigul, “Matn-i Difā,” 8.

⁴²⁶ *Zindigī Nāmih-yi va Mudāfi’āt-i Mujāhid Shahīd Muhammad Mufīdī*, 7.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

trajectory by linking his story with the story of “the people and the masses” [*mardum va tūdi-hā*]. It was on the basis of this identification that he posited the legitimacy of armed struggle and thus his own personal development, despite the fact that his actions clearly contravened the law. In short, his struggle was not “fantastical” or “unrealistic.”⁴²⁸ Where the authorities sought to “train” him through imprisonment, Taregol argues that the kind of “education” [*tarbiat*] he received actually prepared him for armed struggle:

There is no doubt that I was trained in prison for it was in prison that I bore witness [*mushāhidih kardam*] to the evil manifestations [*mazāhir-i palīd*] of this regime. These motivating factors were reasons in their own right to cause me to find myself in the heaven of practical struggle.⁴²⁹

The defense recounts, step by step, everything Taregol would “see” and “learn” during his various prison stints — a process that led him to conclude that “nothing existed except [that which was done] for the people [*mardum*].”

This rhetorical effect was most effective when one was spoken of. “Most select exemplars” of individual purity and innocence, manifest through a commitment to self-sacrifice, may be found across the pages of oppositional publications — particularly those affiliated with the OIPM. They tell the life stories of guerrilla fighters killed by the state over the course of the 1970s. A biographical sketch of Sediqeh (Layla) Zomorodiān in the pages of *Payām-i Mujāhid*, printed on the eve of revolutionary uprisings, reveals a woman who from childhood exhibited a principled commitment to both Islam and serving the poor.

Layla was, from head to toe, love, enthusiasm, and service. Service for those who understood her language and whose everyday language [*zabūn-i hāi*] and deepest pain she understood. Leyla was, from head to toe,

⁴²⁸ Tarigul, “Matn-i Difā,” 9. In a sense, the people [*mardum*] appear in Taregol’s account as a trans-historical entity. Listing numerous and varied examples of resistance against the Pahlavi regime as the work of one and the same subject, Taregol ends up presenting the people not only as heroically defiant but also, by consequence, as immutable. See *ibid.*, 16.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

hatred and anger. Anger and hatred in relation to those who caused the poverty of the dispossessed and the oppression of the oppressed. Because of this love and this anger, she did not sit still for a moment.⁴³⁰

Zomorodiān offered a recursive model for a soon-to-be revolutionary populace. She felt the pain of “the people” so deeply, she sacrificed herself for them. By virtue of this complete identification with “the people,” these accounts seemed to suggest that feeling pain or empathy for the tragedy of individual loss was akin to feeling pain for “the people” in general. In this regard, by 1977, increasingly Islamist oppositional literature turned the “most select exemplars” found in Arāni’s “defense” into a unification of the exemplar (the activist) with the exemplified (the people).

Over the course of the revolutionary uprising, where individual sacrifice became the rhetorical engine for protest activity, individual exemplars — even the kind like Layla Zomorodiān, who appeared as the apotheosis self-sacrifice — no longer stood apart. Even the liberal faction, which ostensibly resisted the radical rhetoric of the “last defenses,”⁴³¹ repeated this developing pattern. By September 1978, human rights literature produced by committees in Iran listed a dizzying number of names as “prisoners of conscience.”⁴³² Bringing attention to so

⁴³⁰ “Yādī az Shahīd: Laylā Zumurudīān” (“In Memory of a *Shahīd*: Layla Zomorodiān”) in *Payām-i Mujāhid: Urgān-i Nihzat-i Āzādī (Khārij az Kishvar)*, no. 48 (Khordād 1356/May-June 1977): 1-2.

⁴³¹ Samizdat from the liberal opposition continued to object “in the name of the law.” A telling example from the Fall of 1977 in response to the repression of a sit-in by university students cites (in the following order) articles 57, 44, 33, 26, 27, 28, 24, 22, 71, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 20, 21, 26, 57, 44, 27, 28, 64, and 66 of the constitution to declare the illegitimacy of the government. It then goes on to cite articles 7, 8, 12, 18, 19, 20, 21, 28, and 29 of the UDHR to support its case. See *Kumītih barāyih difā az huqūq bashar va pīshburd-i ān dar īrān [Committee for the Defense of Human Rights and Their Advancement in Iran]*, 28 Ābān 1356/19 November 1977, 2-4.

⁴³² Fourteen news bulletins produced and distributed domestically by the Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners in Iran (CDPPI) were translated and distributed abroad during and after the revolution. Beginning on 22 May 1978, in news bulletin number 7, the CDPPI began to list the names of political prisoners and, in some cases, details regarding their imprisonment (as well as those subjected to domestic exile). In some instances, the lists would include close to 200 names at once. See *The Iranian Bulletins*, 30-1, 34-5, 37-8, 41, 45-7, 49-50, 53-5, 57, 60-1, 66, 75-8, 83-5, 89-90, 96-101, 105-8, 112-17. For an example of a news bulletin redistributed abroad during the revolution, see News Bulletin, n. 10, The Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners in Iran (CDPPI), 1 September 1978, reprinted in *Āzādī* by Committee of the Families of Martyrs and Political Prisoners of Iran, in Oklahoma City, OK.

many cases at once, this iteration of human rights discourse ended up shifting empathy from individual cases of abuse to a collective subject — one that nevertheless retained the structure of individual rights, thereby situating the collective (“the people” as a whole) as a single object of empathy.

Importantly, the collection of individual cases conveyed a unity of purpose beyond ideational and factional differences. Along these lines, in the earliest instantiation of commemoration as resistance following the violent repression of protests in Qom on 19 Dey [8 January 1978], pictures were pasted around the city of everyday people’s “heart-rending condition” alongside pictures of the children who were killed and “became *shahīds*” the day before.⁴³³ The choice to show the image a child killed in the uprising was not accidental. The juxtaposition communicated a common identity through shared suffering between the people and those involved in the uprising. At the same time, the image of a child suggests innocence before the particulars of a life story. Unlike the activist as either “the most select exemplar” or even the apotheosis of self-sacrifice, the image of a child more effectively rises above any hint of political factionalism.

Just as activist discourse from the uprising increasingly replaced the political prisoner with “the people” as its primary object of empathy, so too did this discourse present “the people” in a process of training akin to the counter-accounts of the self delivered by different political prisoners in their “last defenses,” i.e. as revolutionary subject. Like improvisation, these cultural constructions occurred in a manner that drew from existing frameworks (notably, Shi‘a Islam). A separate first-hand account of the first uprising in the religious city of Qom written by a self-

⁴³³ These images were said to have been accompanied by poetry about the *shuhadā*. See *Dar bārih-yi qīyām*, vol. 1, 55.

proclaimed “the vanguard” [*pīshhtāzan*] presents the events as “the beating of a people’s heart” as the people “searches for life.”⁴³⁴ Later, the uprisings are said to present evidence of “a *millat* [nation/people], and not just a particular group, that discovered with the entirety of its existence [*bā hamiyi vujūdash*] the kind of burning hell it endures, and decided to play its foundational role, to assume its human, political, and social responsibility.” Finally, in a reflection of the continued training involved in the process itself, the event of the 19 Dey uprising “taught” the people how to move from sloganeering — in the form of discussions, declarations, and chants — to actual struggle with the regime.⁴³⁵

The content of that “actual struggle” was ambivalently both active and passive at once, reflecting the peculiar qualities of a revolutionary melodrama arising at the intersection of human rights and *shahādat* (in other words, the specificity of its own cultural construct). The people are described as having “created” [*āfarīd*] a “strange” [*‘ajīb*] “epic” [*hamāsīh*] by spilling their blood and mourning the dead in protest:

Women, children, old men, young students, and clerics were killed in this savage attack. The spilling of their blood added to the people’s epic more than ever before. The people [*mardum*] lifted the corpses of the *shuhadā* on their shoulders — especially that of the first 12 year old child, killed by the first bullet. They marched through the streets and alleyways of the city chanting Allah u Akbar, Allah u Akbar, There is no God but God... They would visit the homes of the leading clerics, the *‘ulamā* and the professors, creating a strange epic.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 73, 59. These types of depictions are plenty. The same account goes on to speak about “this people, carrying deep wounds, hate, anger and revolutionary rage” rising up against “colonialism” because they have seen more “injury” than ever before [*bīsh az pīsh āsīb dīdih and*]. See *ibid.*, 60-61.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 64-65. Similarly, in a later account by Islamist activists of the fortieth-day commemoration of Tabriz protests held in Yazd on 10 Farvardin 1357, the protests are understood as “not entirely based on awareness and knowledge, but rather mostly a matter of passion. If, however, it finds guidance along its correct and true path, and grows and develops, it can change humanity’s fate from confinement to freedom.” See *Dar bārih-yi qīyām*, vol. 3, 17.

⁴³⁶ *Dar bāriyih qiyām*, vol. 1, 67.

And then again, in a separate account about the uprisings in Yazd on 9-10 Farvardin 1357, the people are described as follows: “They not only cried out, but also with the giving of their blood, they became witness to their own rightful cry [*shahīd-i faryād bar haqishān shudand*].”⁴³⁷ The development of the uprising thus corresponds with the development, or training, of the figure of “the people” — what is, ultimately, a self-reflective process. “The people” increasingly come to see themselves as victim by virtue of the reactions their active cries of victimhood inspire.

On the one hand, this pattern quite literally follows the logic of *shahādat* described by Shari‘ati. And yet, a pivotal difference exists by virtue of the oppositional constructs deployed (ostensibly, for strategic and pragmatic purposes) to undermine the regime. The rising influence of human rights discourse and the related popularity of neo-individualism allowed for an imagined identification between “the people” and individual figures of suffering, be they political prisoners or those who died in violent struggle as *shahīds*. In Shari‘ati’s formulation, Husayn needs to sacrifice himself for something other than himself (i.e. the community) in order to become himself as the “embodiment” of that something else (i.e. the community). In activist discourse during the uprising, the replacement of the suffering activist with “the people” loses the distinctions required for “the people” to bear witness to the sacrifice “Husayn” makes for them.

This ambivalence, however, need not lead us to abandon Shari‘ati altogether. Where the neo-individualist construct of the collective as individual prevents a neat equation of “the people” with Husayn, “the people” may nevertheless bear witness to themselves as Zaynab. As I argue in the section that follows, this unresolved tension, found in activist discourse produced in

⁴³⁷ *Dar bāriyih qiyām*, vol. 3, 9.

the moment of the event, reveals an oft-unexplored yet foundational dimension of the revolutionary uprising: that of “non-political” politics.

IV

Zaynab, or the Uprising’s Non-Political Subjects

Those who were killed did a deed like Husayn and those who remain must do a deed like Zaynab

- Anonymous flyer, reportedly distributed after police forces violently clashed with protesters in Qom on 19 Dey 1356 [8 January 1978]⁴³⁸

In 1978, a physician — whose earlier student activism with secular opposition forces and subsequent imprisonment in the 1970s prevented him from obtaining a position at a state-funded institution — found himself working at Qom’s Sahāmiyeh Hospital. Sahāmiyeh was a local and notably private institution affiliated with Ayatollah Shari‘atmadāri. Over the course of the uprisings that rocked the city that year, as those same state-funded hospitals were said to chain wounded protesters to beds, betraying their trust by turning them over to the authorities, Sahāmiyeh emerged as a safe haven. Arrows were drawn across the city guiding injured protesters fleeing security forces to the private hospital where they were attended to in confidence and, when necessary, smuggled to more resource-plenty hospitals in Tehran.⁴³⁹

This sensibility was not limited to Sahāmiyeh’s hospital staff. Rumors circulating at the time suggested that police would confiscate the corpses of protestors in an effort to repress

⁴³⁸ *Dar bāriyih qīyām*, vol. 1, 56.

⁴³⁹ The physician’s allegiances with secular opposition forces did not prevent him, too, from acting in solidarity. Two further details from his recollection of events are worth noting. First, he recalled Qom being in continuous unrest throughout the year. The city’s protests were not simply organized in accordance with the logic of fortieth-day mourning cycles. Second, the hospital staff’s care for wounded protestors never involved direct organizing or coordination. By contrast, the physician recalls directly organizing a march where hospital staff marched through the streets of Qom in their uniforms to protest the practice of chaining wounded protesters to their beds in state-run institutions. Interview with author, April-June 2015.

Qom's famed 19 Dey protests and quell future demonstrations. Wounded activists were said to be taken into custody and killed through the injection of air into their veins; seminary students were reportedly prevented from attending the funeral ceremony for the protest's first *shahīd* or from donating blood.⁴⁴⁰ In response, city residents hid those fleeing from police in their homes while attending to their wounds.⁴⁴¹

The ethos of solidarity had lasting power, influencing the objectives of revolutionary leaders and activist groups. On 12 Azar 1357 [3 December 1979], 300 members of the Organization of Iranian Faculty, came together in Tehran's Polytechnic University. In this gathering, it was decided that the group would calmly march to various hospitals to visit the injured from 1 December 1978. That night — in the midst of martial law and on the first night of Muharram, the month in the Muslim calendar where the Shi'a celebrate Husayn's *shahādat* — people had taken to the rooftops to chant Allah u Akbar [God is great]. Police had responded with gunfire injuring and killing a number of people. The marchers resolved to give blood and to declare the Organization's willingness to volunteer and help hospital staff however possible.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ *Dar bāriyih qiyām*, vol. 1, 51-2. Similar reports from the aftermath of a pitched five-hour street battle in Yazd on 10 Farvardin 1357, the fortieth-day commemoration-turned-protest for Qom's fortieth-day in Tabriz, say the injured were not allowed visitors. Those who attempted to give blood were barred from doing so and in some cases taken into custody for the attempt. See *Dar bāriyih qiyām*, vol. 3, 16. Reports of these attacks lasted well into 1978. A collective of doctors and pharmacists from Āmol protested similar attacks in Bābol and Gorgān in late November of that year. See *Hambastigī*, n. 2, 16 Āzar 1357 [7 December 1978], 4.

⁴⁴¹ These accounts recall scenes from Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*, which was banned during the Pahlavi regime but extremely popular in the first year after the revolution. See Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 3, 24. We might speculate that its popularity in post-revolutionary Iran reflected, in part, the similarities between these scenes of solidarity and the experience of the revolutionary uprising — not just its romantic portrait of urban guerrilla warfare. Activists nevertheless used the film for their own purposes. An early issue of *Shawrā*, a newspaper from the time advocating Islamic workers' collectives, reports the film was "shown for the residents of Qarchak, the workers at the brick burning factory in Varāmīn, and the workers at the Wynn Shoe Factory as well as the United and Gabor Factories from the national industry collective." Based on articles in the following issue about Ayatollah Taleqani's death, we may infer this screening to have occurred sometime in August 1979. See "Akhhār-i Kārgār" ["Workers' News"], *Shurā*, no. 5, 1, 4.

⁴⁴² The group was dispersed by gunfire after which members nevertheless followed through on its initial objectives on an individual basis. For an account of both events (on 1 and 3 December) see *Hambastigī*, no. 1 (12 Āzar 1357/3 December 1978), 1; *Hambastigī*, no. 2 (16 Āzar 1357/7 December 1978), 1-2. Similarly, it was reported that 10,000

An activist account of the 19 Dey uprising in Qom distinguishes the unity exhibited by the rising of the *millat* [the nation or the people] from any “particular [political] group.”⁴⁴³ The statement was a projection of who or what “the people” *should* be and less who or what they actually were. Indeed, in the moment of the revolution’s configuration — the activist-based uprisings that lasted from Fall 1977 until late summer 1978 — large sectors of the Iranian populace did not participate. Perhaps, as Kurzman argues, they pragmatically and shrewdly waited until it was safer to do so — until it was clear that others, and not just activists, would participate as well. But this does not mean that they did not participate at all. A different possibility exists: that many responded without directly responding by demonstrating solidarity in terms of principles shared between both *shahādat* and human rights discourse such as suffering, shame, and empathy. In this respect, the promise written into the activist conceit of solidarity was more readily found in the “non-political” support everyday people exhibited for injured and wounded demonstrators. While empathizing with the suffering of protestors was policed, unlike overt political demonstrations it was harder to identify, much less regulate. The following section theorizes this “non-political” activity as a revision to overtly political registers of resistance from within a shared frame of reference — that of *shahādat*. I do so by presenting the space within activist discourse to imagine a “non-political” politics — one comprised of the sensibilities of a domestic human rights observer or, to adopt a different register, of Zaynab as witness.

people in Tehran gather on Monday (4 December 1978) in Behesht-i Zahra cemetery for the burial of *shuhadā*. See *ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁴³ *Dar bāriyih qīyām*, vol. 1, 64.

The act of witnessing fostered solidarity on “non-political” terms when overt political solidarity could not and would not be expressed otherwise. Between political groups, the years leading up to the 1977-78 uprisings were marked by anything but unity. The few sites of opposition where express political groupings might form were riven with bitter infighting, competition, power struggle, and resentment. To make matters worse, those sites were increasingly absent in the domestic public sphere after 1968, appearing either in international or domestic exile — that is, among activist student groups and exiles abroad or behind the walls of state prisons. Outside of Iran, contestation between political factions in opposition to the Pahlavi state reached such a fever pitch in 1975, they led to the Confederation of Iranian Student’s (CISNU) dissolution as an umbrella organization.⁴⁴⁴ Domestically, in the later 1970s, the charged atmosphere produced by transnational guerrilla warfare corresponded with the expression of sharp differences between political factions cohabiting a single prison yard. Where prisons had previously fostered an opportunity for interaction and collaboration across political difference, they now became the sole site of direct and bitter contest.⁴⁴⁵ Notably, when these prisoners were finally released over the course of the revolutionary uprising, many consciously suppressed the expression of factional positions in demonstrations and refrained from organizing in their own name for the sake of producing a semblance of national unity.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁴ For an account of the organization’s final split and the emergence of multiple factions, see Matin-asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, 143-47. Organized student opposition abroad continued afterwards — often in collaboration, but never again as a single organized unit. I address this point in Chapter 1, where I present human rights advocacy as a site of continued collaboration.

⁴⁴⁵ The contestation and infighting was exacerbated by a split in the OIPM in 1975, leading to a Marxist Mojahedin (which eventually became the Marxist group, Paykār, as well as a smaller, non-Maoist splinter group); a Muslim Mojahedin (which eventually became the MKO, taking the group’s title in the post-revolutionary period); and a pro-clerical faction that split from the group and its name entirely. On these splits, see Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 70-73; Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, 145-69.

⁴⁴⁶ For instance, the group that later became the MKO participated under the banner of the Islamic Student Association (i.e. an ostensibly “non-political” association). See *ibid.*, 170-71.

Meanwhile, in the domestic public sphere, the figure of the political prisoner provided an unexpected opportunity for solidarity among ordinary and ostensibly “non-political” citizens. The status of the political prisoner was a prominent social problem — one that occasioned a sense of common cause across political factions precisely because its primary agents were “non-political” family members and acquaintances.⁴⁴⁷ The fact of a public sphere closed to open political dissent and an abundance of infighting among actual political factions (which eventually encouraged expressions of national unity from even the most committed activists) created the conditions for suffering to emerge as a “non-political” basis for collective action. Paradoxically, despite the exhortations of activists projecting a unified “people,” this negative foundation was one of the only viable foundations for solidarity available.

This basis of solidarity was not simply a reflection of strategic maneuver in the face of limited political possibilities — what Kurzman calls pragmatism. It followed an equivocation at the heart of activist discourse, which in turn allowed “non-political” action to inhabit the narratives woven by activists across the political spectrum. Again, there are two prominent accounts of protests and uprisings lasting from the Fall of 1977 until August 1978; the separate accounts reflect two different types of open activist discourse and mobilization in what was, at the time, not yet a mass movement — the liberal and the Islamist.⁴⁴⁸ According to Lāhiji, the

⁴⁴⁷ For Lāhiji, it was the only glimmer of solidarity in the 1970s. He reasoned that, if in fact there were 10,000 Iranian political prisoners held at one point in time in the 1970s, this meant that 10,000 immediate families and their acquaintances were effected, concerned, and disgruntled — an observation that explained why “free all political prisoners” was a primary chant in uprisings before December 1978. Abdolkarim Lāhiji, interview with author, Paris, France, July 2015. Further evidence of this point may be found in a 1971 statement by Khomeini distributed by students abroad that called it a duty for believers to assist the families of political prisoners who have acted to “preserve Islam.” See Library of Congress: “*Matn-i fatwa-i hazrat āyatullāh khumaynī dar bārih-yi kumak bi khanivādih-yi zindāniyān-i sīyāsī*” [“Text of Ayatollah Khomeini’s Fatwa Regarding Assistance to the Families of Political Prisoners”], 26 Aban 1350 [17 November 1971].

⁴⁴⁸ As noted above, these factional distinctions should not be taken to be neat distinctions before, during, or even after the moment of the event. They merely provide a schematic point of reference through which I identify commonality across perceived difference.

spokesperson for two of the leading liberal organizations active at the time, the primary slogan in all of the major demonstrations up until and including the one on 10 December 1978 was “Free All Political Prisoners” [*āzādī-yi zindānīyān-i sīyāsī*].⁴⁴⁹ The available collections of memoirs and flyers printed and distributed over the course of the uprisings suggest that overtly Islamist and/or explicitly revolutionary chants were present as well.⁴⁵⁰ A selection of chants from the earliest of these protests, in Qom on 8-9 January 1978 when clerical leaders ironically insisted on maintaining a posture of moderation,⁴⁵¹ include (in addition to the epigraph above): “Down with this *Yazīdī* government” [*marg bar īn hūkūmat-i Yazīdī*] and “I have written it with my blood, my life is to be sacrificed, either death or Khomeini” [*bā khūn-i khudam nivishtam, az jān guzashtam, yā marg yā Khumaynī*].⁴⁵²

Yet these more radical chants were not a given. In the actual unfolding of events, organizers attempted to regulate chants in order to maintain a “non-political” veneer of innocence. Early in the demonstration, local police told the crowd they would not attack if the crowd refrained from chanting slogans. In response, moving from the home of one cleric to another, the crowd as well as the clerics themselves beseeched and generally practiced a strategic

⁴⁴⁹ The tenor of protests only changed from the following day onward (i.e. Ashura), after which the primary slogans chanted were Islamist in nature. Abdolkarim Lāhijī, interview with author, Paris, France, July 2015.

⁴⁵⁰ According to Kurzman, three sets of collections were produced and distributed while the uprising was taking place — while the revolution was still “unthinkable.” As he suggests, these sources allow a perspective on the Islamist portions of the movement precluded from later state-sponsored collections. These collections include *Dar bārih-yi qīyām-i hamāsīh āfarīn-i Qum va Tabrīz* [*Regarding the Epic Uprisings in Qum and Tabriz*], Vol. 1-3 (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), which I have referenced throughout this chapter. See *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 175-85. For a collection of revolutionary slogans published by a state-sponsored institution well after the revolution in Iran, see *Farhang-i Shu’ār-hāyi Inqilāb-i Islāmī* [*The Dictionary of Slogans from the Islamic Revolution*] (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1390/2011-12).

⁴⁵¹ Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 176; *Dar bārih-yi qīyām*, vol. 1, 43-44.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 44, 55-56.

(or pragmatic) appearance of calm.⁴⁵³ In fact, at the time, the massive size of the crowd on 9 January [19 Dey] was directly attributed to an enforced absence of chanting and slogans, allowing people who would not otherwise participate in riskier and more directly confrontational behavior to be present. The chanting of slogans is said to begin again only when the police reneged on their promise, unjustifiably attacking the crowd under the pretext of attacks on banks by agent provocateurs — a point that again asserts the crowd’s “non-political” innocence.⁴⁵⁴

In this regard, despite their important differences, liberal and Islamist registers of mobilization share a common theme. The central protagonist of each — the political prisoner in the liberal imaginary and the *shahīd* in the Islamist one — appear in an affective relationship with a projected communal audience. Where the political prisoner reflected a condition of suffering brought about by continued and past abuse over the course of the Pahlavi regime, the *shahīd* appeared through state reactions to public demonstrations in the moment. In either case, liberals and Islamists alike presented “the people” as innocent and suffering while denouncing the state for its shameful behavior.⁴⁵⁵ Both were victims of state abuse in relation to whom a mourning collective (the self) may now identify, cultivate, and express itself as a suffering collective (the object it mourns). The splitting of the revolutionary subject in two was

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 40-41, 43-44, 46.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 49-50. Other accounts repeat efforts by organizers to regulate the chanting of any slogans so as to refrain from providing an excuse for the police to attack the assembly. See, for instance, *Dar bārih-yi qīyām*, vol. 2, 12-3.

⁴⁵⁵ Examples of these portrayals are plenty. For instance, in an account of the first street clashes to occur in November 1977, student demonstrators are presented as innocent victims set up by agents of the state who broke bank windows in order to have an excuse to attack the crowd. See *Kumītah Barāyih Difā az Hūqūq Bashār va Pishraw-i Ān dar Iran* [*The Committee for the Defense and Advancement of Human Rights in Iran*], 24 Aban 1356 [15 November 1977] – 1 Azar 1356 [22 November 1977], found in private archive (Paris, France). By contrast, the state is presented as engaging in shameful behavior. The same document refers to the “shameless regime.” A separate account says the 19 Dey uprising in Qom “shamed” [*rusvā*] the regime before an international audience, playfully rearranging the name of the Shah’s single-party — *Rastākhīz* [Resurrection] — as *Rusvākhīz* [The Rising of Shame]. See *Dar bāriyih qiyām*, vol. 1, 64-65, 68.

necessitated by the aforementioned identification between the activist (as political prisoner or *shahīd*) and “the people.” By virtue of the silence imposed by prison or physical death, the victim (as political prisoner, *shahīd*, and, in part, “the people”) must be witnessed by a collective whose condition of being is distinct from it — i.e. not imprisoned or physically alive and present. “We, the people,” — or at least a certain part of the revolutionary mass — must live like Zaynab.

At the heart of these representations lies an equivocation. Ostensibly, shaming occurred for the purposes of drawing attention from a global audience. The identification between “the people” and activists suggests “the people” already know how corrupt and evil the Pahlavi state is. And yet, processual accounts of the people’s “training” through the experience of the uprising suggest otherwise — that the act of shaming uncovers a hidden truth for the very “people” who, by engaging in protest, reveal the truth for themselves in a deliberate fashion.

This equivocation marked public pronouncements by leading figures made in the heat of events. In a statement dated 14 Rabi al-Thani 1398 [24 March 1978], just days before a fortieth commemoration-turned-protest in Yazd, Ayatollah Khomeini called for a permanent state of mourning. In the parlance of revolutionary culture at the time, the statement amounted to calling for continued unrest:

The *millat* [nation, people] must be in a permanent state of mourning. We mourn on the fortieth [*‘arba ‘ayn*] of the huge calamity [*musībat-i buzurg*] that befall our brothers in Tabriz. Through their collective mourning [*‘azāyih ūmūmī*], on that day the Iranian *millat* [nation, people] will make the free nations of the world understand the conditions we live under. From the exalted and most high, God, I ask for splendor on behalf of Islam and Muslims and hope the reach of foreign hands is cut.⁴⁵⁶

Khomeini’s anti-colonial statement arrived in response to the Shah’s depiction of the uprisings as the work of Marxists and Islamic Marxists. Presumably speaking to Islamist activists on the ground, he exhorted them to not only reject these labels but also any kind of collaboration with

⁴⁵⁶ *Dar bariyih qīyām*, vol. 2, 11.

those who willingly adopt them. These associations would separate the activists from a popular message comprehensible to everyday people. They would disrupt a project image of a unified people in uprising as one.⁴⁵⁷

Beyond its effectiveness as strategy,⁴⁵⁸ this characterization presented a paradox reflective of the equivocation in using a discourse of shaming in a post-1968 moment. Put differently, Khomeini's statement resonated with human rights *doctrine* and *discourse* at once. On the one hand, it invoked a rhetoric of self-determination predicated on the autonomous assertion of first, Muslim, and, second, Iranian identity manifest in Khomeini's novel depiction of the fortieth as *'arba 'ayn* and not *chihilum*.⁴⁵⁹ In this instance, the exercise of self-determination involves making one's collective pain and suffering visible before an external audience ("the free nations of the world") who through empathy would ostensibly act to enforce international law. Thus, as human rights *doctrine*: a Muslim/Iranian nation appeals to other (ostensibly non-Muslim) nations in order to acquire and enforce the principle of self-determination, in line with the UDHR's characterization of human rights as a matter of "personhood."⁴⁶⁰ Yet Khomeini's appeal to self-determination fit uncomfortably in a nation-state framework:

⁴⁵⁷ *Dar bariyih qīyām*, vol. 2, 9-11.

⁴⁵⁸ For a discussion of Khomeini's thought and politics as populism — a pragmatism based on flexibility as opposed to the rigidity of a presumed religious "fundamentalism" — see Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*.

⁴⁵⁹ The turn of phrase — reserved in Persian solely for describing the fortieth-day commemoration of Ashura — reflects the constructed nature of revolutionary culture. Kurzman attributes this construction to an approximate overlap with the fortieth-day after Ashura and the fortieth-day after the 15th of Khordād in 1963, reflected in a flyer calling for protest activity as noted above. See Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 54-55. The flyer itself, however, does not use the term *'arba 'ayn*, but rather *chihilum*. See Davānī, *Nihzat-i Ruhānīyūn*, 153-54. In a separate collection, it is said that Ayatollah Mar'ashi Najafi issued a declaration in honor of the "'arba 'ayn" of the 15th of Khordād on 11 July 1963. The declaration is not said to refer to any protest activity. See *Rūzshumar-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī dar Qum*, 59. In this regard, the reference to commemorations-turned-protest specifically as *'arba 'ayn* seems to be a product of the revolutionary uprising in 1977-78.

⁴⁶⁰ See fn40 in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

It is necessary that, with all of your power and awareness, you separate yourselves from individuals who are associated with non-Islamic schools of thought [*maktab*]; who by virtue of an opportunist temperament wish to take advantage of this moment by inserting themselves among your ranks; who when the time is right will not hesitate to stab you in the back. Do not give them an opportunity to act. Other than the doctrine [*maktab*] of Islam and chants about Islam, the country cannot find refuge from danger...⁴⁶¹

The country could only be saved through a strict adherence to Islam — a kind of nationalism that, counter to the logic of nationalism, exceeded state borders. The simultaneous invocation of both registers, of nationalism and that which exceeds nationalism, paralleled the emergence of human rights *discourse* post-1968. That discourse, too, imagined a realm beyond the nation-state, a realm where empathy and publicity worked to challenge the nation-state while functioning within its ambit.

The ambiguity in this case produces a paradox. Human rights *discourse* often functions through ostensibly universal appeals to individual right, denying any and all provincial roots.⁴⁶² By contrast, the legitimacy of a Muslim nation is predicated on universality through particularity; as nationalism, it must first be defined against what it is not. In this regard, the logic of self-determination bumps up against the exercise of shaming. In an alternate imaginary of provincialized universalism, who are appeals of empathy, suffering, and shame directed toward?

In less adept hands, this paradox becomes pronounced and thus more clearly interpretable. On the fortieth-day of the 19 Dey uprising [18 February 1978], a man by the name of Razvāni delivered a speech in Qom before a crowd of thousands.⁴⁶³ On the one hand, like

⁴⁶¹ *Dar bāriyih qīyām*, vol. 2, 9.

⁴⁶² Anthony Pagden argues against this tendency, instead calling for the recognition of provincialism in order to defend European conceptions of human rights with reference to the fact of modern nation-states. Put differently, Pagden presents Kant's notion of cosmopolitan right as the framework for a "qualified" but more accurate account of contemporary human rights. Because of the persistence of the state, the only path to realize universal human rights lay in the emergence of what Kant called "representative republics" — which Pagden re-defines, in our contemporary moment, as democratic nation-states. See Pagden, "Human Rights, Natural Rights, and Europe's Imperial Legacy," 171-99.

⁴⁶³ The speech was later distributed among activists both domestic and abroad. For contextual information, see *Dar bāriyih qīyām*, vol. 2, 5.

Khomeini’s message of self-determination, Razvāni’s speech was addressed to activist leaders — bosses, teachers, clerics — who might “guide the people” to social transformation.⁴⁶⁴ On the other, the speech reiterated Khomeini’s appeal to empathy from a global audience, calling on the “world” [*jahān*] to avenge the death of the *shahīds* killed in recent protests.⁴⁶⁵ Yet again, an appeal to the world at large appears alongside a discussion of self-determination.

In this case, repeating themes first articulated in Jalal Āl-e Ahmad’s *Gharbzadegi* [“Westoxification”], the speaker presents the problem in bio-political terms.⁴⁶⁶ A disease like cholera has spread through the body [*paykar*] of Islam. The root of the disease was foreign interference manifest through local agents.⁴⁶⁷ As in the time of the Companions, “conscious” [*bīdār*] Muslims must “pick up [surgical] knives” to remove the ailing heart sending toxic blood throughout the body, a double entendre that suggested insurrectionary violence against the Pahlavi regime.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁶⁶ In using the term “bio-politics,” I invoke Michel Foucault’s discussion of power as “the management of life rather than the menace of death,” which includes the regulation of populations as if they were a living organism. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, 135-59. For a discussion of a “semi-colonial version” of biopolitical discourse as central to the formation of a modern middle class in early 20th century Iran, see Cyrus Schayegh, *Who is Knowledgeable is Strong*, 8.

⁴⁶⁷ The speaker identifies Jimmy Carter, Anwar Sadat, and the Hashemite kings by name. See *Dar bāriyih qīyām*, vol. 2, 24. Cholera was a prominent 19th century problem addressed through new sanitary measures. See Schayegh, *Who is Knowledgeable is Strong*, 9.

⁴⁶⁸ For the entirety of the speaker’s analysis, see *Dar bāriyih qīyām*, vol. 2, 16-18. A representative passage reads as follows: “When Imam Husayn sees that Yazid’s foundation for government produces toxic blood that is then sent coursing through the body of Islam so that the body of Islam falls ill from this blood, he says: We must pick up the knives. We must pick up the surgical knives, we must go and remove this sick heart from within Islam’s chest. What did the Muslims in Osman’s period do? They said that Osman was a sick heart that has taken root in Islam’s chest, that produces toxic blood. They said [to themselves], all of the pain and suffering comes from here. Aware Muslims raised the surgical knives and split open Islam’s chest. They removed Osman’s sick heart from Islam’s chest and transplanted it with Ali’s healthy heart” (18).

The ambiguous relationship to the foreign world — as both the obstacle to and the means through which self-determination may be achieved — mirrors a related ambiguity with regards to assuming a posture of grief. Like Khomeini, Razvāni presents the act of mourning as an act of insurrection:

What does condolence mean? Pay attention so that the meaning of condolence becomes clear. Condolence means taking steps to get revenge for the blood of the *shahīds* from history's *shahīd* killers [*shahīd kushān-i tārikh*]. So that the fire in the hearts of those who lost their loved ones in the crucible of history may dissipate. So that their hearts may find consolation. This is the meaning of condolence. Condolence is not a matter of meaningless utterance. Condolence is an active and conscious endeavor [*yek iqdām-i 'amalī-yi āgāhānih*].⁴⁶⁹

The call for an “active” and “conscious” form of condolence as retribution is contrasted with the “weakness” exhibited by verbal condolence and yet is limited by circumstance:

The tears we occasionally shed send a signal. Even if we have no other means at our disposal to guide the army and the ship sent to save the *ummah* to their victorious destination, we may nevertheless offer our tears. We will create oceans of tears so that this ship, sailing under the leadership of Imam Husayn, may set out toward the shores of its destination.⁴⁷⁰

With this, Razvāni presents a different kind of “active” and “conscious” condolence — one that, in the absence of opportunities for direct confrontation, nevertheless refuses to do away with communal responsibility. He goes on to make a direct comparison between his audience and Zaynab: on the 11th of Muharram, the day after Imam Husayn is killed, Zaynab is found reciting her prayers in an unorthodox position, seated on the ground.⁴⁷¹ She is asked if she has forgotten God's splendor or perhaps if she is so overcome by grief she cannot muster the strength to stand. Her response is that she has been forced to kneel under the weight of “responsibility.”

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁷¹ In Islam, prayer is recited while standing.

Razvāni goes on to declare that the crowd assembled, like Zaynab, must not let the blood of the uprising's *shahīds* go dry.⁴⁷²

In an important sense, Razvāni's statements affirm Kurzman's point about pragmatism. The different dispositions of "active condolence" crafted on the example of Husayn and Zaynab suggest different strategies of resistance across time — active political protest and active withdrawal, the latter of which Kurzman associates with the revolution's general strike. Yet there is an added element produced by these particular cultural constructs — produced, in other words, by their relationship to discourses of *shahādat* and human rights at once — that suggests a third subject position not contained by overt political activism. In this third subject — a different way of being Zaynab — we may discern a "non-political" politics of "permanent mourning" and "active condolence."

The aforementioned pragmatism of activist discourse contains an implicit paradox. Adopting a posture of "permanent mourning" or "active condolence" so that an international community might empathize with one's plight threatens to undermine the logic of self-determination by virtue of its reliance on external actors. Yet Zaynab is different from the human rights observer who neutrally witnesses events as a medium for others. She is depicted as weighed down by the responsibility of what she bears witness to; she is, to put the matter simply, part of the community she observes. The "permanent mourning" and "active condolence" of Zaynab involves the recording and projection of shameful acts within the community itself; the act of witnessing occurs by and for the community itself. In short, by imagining parts of the

⁴⁷² Ibid., 29-30.

community as Zaynab, self-determination may be retained right alongside the absent presence of human rights discourse.

On the basis of this interpretation, we may identify points of dis-identification within liberal and Islamist activist discourse's shared configuration of "the people" as revolutionary subject. The cultural constructs of revolutionary events in Iran allowed an entirely different segment of the population to adopt its own posture of "permanent mourning" and "active condolence" distinct from a select group pragmatically engaged in protest activity. That posture — a "non-political" politics of solidarity — cohered with the rhetoric of activist configurations even if it did not involve an exact copy of the subject positions interpellated therein, i.e. a strict identification between, on the one hand, the activist as political prisoner or *shahīd* and, on the other, a similarly suffering yet resistant "people." Instead, in the unexpected gaps and paradoxes of activist discourse, reflective of the invisible yet pronounced solidarity exhibited by non-participants in the revolution's early stages of uprising, we may discern traces of the "non-political" politics that would animate mass mobilization in the revolution's final stages.

CHAPTER 5 | NARRATIVE REVOLTS

Revolt or rebellion is traditionally opposed to revolution, an opposition which doctrine ritually assimilates to that between spontaneity and organization. The point about reclaiming this suspect word was not to extol the virtues of spontaneity, but rather to undermine this very opposition by subverting the idea of time that underlies the contrast between the supposedly continuous ‘process’ of revolution and the scene of rebellion that is said to be momentary. This is why the word ‘revolt’ could be linked with a ‘logic’ that is seemingly opposed to it. There is also logic, the construction of a particular assembly of reasons at a specific place and time, when no process justifies in circular fashion its necessity by its continuity and its continuity by its necessity. ‘It is right to rebel’ was the great slogan of the Cultural Revolution, taken up in May 1968. The title of *logical revolts* declared less imperiously that what is called rebellion or revolt is also a scene of speech and reasons: neither the eruption (often celebrated in those years) of a popular unruliness irreducible to the disciplines of power, nor the expression of a historical necessity and legitimacy.

- Rancière, *Staging the People*⁴⁷³

In the preface to the English edition of his collected articles for *Les Révoltes Logiques*, Jacques Rancière directs attention to the journal’s title, calling for a change in the language used to tell revolutionary history. Rancière’s proposal means to break with patterns of thinking that submerge “the people” in the language used to talk about them. Instead of an unruly and irreducible mass that simply disrupts or the systematic unfolding of History as structure, the concept of “logical revolts” asks us to consider the “speech and reasons” involved at the scene of rebellion. Rancière’s formulation addresses two different perspectives writing against Marxism in the wake of May 1968. It similarly begets a reconsideration of two disparate yet related bodies of scholarship which have influenced recent interpretations of the Iranian Revolution.

⁴⁷³ Rancière, *Staging the People*, 10.

The first is social scientific and pertains to the question of post-revolutionary state consolidation. Since its auspicious publication in 1979, Theda Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions* has inspired numerous counters to Marxist histories of revolutionary change, a product of Skocpol's emphasis on the continuity of structural conditions. Drawing on Tocqueville's example, Skocpol emphasizes the primacy of institutions, circumventing reductions of the political to economic determinism without relinquishing the social altogether. Instead institutional continuity is understood as contingent.⁴⁷⁴

The timing of Skocpol's book corresponded with a sea change in the historiography of modern Iran.⁴⁷⁵ In relation to it, two separate yet related tracks of scholarship have emphasized the structural causes of revolutionary change and state consolidation. The first track has attempted to revise Skocpol's framework in order to make the cultural and ideological features of

⁴⁷⁴ Where Marx presents a systematic and fundamental distinction between the social and the political (albeit one that in later works affords some contingency), Tocqueville understands the same distinction as entirely contingent. Where the former understands revolution as a sharp break, the latter presents the French Revolution as a "social and political revolution," emphasizing points of historical continuity between the pre- and post-revolutionary regimes. See *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 476-8, 489-90, 522-23; Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the Revolution*, 33-34, 102, 123, 139, 148, 162-63, 189. Following Tocqueville's example, Skocpol provides a general theory for why "social revolutions" occur — that is, historical events where social transformation coincides with political change. They are not "made" by mass-mobilizing revolutionary movements but rather result from "institutional and historical patterns" within old regimes. Skocpol refers to this approach as a "structural perspective" — a perspective that staunchly opposes voluntarist notions of agency and instead focuses on patterned relationships among groups. See Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 4-5, 17-18. A strictly structural perspective, however, would lead Skocpol to suggest that transformations at the level of the state are solely a reflection of developments in the domestic or transnational sphere of social relations. Where scholars following pluralist, structural-functionalist, and neo-Marxist approaches define state actions as a direct reflection of social forces, Skocpol argues for its autonomy. Her "more state-centric approach" accounts for the contingencies that ensue when the state acts as an independent force. See "Bringing the State Back In," 20-21, 28-29. Where the majority of her analysis is influenced by Tocqueville's attention to institutions, there is an ambivalence in Skocpol that leads her to break from a structural analysis when discussing the state. For a critique of this rendering as reification, see Mitchell, "Society, Economy, and the State Effect," 174; Mitchell, "The Limits of the State," 77-96.

⁴⁷⁵ The sea change involved a sudden rise in efforts to explain the causes of the revolution after it occurred. For a review of historiographical trends, one that makes a compelling case against the persistent tendency to presume a division between the past and the present instead of linking the historical writing of events with the event represented, see Jefroudi "The Opening-Up of the Past," 235-48.

the revolution fit.⁴⁷⁶ A second track has bucked the historiographical trend, insisting instead on structural explanations that match Skocpol's original 1979 framework sans analyses of culture and ideology. While certainly not Marxist in the strict sense of the term nor for that matter concerned with "the continuous 'process' of revolution," this track nevertheless insists on (more-situated and contingent) patterns of historical necessity.⁴⁷⁷ Between ideology *as* structure and structure *without* ideology, however, the question remains as to whether or not structures must be taken for granted in order to discern the "logic" of "revolt."

A second body of scholarship similarly emerged in parallel with the aftermath of the 1979 revolution. Yet again, the point of inspiration was not the event of the Iranian Revolution but rather a broader pivot away from doctrinal Marxist politics and social analysis. Various

⁴⁷⁶ In a 1982 essay written in response to the prospect that events in Iran directly refuted her most basic analytical premises, Skocpol amends her original position to account for the centrality of cultural and ideological factors. Despite points of divergence, she argues that the "Iranian Revolution *can* be interpreted in terms analytically consistent with the explanatory principles...used in *States and Social Revolutions*." See Skocpol, "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam," 265-83. Said Amir Arjomand initially argues against Skocpol's theory, pointing to the absence of certain key structural conditions in the Iranian case; he ends, however, by applauding her effort to "bring the state back in." The Iranian case simply reveals the fact that Skocpol does so in an incomplete fashion. Arjomand argues that the Iranian Revolution occurred when the "manpower of the state bureaucracy" failed to recognize the authority of the old regime as legitimate. The state did not simply lose its legitimate authority; rather "reactionary radicals" were able to mobilize the masses for a long period of time in a national act of "civil disobedience." See Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, 119, 190-96. For William Sewell, Skocpol's analysis does not adequately consider ideology (which he identifies with culture) as a separate or autonomous cause in the conjectural unfolding of revolutionary events. Where she takes ideology to be the result of "people's conscious intentions" (and hence a matter of voluntarism), Sewell understands ideologies to be the anonymous and impersonal products of an interrelationship between "semantic items" and "social forces." They are, in other words, structures unto themselves. Over the course of contestation, new and unexpected ideological discourses are produced rendering ideological structures — like *all* agentive actions — "anonymous" and "collective." See Sewell, "Ideologies and Social Revolutions," 57-85, especially 60-61. For a discussion of ideological structure as explanatory factor in revolutionary Iran, see Farhi, *States and Urban-Based Revolutions*, 83-105; Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent*, 83-87. In an echo of Sewell, the latter interprets ideological developments in the process of state consolidation as anonymous and unintentional.

⁴⁷⁷ For a thoroughgoing critique of the idea that the revolution was ideological, see Parsa, "Ideology and Political Action in the Iranian Revolution." For efforts to retain structural analysis without ideology, see Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, 89; Harris, "The Martyrs Welfare State," 31-33, 117-18.

iterations of radical democracy by political theorists have placed emphasis on what Rancière calls in this passage “popular unruliness irreducible to the disciplines of power.”⁴⁷⁸

Along these lines, the shift from a revolution’s moment of vanguard activism to its moment of mass mobilization poses both a possibility and a problem. Possibility appears with the promise of unity — of collective action and solidarity across otherwise disparate and disconnected populations.⁴⁷⁹ The “trouble with unity” is that it can and often does limit opportunities for democratic discussion and debate. If it is to be anything but the reduction of difference into sameness, if it is to retain any semblance of democracy, unity must be momentary and fugitive; it must be a disruption within ordinary politics; an extraordinary moment of association and assembly prior to politics; that which only becomes part of regular political life at the risk of stamping out differences in political subjectivity.⁴⁸⁰

Michel Foucault’s philosophical journalism provides the clearest link between these versions of radical democratic theory and the event of the 1979 Revolution. Foucault’s visits to Iran in the Fall of 1978 led to a series of articles about the appearance of a “collective will.” Shortly after their publication, post-revolutionary violence led to conflicting interpretations not only of his characterization of events but also of his broader approach. Critics have excoriated

⁴⁷⁸ For an articulation of contemporary radical democratic theory on these terms, situating democracy as a permanent challenge to power in all forms, see Mouffe, “Radical Democracy,” 31-45; Mouffe “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?,” 745-58; Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” 11-25. This mode of theorization is also prevalent in Foucauldian understandings of regulation as control over bodies; for Rancière’s reconceptualization of regulation as “an order of the visible,” see *Dis-agreement*, 29. For a critical survey of “evental readings” of Rancière’s *Dis-agreement* by contemporary political theorists that actually place him in the same camp, see Frank, “Logical Revolts,” 258-59. For a useful survey of related literature pertinent to the relationship between the extraordinary and the ordinary, see Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, 1-8, 13-14.

⁴⁷⁹ On political solidarity, its importance for democratic politics, the challenge of achieving it across difference, and ways of thinking it beyond identity politics, see Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity*, 4-5, 20, 24-25, 37.

⁴⁸⁰ Beltrán, *The Trouble With Unity*, 9; Butler, *Notes*, 166-68.

Foucault (and, more crudely, “post-structuralist” and “Nietzschean-Heideggerian” thought) for a relativist disposition said to obscure the consequences of the political spirituality celebrated in the revolution’s mass uprising.⁴⁸¹ On the other hand, those who have written in defense of Foucault have emphasized the distinctness of the extraordinary — the same kind of distinction prevalent in articulations of radical democracy. As these authors rightly note, the structural logic underlying critiques of Foucault entirely miss his genealogical framework.⁴⁸² And yet, when understood on these terms, it becomes difficult to see how the extraordinary can be a “scene of speech and reasons,” how it can be anything but “momentary.”

In this manner, despite their differences, structural analyses of revolution and theoretical considerations of radical democracy vis-à-vis the Iranian Revolution rely on a common underlying presumption: a sharp distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary.⁴⁸³ For Andreas Kalyvas, rather than understand these moments in strict and antagonistic opposition, the quality of the extraordinary may be understood as shaping the perpetual reconstitution of the ordinary. We may accordingly locate radical democracy within, and not simply opposed to, ordinary politics.⁴⁸⁴ The “logical revolts” considered by Rancière similarly suggest less of a

⁴⁸¹ Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 1-10, 13, 136.

⁴⁸² A genealogical framework is, by definition, not dialectical or causal. In this vein, Foucault’s engagement with events in Iran should instead be understood for what they are: an attempt to write a history of the present. See Honig, “What Foucault Saw,” 310-11; Ghamari-Tabrizi, “When Life,” 276-79.

⁴⁸³ For a related example of this sharp distinction in contemporary discourse, see Abbas Abdi’s response to an interviewer’s challenge in Khujastih-Rahīmī, “*Man Hīchgāh Rādīkāl Nabūdam*,” 50. The interviewer compares the radicalism in Abdi’s participation in the hostage crisis (which Abdi defends) with the radicalism behind the 2009 Green Movement (which Abdi has criticized). Abdi responds with reference to differences in conditions between the two periods in time, highlighting the extraordinary quality of the post-revolutionary period where he claims “rational collective action” [*kunish-i jam ‘i-yi ‘aqlānī*] simply did not exist.

⁴⁸⁴ The ordinary signals the routine functioning of the social and political order. The extraordinary signals a moment of dissolution where the terms of order are disrupted, challenged, and altered; it is when “the slumbering popular sovereign wakes up.” See Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, 6-7. On the related “overlap” between radical democracy and liberal constitutionalism, see Turner, “The Constitution of Radical Democracy,” 558-65.

sharp distinction. Where Kalyvas considers overlaps for the purposes of theorizing radical democracy within the context of the ordinary, Rancière (in this instance) outlines a path for theorizing the extraordinary anew.⁴⁸⁵

This chapter affirms Rancière’s perspective, arguing for less rigid conceptions of the difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary when theorizing social change. I do so by revisiting what Foucault called “the manner in which [the Iranian Revolution] was lived” [*la manière dont il était vécu*].⁴⁸⁶ Foucault’s framework, however, can only be adopted with some qualification. At times, his attention to “lived experience” reflects an underlying positivism — the presumptive existence of an external reality beyond the reach of representation and discourse (yet on behalf of which he was nevertheless somehow able to speak). That positivism conflicted with his own understanding of biopower and discourse elsewhere.⁴⁸⁷

In what follows, I reread and when necessary revise Foucault’s approach to the Iranian Revolution. Against the parts of his theoretical project that emphasize the primacy of lived

⁴⁸⁵ The collection from which this chapter’s epigraph is drawn is clearly not reflective of the entirety of Rancière’s writings, different parts of which may be read in different ways. There is one reading of Rancière as “evental.” There is another reading of Rancière as a theorist of ordinary politics. For a critical survey of the former and an argument for the latter, see Frank, “Logical Revolts.” As a theorist of the ordinary, like Kalyvas, Rancière theorizes the overlap between the extraordinary and the ordinary for the purposes of identifying radical democratic potential within the latter. See Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, 104, 108, 137. For a historical-theoretical study of ordinary politics from this perspective, see Frank, *Constituent Moments*. Yet where Frank’s study focuses on post-revolutionary political life, my chapter focuses on the moment of the revolution itself. In this regard, without relinquishing our critique of “evental readings,” the agenda set in *Logical Revolts* can unveil the ordinary elements of the event.

⁴⁸⁶ Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 792.

⁴⁸⁷ Edward Said’s *Orientalism* famously repeated this tension, turning to Gramsci instead of Foucault in the effort to account for the misrepresentations of prevailing discourse. See Said, *Orientalism*, 5, 23, 41, 70. For a critique of Said that points to the incommensurability between his positivism and humanism, on the one hand, and a Foucaultian notion of discourse, see Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 259-66. For the well-known critique of Foucault’s paradoxical positivism — that is, the creation of a collective subject through the effort to critique the subject — see Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 271-313. Spivak proposes to resolve the tension by exiting Foucault’s framework and turning to ideology. Mitchell seemingly resolves it within a Foucauldian framework, adding a concept of representation that coheres with biopower. In other words, Mitchell presents external reality as a product of the “world-as-exhibition” (i.e. representation). See *Colonising Egypt*, 17-18, 21.

experience, I consider the mass moment of the 1979 revolution through the prism of time and narrative. In this respect, the metaphysics of presence Foucault imputes on “lived experience” parallels the dissonance of time posited against the consonance of narrative; and yet the perceived dissonance of time is only an effect of the consonance of narrative.⁴⁸⁸ Taking narrative as our optic, we may reimagine the essentially temporal nature of the division between the extraordinary and the ordinary. We may, in short, subvert “the idea of time that underlies the contrast.”

The closure of a revolution is notoriously difficult to ascertain. The challenge is further magnified in the case of the Iranian Revolution where the logic of the revolt paralleled the emergence of a neoliberal mode of governmentality — a political rationality itself predicated on indeterminacy. According to this “logic,” that which *is* represents itself as that which it is *not*. Yet rather than prevent us from considering the problematic, this difficulty presents an opportunity to imagine new conceptual possibilities. To be specific, analyses of the manner in which the Iranian Revolution was lived as it entered its mass phase in September of 1978 and stumbled to some sense of closure in 1983 sheds light on the relationship between the ordinary and the extraordinary. On the one hand, the differences characteristic of ordinary politics are part and parcel of the extraordinary moment of the uprising without compromising that moment’s extraordinary quality. On the other, lasting feelings of unity appeared and persisted across agonistic, contentious, even violent expressions of political difference as the revolution inched closer and closer to closure. In line with this dissertation’s focus on the emergence of a revolutionary movement and the parallel emergence of a neoliberal political rationale, this

⁴⁸⁸ See Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 72-73. I discuss this point in further detail below.

chapter focuses on the extraordinary, demonstrating the centrality of ordinary political practice to its formation and persistence.⁴⁸⁹

Subverting the distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary in the context of the Iranian Revolution generates two conclusions, both of which are advanced here. The first is analytic, the second normative. First, the unpredictability of the revolutionary uprising is not an exceptional moment to be held apart from the regularly scheduled programming of structural analysis. Rather, how the new state came about played a role in how the new state functioned.⁴⁹⁰ Our analyses of ordinary politics in the post-revolutionary order can account for the persistence of this radical democratic potential within and in relation to the ordinary. The following chapter creates the grounds for this kind of analysis.

Second, insofar as the mode of resistance employed in revolutionary Iran shares features with instances of revolt and rebellion elsewhere in our contemporary moment, the argument presented here challenges assumptions prevalent in normative political theory. Romantic celebrations of the extraordinary — as simply outside of the disciplinary techniques founding ordinary politics — are partial. They are also potentially counter-productive. Overlooking the prospect of extraordinary politics as a “scene of speech and reasons,” these characterizations threaten to accept the disavowals fundamental to neoliberal political rationality — or, in other words, the discursive operations that constitute the building blocks of neoliberalism as ideology.

Section I offers a new perspective on Foucault’s reflections about revolutionary Iran. I emphasize Foucault’s discussions of associational activity in place of existing scholarly

⁴⁸⁹ I address possible avenues for further research concerning the establishment of ordinary politics in the Afterword.

⁴⁹⁰ This point partially echoes Kevan Harris’ argument that “the welfare push by Khomeini and the Islamic Republic was a method of containing and channeling the popular mobilization that emerged from the revolution into bases of support and legitimation for the State.” See Harris, “The Politics of Welfare After Revolution and War,” 138.

emphasis on his discussion of religion. With this, what Foucault calls a “collective will” could very well be an effect of narrative. Section II presents a framework for interpreting the manner in which the transition from activist uprising to mass demonstrations, from September 1978 through February 1979, was lived. Drawing on interview data, I advance both an interpretive and a substantive point. Against the prevailing overemphasis on ideology and political affiliation, I follow Naghmeh Sohrabi’s suggestion in comparing similarities and differences in “lived experience.”⁴⁹¹ I focus in particular on actors who became politically active after the revolution became “viable.” Substantively speaking, doing so reveals the centrality of narrative. Section III presents refigurations of the *shahādat* narrative alongside experiences of civic minded associational activity in the transition from the extraordinary to the ordinary. Herein the sharp line between the moments blurs, at times beyond distinction. In conclusion, I consider the prospect of neo-individualism as narrative care — that is, modes of reproduction and resistance in a bio-political welfare state predicated on the combination of collective and individual life distinct to an emergent political rationality.

I

Refiguring the Hedgehog: A Collective Will as Narrative Effect

A pharaoh has left. A pharaoh who from long ago forgot that in the unadulterated Persian language, the first person singular refers to himself as ‘I’ [*man*], not ‘we’ [*mā*] ... We. He would say we and everyone knew that in the bondage of his ‘I,’ he is alone and without friends. That that ‘I’ in and of itself is his worst enemy. A man, a free man [*rādmardī*], comes from afar. Every time with humility he says ‘I,’ the people [*millat*] find in his words the meaning of ‘we.’ If there’s an enigma [*rāz*] that goes by the name of ‘Khomeini’s secret,’ it is thus: the people [*millat*] appreciate ‘*āqā*’ [the sir] for he, as the tireless forerunner and precursor of freedom, justice, equality, and fraternity, is a crystallization of all of the demands and ideals of a people, national and human alike.

- Editorial, *Zan-i Rūz*, 3 February 1979⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹ See Sohrabi, “Muddling through the Iranian Revolution.”

⁴⁹² *Zan-i Rūz* [*Contemporary Woman*], no. 708, 14 Bahman 1357 [3 February 1979], 3.

Foucault begins his first reflections on Iran, published in *Corriere della sera* on 28 September 1978, with a discussion of a recent and devastating earthquake in Tabas, a small city in one of Iran's southern provinces. The article links the event to an earlier yet similarly devastating earthquake in another small city from the same province (Ferdows); that earthquake occurred in 1968. In a rhetorical flourish, Foucault connects his description of these events to the figurative "earthquake" of the event known as Black Friday (8 September 1978) when Pahlavi military forces opened fire on demonstrators.⁴⁹³ On that fateful day, the "ground in Tehran trembled under the tread of tanks."⁴⁹⁴

The discussion of earthquakes, real and symbolic alike, identifies an ethos of collective action in the face of a need for reconstruction. In 1968, "artisans" and "farmers" acted "against all official plans" under the supervision of a cleric [*un religieux*] and "reconstructed their own" version of the village [*reconstruit la leur*], which they called Islamiyeh.⁴⁹⁵ In response to the September 1978 earthquake in Tabas a similarly collective ethos compelled youth in Tehran to go door to door collecting funds while distinguishing their efforts at reconstruction from the government's. Indeed, "[t]he earth that shakes and destroys things may just as well bring men

⁴⁹³ The number of protestors killed ranges between eighty-seven (official government figures) and four thousand (public opinion). While "trials held immediately after the revolution show the true figure to have been closer to the lower one," the event spread rumors further radicalizing the crowd beyond its vanguard. See Abrahamian, "The Crowd," 23-24.

⁴⁹⁴ Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 664, my translation.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. Cf. Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 189-90. I note the original French when and where Afary and Anderson's translations miss meanings central to Foucault's argument and/or the argument I make here. In this instance, I have been careful to translate *reconstruit* as "reconstruct" and not "rebuilt." The terms "construction" and "reconstruction" become prominent in Iran's post-revolutionary period, e.g. *Jihād-i Sāzandigī* [The Construction Jihad] and descriptions of the 1990s as a period of reconstruction [*bāzsāzī*].

together” [*peut bien rassembler les hommes*].⁴⁹⁶ Foucault’s later articles on Iran may be read as efforts to elaborate this sense of association with respect to the political earthquake of Black Friday. We witness discussions of a “political will” [*une volonté politique*], a “political spirituality” [*une spiritualité politique*], and finally “a collective will” [*une volonté collective*], each phrase expressing the unity of non-state collective action first exemplified by 1968’s efforts at reconstruction.⁴⁹⁷

This “collective will” is distinct insofar as it is negative. In the first instance, it is non-political but also not necessarily social. Second, it is a rejection — a shared desire for the departure of the Shah. Third, its indisputable “focal point” (Khomeini) is defined by what he is not: “not there” (i.e. in exile); saying “nothing other than no”; and “not a politician.” Finally, the event is “not a revolution in the literal sense of the term” (i.e. the sense in which the term is understood in France).⁴⁹⁸ As such, a “collective will” may promise “something new” [*une nouveauté*]⁴⁹⁹ when and where existing normative conceptions of a “collective will” in France posited the social, sovereignty, and/or the subject as the telos of revolutionary action.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid. The reference to assembly — and, by extension, associational rights — should not be overlooked in Foucault’s use of the term *rassembler*. The French term connotes more than just a vague sense of bringing people together; it also signals the act of recruiting and unifying for the purposes of collective action.

⁴⁹⁷ Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 694, 715. Of the three uses of the phrase “political will” found in an essay “*À quoi rêvent les Iraniens?*”, it twice appears in scare quotes. I take this to signal the non-political nature of the activity orienting the formation of a shared will.

⁴⁹⁸ See *ibid.*, 715-6. Cf. Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 221-2. For a similar observation, see Honig, “What Foucault Saw,” 308. With the respect to understanding the collective will as non-political and non-social, Foucault writes that the “rejection of the regime is a massive phenomenon in society” [*un phénomène de société massif*] with “no counterpart and no expression in the political order.” Afary and Anderson translate *un phénomène de société massif* as “a massive social phenomenon,” a turn of phrase that mistakenly suggests the concept of “the social.” Regardless of translation, the paragraph clearly communicates a non-political phenomenon; in this sense, Afary and Anderson take misleading liberties when they insert the phrase “political will” in the following paragraph where Foucault himself uses *c’est celui* to refer back to a “collective will.” In a related fashion, Ansari describes what Foucault observed as “the social manifestation of the myth of political emancipation.” See Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*, 41. Yet the potential for “something new” lies in the negative aspects of the phenomenon — that which makes it non-political *and* non-social. By conflating society with the social, these renderings miss this potential.

⁴⁹⁹ Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 208; cf. Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 694.

Read in this light, Foucault’s reflections on Iran are actually reflections on the radical potential of popular sovereignty. Writing many years later, Judith Butler attempts to capture the shared qualities of this same radical potential across differences in context. If associational rights — the right to assembly or the freedom of assembly — are to be consistent with what they are, they can neither be grounded in natural law nor reliant upon the nation-state. Instead, popular sovereignty functions as a “precondition of politics.” An assembly “speaks” through the performative act of assembling, bringing into existence the collective it “names” by gathering and connecting bodies. Before any actual speech, this assembly retains plurality within the collective. In this sense, the act of assembly forces the state’s hand. The state is compelled to provide protection for that which at any moment threatens to undo it, precisely because state legitimacy relies on iterations of assembly to exist.⁵⁰⁰

Here is Foucault, similarly imagining a “unanimous will” prior to ordinary politics:

It is because there is no plan for a government, it is because the slogans are short [*courts*], that a clear, obstinate, almost unanimous will [*une volonté claire, obstinée, presque unanime*] may exist there. Iran is currently in a state of generalized political strike. I want to say in a state of a strike *in relation* to politics [*la politique*]. And this, in two senses: a refusal to sustain in any manner the system in place, to allow its apparatus, its administration, its economy to function. But also a refusal to make room for a political battle [*une bataille politique*] over the future constitution, over social dilemmas [*les choix sociaux*], over foreign policy [*la politique étrangère*], over the replacement of officials. It is not that one does not discuss them; rather one does so in such a way that these questions cannot give rise to a political game on the part of anyone who comes along [*donner prise à un jeu politique de la part de qui que ce soit*]. All of its quills out, the Iranian people form the hedgehog [*fait le hérisson*]: its political will [*sa volonté politique*] is to not allow politics to take hold [*de ne pas donner prise à la politique*]. It is a law of history: the simpler the people’s will, the more complex the job of the politicians. Undoubtedly because politics is not what it pretends to be — the expression of a collective will; it only breathes well where this will is multiple, hesitant, confused, and obscure to itself.⁵⁰¹

⁵⁰⁰ Butler, *Notes*, 156-75.

⁵⁰¹ Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 702. I have borrowed from but also changed the translation in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 212. This passage appears in a 5 November 1978 correspondence (“*Une révolte à mains nues*”) where Foucault recounts a debate internal to the opposition. The debate was between nationalist leader Karim Sanjabi, who proposed a referendum before the ouster of the Shah, and Ayatollah Khomeini, whose counter-proposal called for a referendum after the Shah had been deposed. Through his reportage, Foucault touches upon “the practical problem of all revolutions and the theoretical problem of all political philosophies”: when and how an extraordinary and decidedly non-political “collective will” transitions into the contestation and negotiation characteristic of politics in ordinary time.

Foucault’s statement — “All of its quills out, the Iranian people form the hedgehog” — recalls two prominent formulations in the history of European thought. First and most obviously, there is Archilochus’ quip popularized by Isaiah Berlin: “a fox knows many things, but a hedgehog one important thing.”⁵⁰² In these accounts, the Iranian people are characterized by their singular focus on “one important thing” (a rejection of the Shah) without recourse to any future plans — that is, without recourse to politics. Perhaps unintentionally, the passage also recalls Schopenhauer’s reference to porcupines huddling together on a cold winter day, inadvertently pricking one another with quills until they learn to maintain a moderate distance where they could tolerate and benefit from the proximity of their presence.⁵⁰³ Indeed, the Iranian people also appear as moderating one another’s behavior, refusing to “make room” in their huddle for political battles.

For all its similarities to Butler’s reflections on assembly, this second reading of Foucault’s reference to “the hedgehog” belies an important and suggestive point of dissonance. Where Butler’s reflections on assembly emphasize plurality within the collective without speech, Foucault presents the same kind of plurality *with* speech.⁵⁰⁴ In this regard, the formation of a people as “hedgehog” requires discipline, only allowing forms of political speech that prevent

⁵⁰² Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, 1-2.

⁵⁰³ This point inspires Freud’s reflections on group psychology, where the coming together of humans is understood to simultaneously contain an element of hostility. Freud goes on to resolve this fundamentally anti-social disposition with recourse to the concept of identification. See Freud, *Group Psychology*, 41-42, 46-47. We would do well to remember that Foucault uses the term *hérisson* and not *porc-épic* [porcupine], making the reference to Archilochus and Berlin more plausible (or at least more primary) than the one to Schopenhauer and Freud.

⁵⁰⁴ For a similar point, see Honig, “What Foucault Saw,” 305. Foucault’s characterization of the Iranian Revolution bears some resemblance to Hannah Arendt’s characterization of the American Revolution. Arendt, however, makes a hard distinction between politics, defined by speech, and the antipolitical (“mere physical visibility” or “sheer audibility”). See Arendt, *On Revolution*, 9-10.

politics from taking hold. Self-regulation and moderation appear *within*. Just as assembly (i.e. the extraordinary) is prior to and a precondition for political sovereignty (i.e. the ordinary), here a kind of disciplinary power appears as the necessary precondition for the extraordinary.

For Foucault, this speech is moderated by a spirituality manifest in certain renderings of Shi‘a Islam.⁵⁰⁵ Where Butler turns away from narrative in making her point, Foucault’s turn to Shi‘a Islam introduces the prospect of narrative as a mode of radical democratic counter-discipline. Put differently, the indeterminacy in Foucault’s “history of the present” may be re-conceptualized as an effect of narrative. Insofar as narrative reflects the very disciplinary processes against which radical democracy is posed, the perceived division between extraordinary and ordinary politics is not as rigid as it seems.

Foucault understood plural assembly in Iran in terms of presence. In May of 1979, after political violence and the ensuing controversies associated with post-revolutionary state consolidation in Iran had begun, he wrote:

If societies persist and survive, that is to say if the powers there are not ‘absolutely absolute,’ it is because behind all the consent and coercion, beyond the threats, the violence, and the persuasion, there is the possibility of this moment where life will no longer barter itself, where the authorities can no longer do anything [*où les pouvoirs ne peuvent plus rien*], and where, in front of the gallows and the machine guns, men rise up.⁵⁰⁶

With this, in both form (a history of the present unrelated to what follows, or rather an anti-teleology) and content (focusing on the “ultimately inexplicable” condition of a “man in revolt”),

⁵⁰⁵ When confronted with the notion of “Islamic government,” Foucault reports expressing skepticism: the notion seemed to simply repeat the basic formulas for democracy since the eighteenth-century with all of their ensuing problems. The response he reports receiving is that the Christian and industrialized West had “lost [the] meaning” of the formulas for democracy. He follows this up by pointing out that Iranians are searching for a thing “we others [*nous autres*] have forgotten” since the Renaissance: political spirituality. See Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 692, 694; cf. Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 206, 209.

⁵⁰⁶ Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 791. This translation draws from Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 263-64 with some changes. The plurality of *les pouvoirs* is retained. The translation of “where life will no longer barter itself” — as opposed to “where life cannot be exchanged” — is borrowed from Ghamari-Tabrizi’s eponymous chapter title.

he positioned his reflections against the discourse inaugurated by the age of “revolution” — a discourse that sought to discover foundational reasons [*raisons profondes*] and structural explanations for revolt and insurrection.⁵⁰⁷ The present-ness of the present separates the extraordinary from the functioning of ordinary politics even as the extraordinary persists underneath and within ordinary politics as a perpetual moment of disruption. Just as popular sovereignty is both the basis for and the undoing of state sovereignty, revolutionary Iran promises to be the “spirit of a spiritless world.” It is thus that, for Foucault, Iran reminds Europe of what it lost through two hundred plus years of institutionalized democratic revolution.

Islam is instrumental to creating this disruption because religion is both within and “outside” of history at once; as such, it can offer the “reasoning” for action by an otherwise “ultimately inexplicable man in revolt.”⁵⁰⁸ The “common people” in Iran are said to turn to Islam neither as a “refuge” nor as a “weight of inertia” placed before state policies; Islam is not a static entity resisting change as such by resisting the teleological changes brought about by modernization. Instead, political spirituality involves a “distrust of legalism” alongside “a faith in the creativity of Islam.”⁵⁰⁹ Shi‘ism offers an instrument in the full, dynamic, and constitutive

⁵⁰⁷ Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 790-92; cf. Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 263-64.

⁵⁰⁸ Foucault notably places scare quotes around “outside history” [*hors d’histoire*]. See Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 791. This pattern is repeated in his later discussion of spirituality as the care of the self. There, too, Seneca emerges as important figure precisely because he is situated at once both inside and outside of professional philosophical practice. See Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 155.

⁵⁰⁹ Afary and Anderson, 201-2, 206. Foucault’s interest in expressions of Islam as creativity align with his embrace of an Enlightenment without humanism. Foucault appropriates the term Enlightenment and re-signifies it for the purposes of a critique *against* humanism — defined implicitly as the positing of an essential nature to the human that is distinct and immutable. Accordingly, an ethics of the self — or, in other words, “the principle of a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy” — takes shape with the Enlightenment as an event. In positing the primacy of constituted selves, the Enlightenment presents a fundamental challenge to the notion of humanism. This remaking of the self is similar to the characteristic features of the rise of the modern novel according to Watt. In both cases, the “plot” (so to speak) is yet to be determined. In this regard, a devastating critique of what some take to be the humanities — i.e. the idea that the human may possess some essential character that can only be accessed, expressed, and represented through aesthetics — resides in one of the most quintessential humanistic forms, the novel. See Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?,” 32-51; Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 15.

sense of the term: it is the language political struggle takes for the “popular classes” [*les couches populaires*], turning everyday people into a “force.”⁵¹⁰

[Islam is] a form of expression, a mode of social relations, a supple yet simple organization that is widely accepted, a way [*manière*] of being together, a way [*façon*] of speaking and listening, that which allows one to be understood by others — to yearn with them, at the same time as them [*de vouloir avec eux, en même temps qu’eux*].⁵¹¹

Yet against the best intentions underlying Foucault’s genealogical method, this rendering loses sight of particularities to the discourse at hand. For all its worthy attention to the “popular classes,” the discussion of Islam in Iran overlooks a key element of popular cultural production from the long 1970s: an abiding emphasis on narrative. Shari’ati’s rendering of *shahādat* is a case in point. In positing the unique qualities of “colonization” in Iran, Shari’ati breaks from Fanon’s emphasis on the immediacy of corporal colonization and resistance. As opposed to complete historical erasure, Iran is said to experience colonization as “disfiguration” [*maskh shudan*]. In response, the narrative qualities of *shahādat* are emphasized: the validity of stories told by intellectuals depend on whether or not they align with present beliefs in the hearts and minds of the people. What Islam “is” must be determined by its reception; it speaks to the “popular classes” through the mechanism of narrative refiguration. Post-1968, that refiguration turns Islam into a revolutionary force, registering a sense of indeterminacy between the religious

⁵¹⁰ The primary challenge facing the promise of collective democratic action in terms of Foucault’s “therapeutic” ethics is a lack of clarity as to how we move from care for the individual self to collective action without the exogenous mediation of a common and worldly object of concern. See Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 39-52. Foucault’s writings on Iran may be read as resolving this problem. By way of religion, a “return” to a collective self could be the common object of concern animating collective action without the worldly. Myers does not address Foucault’s Iran writings in her otherwise insightful study.

⁵¹¹ Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 688; cf. Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, 202-3. I have borrowed from and modified the translation found in the latter.

and the secular. In this sense, narrative takes precedence over any immediate identification with Islam as such; the instrument (i.e. Islam) has its own instrument (i.e. narrative).⁵¹²

At first glance of course, speaking of narrative with respect to Foucault would seem to constitute an incommensurable task. The living being of literature in *The Order of Things* concerns literary works that defy the structure of narrative employment. Foucault instead celebrates the disruptive qualities of texts, portraying life's chaos and darkness without any semblance of order. His ensuing research on discipline and sexuality similarly resist the tendency for order implied by and constitutive of social norms. Where narrative suggests a closure, it threatens to perform a normative violence against the disordered and incongruous elements that otherwise constitute us as individual subjects.⁵¹³

In his later lectures and writings, Foucault reimagines narrative yet nevertheless maintains his earlier critique. In “Self Writing” [*L'écriture de soi*], his presentation of spirituality involves “a narrative of the self” [*un récit de soi*], an “account of one's relation to oneself” presented to others in the epistolary form. Unlike personal diary writing, the epistolary form allows an other's gaze to shape one's everyday actions. This understanding of narrative gives pride of place to relationality beyond the text.⁵¹⁴ That which cannot be narrated is the

⁵¹² Articulations of resistance in the 1977-8 uprising — from Ali Asghar Hājseyyed-Djavādi's direct call for the need to narrate history in his open letter of 1977 to activist testimonials capturing the historical and “epical” features of protests in 1978 — attest to the relevance of this framing beyond just Shari'ati's lectures. For the former, i.e. Hājseyyed-Djavādi framing his letters as an argument for historical writing, see Hāj Sayyid Javādī, *Du Nāmah*, 91-97. For the latter, see Section IV in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

⁵¹³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 42-44; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 150-57.

⁵¹⁴ Foucault, “Self Writing,” 217, 221; cf. Foucault, *Dits et Écrits* 1245-46, 1248. In a similar vein, Butler posits the inability to provide narrative closure as the condition for our capacity to relate to others. Narrative is a prerequisite for morality; relationality, however, precedes and exceeds narrative. A query by a ‘you’ who asks the ‘I’ to narrate itself and to thus give an account of whether it was or was not the one responsible for a particular action turns the subject (the ‘I’) into “a self-narrating being” (11-12). At the same time, the ubiquitous nature of sociality (i.e. the initial relationship between the ‘you’ and the ‘I’) suggests that narrative closure in the form of self-mastery — even after the fact — performs violence against what could be called the “truth” of the person in question. This truth (contingently defined because of its open-ended nature) is characterized by interruption and stoppage — and not the

precondition of narrative (our relationships to one another); it is also the condition of possibility for association and assembly (or a negative “collective will”).

Yet these renderings do not capture the entirety of what narrative is or can be. For Ricœur, critiques of narrative as performing a “violence of interpretation” fail to appreciate the “properly dialectical relationship” narrative bears to time. What we take to be disordered and ordered between time and narrative is not as static as critics make them seem. By suggesting that narrative consonance (order) is imposed on a lived temporal dissonance, these critiques divide consonance and dissonance between narrative and time in “a unilateral fashion.” In the process, they overlook the extent to which the perceived discordance of time is a construct (or effect) produced by the concordance of narrative.⁵¹⁵ The notion of an irreducible presence — whether as bodies in an assembly or the history of the present — repeats the opposition.

How might we instead understand the “collective will” as narrative effect? How might we better account for the cultural particularities Foucault intones in his reflections on assembly via revolutionary Iran? The response to these questions brings us back to the parts of Foucault’s reflections on Iran where he depicts events in terms of “earthquakes” and “reconstruction.” Just as the consonance of narrative and the dissonance of time are mutually constitutive, Foucault’s account of a “collective will” similarly contains a non-teleological dialectic between consonance and dissonance. When and where it appears in response to various “earthquakes,” the “collective will” involves reconstruction. In other words, its dissonant aspects — the “ultimately inexplicable man in revolt” — only appear as a product of disciplined actions in the effort to bring about an alternate form of order (i.e. consonance). Moreover, prioritizing this worldly

seamlessness that a self-contained narrative presupposes. In short, we are always “implicated, beholden, derived, sustained by a social world that is beyond us and before us” (64). See Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*.

⁵¹⁵ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 72-73.

associational ethos over religion allows us to look past strict divisions between a moment of revolutionary disruption in the present and a consequent moment of reconstruction. Instead, disruption and reconstruction may be understood as simultaneous and overlapping. By contrast, asserting the non-teleological qualities of a “history of the present” in order to shield Foucault from undue criticism regarding post-revolutionary violence threatens to reaffirm the fetish of dissonant time.

As narrative effect, the indeterminacy of a negative and irreducible “collective will” is produced (and reproduced) through reception. Beyond the dyadic relation between an ‘I’ and a ‘you’ said to give rise to narrative lies a different order of sociality: the prospect of a plural and collective ‘we.’ The act of composing a narrative neither does nor can determine a closed identity for inert readers to passively adopt. Rather, a narrative only achieves closure through the engagement of a potential audience. Put differently, narrative is itself inherently social and relational. Its influence on the subjectivity of readers must be measured against a reader’s ability to exercise judgment in grasping one meaning over another. The basis of that judgment in turn is contingent upon readers’ expectations and anticipations in relation to the world of action they encounter.⁵¹⁶ Because these readers are a plurality (that is, there could be many readers who refigure a text in a variety of ways), narrative allows for a potentially communal and collective structure of address. The ‘you’ of a narrative text may be appropriated, adopted, and adapted by a collective ‘we.’

⁵¹⁶ Kirstie McClure contrasts Ricœur’s account of narrative with “constructivist” approaches to historical writing that “presume the effacement of difference between past and present,” on the one hand, and accounts that affirm “the autonomy of the present” and “the pastness of the past,” on the other. According to McClure, refiguration presents a site “riddled with paradox” that refuses either side of this polar opposition. The role of judgment is central in directing elements from the past in the present toward future-oriented activity (244-45). See McClure, “Speaking in Tenses,” 234-49.

Foucault allows as much. In his last essay, where he defends himself against critics by asserting the present-ness of the present, he notes that a “striking” thing will appear for those who wish to understand the “lived” experience of the revolution — for those who wish to understand what was going through the heads of Iranian men and women in revolt as opposed to its *raisons profondes*:

Their hunger, their humiliations, their hate for the regime and their will to overturn it. They wrote [*inscrivait*] these in a conjured history [*une histoire rêvée*], at the border between the heavens and the earth, that was as much religious as it was political.⁵¹⁷

If “self writing” involves a letter sent to another, positing the self before the gaze of an other, then who is writing to whom when a people are in revolt, when a “collective will” has ostensibly emerged and acts to transform itself? With reference to Ricœur, we might respond to this question by disaggregating the revolutionary mass into three parts: activists, who wrote a “conjured history” before the gaze of a mass audience; a mass audience who bore witness in a “non-political” fashion; and a newly formed activist class, rising from the “non-political” mass as they “read” activist framings through plural yet nevertheless collective action. The following sections consider the “lived experience” of this third subject as a marker of the less than neat distinction between extraordinary and ordinary politics.

II

The End of Narrative?

We were professional actors for the front of right and truth
[*bāzīgarān-i hirfih-ī-yi jibhīh-yi haq*]
- Ahmad H.

For Ahmad H., the unforeseen victory of the Revolution on 22 Bahman 1357 [11 February 1979] only exacerbated a contradiction set in motion months before with the sudden

⁵¹⁷ Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, 792; cf. Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 264.

appearance of mass demonstrations. Since his first engagements with political activism as a teenager in 1354 [1975-6], Ahmad had forged an identity based on a simple and straightforward dichotomy. Following the instructions of older activists at his local mosque — all university students with varied political leanings yet nevertheless all invariably influenced by Shari‘ati — he came to see the world divided between *haq* [right, truth] and *bātil* [wrong, untruth]. Taking the political prisoner and Imam Husayn as orienting exemplars, those who stood on the side of right or truth [*jibhih-yi haq*] were promised happiness [*sa’adat*] in dying for their cause:

Arash: The last time we sat together, you said the experience of the victory [of the revolution] came as a shock, since the narrative of Imam Husayn had a quality where victory was not a thing one would think could actually happen... But when the revolution was victorious, all of a sudden... I mean, you didn’t expect this event to occur.

Ahmad: That’s exactly right. You see, we – for instance, our legends were those who had died in prison. They influenced us a great deal — those of us who before the start of the revolution were political and had heard a few things. There, as I mentioned before, a path to prosperity had been defined for us. This path to prosperity was a path of right [*haq*]; in essence, it has no future in this world. We’ll simply use up our lives on behalf of right [*haq*] without having any expectation of a determinate [*mushakhas*] outcome in this world. I want to say that there really was no ideology for us in the sense of defining distinct [*mushakhas*] ideals in this world. The revolution had no such ideological structure.

آرش: دفعه ی پیش که با هم نشستیم بودیم، گفتم که تجربه ی پیروزی یک شوکی بود. یعنی چونکه روایت امام حسین یک حالتی داشت که پیروزی یک چیزی نبود که آدم فکر بکند که در واقع اتفاق بی افتد... ولی موقع ای که خود انقلاب پیروز شد، یک دفعه... یعنی انتظار نداشتی که این اتفاق بی افتد.

احمد: همانطور. ببینید، ما مثلاً فرض کنید ما ها اونجا اون روزها اسطوره هامون آنها ای بودند که تو زندانها کشته شده بودند. آنها خیلی تو ما ها تاثیر میگذاشتند. ما ها که قبل از شروع انقلاب سیاسی بودیم و یک چیزهای شنیده بودیم. اونجا، همان جوری که گفتم، یک راه سعادت برای ما تعریف شده بود که این راه سعادت قدم گذاشتن تو یک راه حق، علل اصول، آینده ای در این جهان ندارد. ما فقط زندگی مان را مصروف حق می کنیم بدون اینکه چشم داشت به نتیجه ی مشخصی در این جهان داشته باشیم. بنا بر این میخوایم بگم که ایدئولوژی به این معنی که آرمان های مشخصی در این جهان برای ما تعریف کنه واقعاً وجود نداشت و انقلاب یک چنین ساختار ایدئولوژیک نداشت.

After months of instigating semi-spontaneous protest activity in Tehran’s mosques against the wishes of family members, prayer leaders, and neighbors alike (all of whom initially refused to participate), the onset of mass demonstrations in the capital city left Ahmad and his peers with a strange and unexpected feeling: they had suddenly “become the dominant voice”

[*yik jūrī ihsās kardīm ki sidāyi ghālib hastīm*].⁵¹⁸ Their parents congratulated them; their sisters felt proud; no longer an isolated minority, they saw themselves reflected in awe-inspiring crowds. The sudden change brought about paradoxes. The exhilaration of soldiers running away instead of attacking suggested they were no longer the meek and submissive [*mazlūm*] subject of *shahādat* — an object of suffering only fashioned as subject of action through physical demise. Instead of freedom, Ahmad recalls feeling “power” at the onset of an unanticipated mass movement. With that power, he claimed, their narrative came to an end and in its place contradiction began. What was a physically living *shahīd* — imbued with power, devoid of an immediate object of enmity — to do?⁵¹⁹

Ahmad’s experience of revolutionary empowerment as contradiction repeats an element of the dichotomy between reform and revolution found in the Jacobin-Leninist tradition of revolutionary vanguards. That dichotomy associates revolution with “an absolute liberation, a progressive and chiliastic philosophy of history, and the millenarian utopia of total emancipation.” The trope can function as a limit, creating an unbridgeable divide between ordinary politics, on the one hand, and extraordinary politics as unrealizable mystification, on the other.⁵²⁰ As a result, the moment when a revolutionary vanguard actually realizes its objective may ironically produce an existential crisis — an “end of narrative.”

⁵¹⁸ For an account of the revolution as a gradual shift from spontaneous to organized mobilization, see Bashiriyeh, *The State and Revolution*, 111-12. In contrast to this dichotomy, Ahmad qualified his early activism as semi-spontaneous. While not organized by external forces from above, he and his colleagues were nevertheless organized.

⁵¹⁹ The other contradiction Ahmad H. mentioned affirms Kurzman’s point about pragmatism and self-preservation. After years of having imagined himself ready to die, Ahmad H.’s first experience of violent protests — just before “Black Friday” on 17 Shahrivar 1357 — left him terrified. Previously, he had been at the very front of each march; thereafter, he slid into the safety of the crowd’s rear guard on, a place he kept until the revolution was over.

⁵²⁰ Kalyvas, *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary*, 2-3.

Yet Ahmad's account contrasts with the experiences of many of those present. As is to be expected, a vanguard constitutes a select minority. Unlike Ahmad, Mehrnoush T. remembers feeling "deep freedom" at the moment of mass mobilization. That feeling managed to last until 1981 — well beyond the moment of revolutionary uprising and, moreover, despite her opposition to emergent state power.

Mehnoush: I, at the time of the revolution, it was the happiest time of my life. Meaning with all of the things that got difficult, I wouldn't want it to be omitted from my life. The experience was really deep. Its joy was really deep, because you were so extremely close with everyone. For example, you would go to the theatre somewhere on the other side of the south of the city, then, for instance, at the end of the night you'd return right next to whoever, in a taxi, on the laps of, for example, all of a sudden 7 people, 8 people. You wouldn't know any of them. At that time, I didn't feel in the slightest way that I was a woman or a man. Nothing. I liked this a lot. For me, its freedom was deep. It still is.

مهرنوش: من، موقع ی انقلاب، شاد ترین موقع ی زندگیمه. یعنی با همه چیزهای که سخت شد، من اصلاً نمیخواهم از زندگیم حذف بشه. یعنی تجربه ای که بود خیلی عمیق بود. شادیش خیلی عمیق بود، برای اینکه خیلی نزدیک بودی با همه. مثلاً یک جایی یک تئاتر مثلاً میرفتی اونور جنوب شهر بعد مثلاً آخر شب بغل هر کی برمیگشتی. تو تاکسی رو دامن مثلاً یک دفعه ۷ نفر، ۸ نفر. هیچکی را نمیشناختی. من اصلاً، یک زره، مثلاً، تو اون دوره اصلاً احساس نمی کردم زخم، مردم. هیچی. خیلی دوست داشتم اینو. یعنی آزادیش عمیق بود برام. هنوز هست.

For Ahmad, by contrast, talk of freedom in the revolutionary moment signals an anachronism — a liberal ideal at odds with his experience:

Ahmad: The understanding we have of freedom today absolutely did not exist in those days. That kind of freedom was not sought after. For us to go after individual or liberal freedom... Fundamentally, it had no relevance at all. Our meaning of freedom was more about liberation from a dictatorship that is dependent on forces of international oppression and that is illegitimate with regards to the values of... Whether it was our leftists and radicals, or our religious [forces]. That part depended on where you were. As a result, when we got close to the victory of the revolution, freedom in that sense did not occur. A feeling of freedom in that sense did not work at all. But we felt power. Freedom in the sense of a subject who is powerful was taking place. And this too is external to that narration. Because in Imam Husayn's story — although you do see power, Hazrat Abbas or Imam Husayn himself kills a number of individuals with a sword and all, but in the end he fails.

Arash: What were the examples of this feeling of freedom, which was a feeling of power, at the time?

احمد: درکی که امروز از آزادی میکنیم مطلقاً اون روز وجود نداره. یک چنین آزادی طلب نمیشه. یعنی ما ها دنبال آزادی فردی و لیبرال و اینها... اصلاً اساساً هیچ موضوعیت ندارد. ما بیشتر منظورمان از آزادی رها شدن از یک استبداد وابسته است به نیرو های ستمگر بینالمللی و نا مشروع در مقابل ارزشهای... حالا چه چپ و رادیکال ما، چه دینی ما. حالا بستگی دارد به اینکه کجا بودی. بنا بر این وقتی که ما به سمت پیروزی انقلاب نزدیک میشدیم، آزادی به این معنا اتفاق نمی افتاد، احساس آزادی به این معنا اصلاً اتفاق نمی افتاد. ولی ما احساس قدرت میکردیم. آزادی به معنای سوژه ای که قدرت مند است. داشت اتفاق می افتاد. و این هم باز خارج اون نریشن است. برای اینکه شما تو قصه ی امام حسین... البته قدرت مبینی، حضرت عباس، یا خود امام حسین میره با شمشیر چند نفر را میکشد و فلان ولی نهایتاً شکست میخورد.

آرش: نمونه ی این حس آزادی که حس قدرت بود چیه در اون زمان؟

Ahmad: I'm – for each one of us, I'm saying, our individual feelings were feelings of power. We felt like we were powerful beings.

احمد: من دارم – تک تک مان دارم میگویم که حس های فردی مان حس های قدرت بود. احساس میکردیم که ما موجودات قدرتمند هستیم.

In part, the differences between Mehrnoush and Ahmad's experiences reflect differences in political affiliation, individual sensibility, and ideology. Ahmad's identification with the "dominant voice" of the revolution was no loose identification. From his earliest activism through the revolution's victorious moment, he was a self-described foot soldier in the pro-Khomeini Islamist coalition.⁵²¹ Mehrnoush, by contrast, was a self-described "materialist," a female art student, uninterested in what Shari'ati had to say; she recalled crying when Khomeini's plane landed in Iran. From years before, she had pursued leftist political ideas; in the midst of it all, she remained resolutely independent and unaffiliated with any political group, a position that often strained her friendships; for years after, she worked against the new state, finally joining a leftist organization before being imprisoned.

And yet a number of patterns upset a neat account of ideological difference as explanatory factor. Without ignoring these differences altogether, important insights emerge if and when we identify points of commonality in "lived experience" despite them. First, Ahmad and his cohort were not the only ones to understand revolutionary activity as sacrifice. Ahmad himself notes as much. In the same breath, he discussed his mentality ("our religious [forces]") alongside the mentality of "leftists and radicals." While the differences between leftist and Islamist understandings of sacrifice are undeniably significant, a basic shared ethos of self-abnegation was nevertheless prominent among those in the vanguard.⁵²²

⁵²¹ I define activists in the pro-Khomeini Islamist coalition as those who agitated on behalf of Islamism prior to the 22nd of Bahman and who never joined any of the oppositional groups competing with the IRP in the four years immediately after, explicitly or otherwise staying the course with what Ahmad H. called the "dominant voice."

⁵²² The clearest indication of the differences and similarities between Leftist and Islamist understandings of sacrifice can be found in the name of the OIPFG, the Organization of the Iranian People's Fadā'i Guerrillas. The term *fadā'ī*, popular in other Third World liberation contexts, indicates a willingness to lose individual life for the sake of a

Second, Ahmad’s experience of the revolutionary moment in terms of power could be found among activists from considerably different, even antagonistic, ideological positions. Where Ahmad felt empowered with the onset of the revolution’s mass moment, vanguard activists from other ideological persuasions just as immediately experienced disempowerment. Hesām K. was also a “professional actor” [*bāzīgar-i hirfih-ī*] on one of the revolution’s frontlines, part of a select minority orchestrating actions that later became the foundations for mass-based oppositional politics. An oil worker with close ties to the OIPFG, he played an instrumental role in the secret committees that organized the oil strike, bringing the Pahlavi state to its knees.⁵²³ As the transition occurred from an extraordinary period of oil strikes and limited domestic consumption to ordinary politics and post-revolutionary reconstruction, Hesām remembers oil workers in his refinery losing their opportunity for autonomous self-governance.⁵²⁴

Hesām: ... With respect to the movement, it is always said that the oil workers came forth late but nevertheless they came forth well and closed the job. I, today, would place a question mark after [the phrase]

حسام: ... و این هم به هر حال در سطح جنبش همیشه مطرح هست که نفتی ها دیر آمدند ولی خب به هر حال خیلی خوب آمدند و کار را تمام کردند. ولی من امروز،

collective ideal without any overt religious connotations. Fanon argues, with respect to Algeria, that the *fidai* does not choose death; in this regard, the logic is not one of sacrifice. See fn233 in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. And yet, for instance, Merhnoush remembered a shared self-negating sensibility across ideological difference both before and after the revolution. Before the revolution, when open political affiliation was often impossible and generally unknown (even among activists), politically-inclined university students tended to congregate in “non-political” student associations where they exercised self-governance: the college library, the cafeteria, the hiking club. In the cafeteria, they deliberately sat in an architectural addition with low lighting to avoid the pleasures the rest of the building afforded. Mehrnoush recollects these students joining *both* Islamist and Leftist groups as the revolution neared.

⁵²³ Differing accounts of the oil strikes as “proximate cause” exist depending on differences in perspective reflecting, yet again, differences in experience. According to Hesām (who was careful to qualify his recollections as particular to his experience), the strike began on 24 Mihr 1357 [16 October 1978] after a series of unanswered demands via petitions written in protest of the Cinema Rex fire in August of that year. The strike was declared unlimited on 13 Ābān in response to attacks on university students. At this stage, the seventeen original demands made by the Abadan refinery’s merchandise division — which were initially all *sinfi* [guild-based] including increased wages, improving the quality of water and air, and housing inequality — became four clear political demands: (1) an apology from the director who had allowed armed forces to enter the space of the refinery because of the risk introduced by firearms; (2) freedom for all political prisoners; (3) an expression of solidarity for the teachers who had gone on strike earlier; and (4) the dissolution [*inhiāl*] of SAVAK.

⁵²⁴ For documentation of this point, see Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 147, 229-30n52.

“closed the job.” I don’t think the oil workers closed the job. I think politics behind the scenes closed on the oil workers.

...

Hesām: ...I remember when in the Abadan refinery a seven-person council was selected, six of them were leftists, one of them was religious. But it didn’t take long, maybe only a few days, before the religious-minded [*mazhabīyūn*] went to the Hosseiniyeh in the Isfahan mosque, sat and spoke with one another and made their decision. They came [back] and held another election where only one of those six leftists remained on the council, the rest [of which was made up] of their own people.

البته، «کار را تمام کردند» را یک علامت سوال جلو اش دارم. من فکر نمیکنم نفتی ها کار را تمام کردند. من فکر میکنم نفتی ها را سیاست های دیگه ی پشت پرده تمام کردند.

...

حسام: من خاطر می آید در پالایشگاه آبادان، یک هیئت هفت نفری که انتخاب شد، شش تاش چپ بود، یکیش مذهبی بود، ولی طولی نکشید، شاید فقط چند روز که مذهبپون رفتند در حسینیه مسجد اصفهانی ها، نشستند با هم صحبت های شان را کردند، تصمیمات شان را گرفتند، آمدند دو باره انتخابات و از اون شش تا چپ فقط یکی شان ماند و بقیه شدند خودشان.

Differences in experience were certainly determined by who a person was (i.e. one’s ideological and political commitments) in relation to emergent powers. And yet, despite these differences, reading Ahmad and Hesām’s experiences side-by-side reveals an underlying point of commonality: regardless of ideological and political commitments, those activists at the proverbial center of events (the revolutionary vanguard in Tehran; the organizers of the oil strike in Abadan) similarly experienced an unpredictable revolution as an immediate encounter with power. This experience was not afforded those further away from the centers of power.

A third and final significant pattern exists within the pro-Khomeini Islamist coalition. In my recorded interactions with Ahmad, a reference to something akin to “deep freedom” unexpectedly appeared after our formal interview. I had spoken with Ahmad in an office shared with Mahmoud D. I was initially scheduled to interview both at once. Mahmoud, however, arrived late. As a result, without having heard Ahmad’s account, he began to tell his own story as Ahmad and I listened, prompting an exchange between the two colleagues over the differences between freedom and power.

Mahmoud: ...In my mind, the main issue, which you’re asking about, was freedom... Freedom was, as they say, a focal point in my thinking and concerns...

Ahmad: The freedom you mentioned, your understanding of freedom – it’s okay if I ask a question? What was your understanding of freedom?

محمود: ...مساله ی اصلی، که شما میگی، آزادی بود تو ذهن من... آزادی به قول معروف یک نقطه ی کانونی فکر و دغدغه های من بود...

احمد: آقا، آزادی که گفتی، فهمت از آزادی — عیب نداره من هم سوال بکنم؟ فهمت از آزادی چی بود؟

Arash: Please.

Ahmad: I mean, experientially. Does it cohere with *this* understanding of freedom?

Mahmoud: Look, in that environment, that issue and later its consequences, we would sit at the foot of the pulpit. When the clerics would come [to our village], some of them had a political strain. They would implicitly make political references. We had teachers who we later learned were political... We would understand some of the ideas. The topic of freedom—for instance, are we not free? The discourse of critique gradually became important for me. I would read *Tawfiq*, for example. Alongside it I would also read Mr. Makārim's *Maktab-i Islām* because it was nearby, they would bring it [to our village]. A mixture of intellectual, religious, and leftist works: I would read them all.

Ahmad: I meant, how did that understanding of freedom differ from today's liberal understanding of it?

Mahmoud: No, it was, in effect, freedom as interpreted by Isaiah Berlin: freedom from. It was as if we felt we are in bonds and shackles that we should not be in. And also, that whole thing with the Shah and the government was gradually – contesting authority was, essentially, a strong inclination of mine. I took the same approach in relation to my father. I had problems with authority.⁵²⁵

Mahmoud's account of negative freedom only temporarily satisfied Ahmad H. Later in the same interview, he interjected again.

Mahmoud: ...I've tried to give you a model. This type that I've mentioned, one might say, was typical of the revolutionary vanguard everywhere [in Iran]. A mixture of intellectualism (for some this strain might be stronger and they would become secular), religion, and socialism (meaning social issues and inequality). These three categories – and that freedom! Freedom as an archetype in all of our minds. A myth whose meaning we didn't even understand.

آرش: خواهش میکنم.

احمد: یعنی تجربی، ها. یعنی با این فهم آزادی معنی دارد؟

محمود: ببین، تو اون فضا، اون داستانه و بعد پیامدهایش، ما پا منبر میرفتیم. روحانیون که میآمدند بعضی هایشان رگه های سیاسی داشتند. به تلویحی اشارات سیاسی میکردند. معلم های داشتیم که بعدا فهمیدیم سیاسی بودند... یک مقدار ایده ها را میگرفتیم. مقوله ی آزادی. ما آزاد نیستیم مثلاً؟ بحث نقد برای من یواش یواش مهم شد. مثلاً توفیق را میخواندم. در کنارش « مکتب اسلام » آقای مکارم را هم میخواندم چون نزدیک بود، می آوردن. ملغمه ای از کارهای روشنفکری، مذهبی و چپ. همه ی اینها را میخواندم.

احمد: یعنی اون درک آزادی میخوام ببینم با درک لیبرال امروز چه فرقی دارد؟

محمود: نه، آزادی در واقع به تعبیر آیزیا برلین، فریدم فرام بود. یعنی گویا احساس میکردیم که توی قید و بندهای هستیم که نباید باشیم. و یک مقدار هم میگم اون داستان شاه یواش یواش و حکومت و – اقتدار ستیزی یک مقدار تو من قوی بود اصولاً. با پدرم هم همین زاویه را داشتیم. یعنی با اقتدار مشکل داشتیم.

محمود: ...الگو را من میخوام پیاده بکنم. این تیپیک (type) که من گفتم شاید بشه گفت که یک تیپیک (typique) نیروهای پیشگام انقلابی تو همه جا بودند. ملغمه ای از روشنفکری، حالا یکی این رگه اش بیشتر میشد میشد سکولار (secular)، مذهب، سوسیالیسم، یعنی مساله ی اجتماعی و نابرابری. این سه تا مقوله – و اون آزادی! آزادی به عنوان یک archetype که تو ذهن همه ی ما بود. اسطوره ای که معنی اش هم نمی فهمیدیم.

احمد: آزادی به معنی حربه.

⁵²⁵ *Tawfiq* was the name of popular satirical magazine, published intermittently in Iran between 1923 and 1971. For a brief historical sketch, see Milani, *Eminent Persians*, vol. 1, 406-9. *Maktab-i Islām* [The Doctrine of Islam] was a monthly periodical formally tied to the Qom seminary that began publication in the 1950s. Mahmoud's "problem with authority" in contrast to Ahmad is reflective of a broader divide between provincial and urban activists in the revolution. As Kaveh Ehsani argues, "[t]he accelerating political engagement of small provincial towns and their rural peripheries in national affairs during the revolutionary years was, in part, a reaction to the authoritarian and highly centralized actions that characterized the formation of the modern national state." See Ehsani, "The Urban Provincial Periphery," 43.

Ahmad: Freedom in the sense of deliverance [the Arabic term *hurriyā*].

Mahmoud: Yes. Freedom from. In sum, you are to be emancipated from authority.

Ahmad: I mean to say, it also had a celestial dimension —

Mahmoud: Yes. Yes.

Ahmad: — an aspect of servitude and worship. It was a bit like this as well.

Mahmoud: And the interesting thing is, my state of mind was always a mixture.

محمود: بله. فریدوم فرام دیگه. از اقتدار خلاصه رها میشی.

احمد: یعنی میخوام بگم یک جنبه ی قدسی هم داشت —
محمود: بله. بله.

احمد: -- یک جنبه ی عبادی. یک خورده هم اینجوری بود.

محمود: و جالب اینه که من همیشه ملغمه ای بود ذهنم.

Perhaps no exchange better affirms Foucault’s discussion of a unanimous will as political spirituality. Through Ahmad’s interventions in Mahmoud’s account, Shi’a Islam appears as a technique to bring about a collective will. Ahmad is seen here searching for an idea of impossibility, a freedom one could never conceivably realize in this world, an unrealistic utopia. A “celestial” [*qudsī*] freedom understood as “deliverance” [*hurriyā*] would better match his experience of *shahādat* and, by extension, his narrative about “the end the narrative.” What form of negation could be more irreducible, more resistant to the traffic of ordinary politics, than the negation of the worldly altogether?

Yet even without the direct addition of otherworldly metaphysics, Mahmoud’s repeated assertions of a purely negative archetype of freedom — defined as a mythical rejection of authority without an affirmative plan for its replacement — matched the disruptive and non-teleological spirit of Ahmad’s experience. But the disassociation of the phenomenon from a strictly metaphysical worldview created the possibility for plurality within the collective. After their apparent agreement, Mahmoud’s reassertion of a “mixture” — intellectualism, socialism, and religion — relegates Ahmad’s depictions of freedom as “deliverance” [*hurriyā*], “celestial” [*qudsī*], and “servitude and worship” [*ibādī*] to one aspect among others.

This notion of “mixture” was not solely a reflection of the “multiple, hesitant, confused, and obscure” quality of politics Foucault posits in opposition to a unanimous will. Rather, Mahmoud’s presentation of negative freedom as an archetype within which “mixture” appears mirrored the prospect of multiplicity within unanimity, of speech within assembly, suggested by Foucault’s observations on Iran. Before the fall of the Pahlavi regime, this dynamic appeared alongside already contentious exchanges between leftists and Islamists.⁵²⁶ The example of the oil industry is again illustrative. Over the course of the strike, despite infringements by the Islamists on oil workers’ autonomy before February 1979, Hesām remembered experiencing the kind of unity described in Foucault’s journalistic accounts — a notion of collectivity and assembly where political difference and disagreement only existed to the extent that the collective itself remained unified.

Hesām: ... Therefore, with respect to the issue of disagreement between the religious forces and the leftist forces in the core of the strikers’ movement before the revolution, I [did not] witness conflict, I [did not] witness discord – apart from debates.

Arash: There were debates?

Hesām: There were even debates among the leftists. Like, man, this tactic is correct or incorrect. It was even possible for them to fight with one another. But disagreements where they would negate one another, disagreements to such a degree where the ranks must separate, those did not exist.

حسام: ... بنا بر این مساله ی اختلاف بین نیرو های مذهبی و نیرو های چپ توی بدنه ی جنبش اعتصابیون قبل از انقلاب، من شاهد درگیری، شاهد اختلاف و اینها – بحث رو بگزاریم کنار.

آرش: بحث بود؟

حسام: بین خود چپ ها هم بحث بود. که، آقا، این تاکتیک درست است یا غلط است. حتی ممکن است دعوا هم بکنند یا هم. ولی اختلافی که هم دیگه را نفی کنند، اختلافی که در این حد باشد که صف ها باید جدا بشه، وجود نداشت.

Each of these individuals (Mehrnoosh, Hesām, Mahmoud) experienced some level of distance from the revolution’s “dominant voice.” By her own account, Mehrnoosh inhabited a liminal position, working in student governance alongside members of the activist vanguard who eventually assumed that “voice” while maintaining a skeptical disposition with respect to their

⁵²⁶ For an account of leftist clashes with Islamists, see Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, 146-48. These tensions were reflected in Khomeini’s statements for unity — a unity he posited against the Left. For one such example, see my discussion of Khomeini’s 24 March 1978 declaration in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

habits. Hesām's overt political affiliations put him on the losing side of a power struggle despite sharing Ahmad's experience of centrality in the lead-up to the revolution. Finally, despite a shared ideological framework, Mahmoud's provincial background put him on a different track. Where Ahmad was at the center of events, Mahmoud recounted traveling to Tehran from his provincial village in order to chant alone in a bazaar around the 17th of Shahrivar simply to "empty himself." Only later, after the revolution had clearly turned the corner into a mass movement, was he able to transfer to Tehran University where he too was at the proverbial center of events.⁵²⁷

Yet there is more at stake here than just experiential determinism. Dissonance, the raw data of the subaltern, cannot be presumed to speak for itself. Rather, we must attend to continually constructed cultural artifacts of lived experience as that experience evolves. In this vein, instantiations of difference in individual experience between Ahmad and Hesām, on the one hand, and Mehrnoush and Mahmoud, on the other, reflect a change in the experience of the revolution brought about by the onset of mass mobilization. That change did not simply signal the "end" of the narratives animating the uprising but rather their refiguration — or, the interpretive adaptation of their themes. To be more precise: in the midst of his argument against traces of liberal freedom in the revolution, Ahmad concedes feeling freedom as empowerment. Whereas one person's empowerment can mean another's disempowerment between different elements in a revolution's vanguard, mass mobilization can bring about and enhance feelings of

⁵²⁷ In his case study of Rahormoz, Kaveh Ehsani argues that "the Islamic Republic should be characterized as much by its provincial character as by its Islamist ideology." See "The Urban Provincial Periphery," 39. My efforts here are meant to similarly de-center events by identifying the experiences of different members of the revolutionary mass as distinct from the ideal type of an urban activist affiliated with the "dominant voice."

empowerment for an otherwise “non-political” or non-vanguard mass.⁵²⁸ The latter involves narrative refiguration, not “the end of narrative.”

In the secular metaphysic of freedom animating Mehrnoush and Mahmoud’s respective experiences, Ahmad’s understanding of revolutionary freedom as deliverance appeared on new terms. The collective itself became that to which one could submit and through which one could find deliverance. Speaking of her attendance at the famed ten nights of poetry readings at the Goethe Institute in 1977, one of the defining events of political liberalization for the dissident intellectual class,⁵²⁹ Mehrnoush reflected:

Mehnoush: ... You would simply enjoy the atmosphere...

Arash: ... Why? What was the atmosphere like? Do you mean the atmosphere of those ten nights or the atmosphere of the Institute in general?

Mehnoush: The atmosphere of those ten nights.

Arash: What was it [like]?

Mehnoush: Well, first of all, there was a feeling of solidarity— of closeness to everyone. It was as if you have permission to speak. It was as if all of those secrets in the books are now coming out. They can now speak aloud. This part of it was interesting. One person might speak and say nothing, another might say something. Just the fact of seeing everyone. I wasn’t [affiliated with] anything in particular at the time.

مهرنوش: ... فضا اش را اصلاً دوست داشتی...

آرش: ... چرا؟ فضا اش مگه چی بود؟ یعنی فضای اون ده شب یا اصولاً فضای انستیتو؟

مهرنوش: فضای اون ده شب.

آرش: چی بود؟

مهرنوش: خب اولاً یک حالت سالیبری — یک حالت نزدیکی به همه. مثل اینکه اجازه داری حرف بزنی. مثل اینکه همه ی اون یواشکی ها توی کتابها حالا دارد می آید بیرون، بلند دارند صحبت میکنند. اینهاش جالب بود. یکی حرف میزد، هیچی نمی گفت. یکی میگفت. همین که همدیگر و میدیدی و اینها. من چیز خاصی نبودم.

These reflections articulate a feature of the revolution’s non-vanguard participants — the initial uprising’s audience as opposed to its “professional actors.” The gradual shift from one

⁵²⁸ Harris makes a similar point when presenting the participation of “newly empowered social classes” in both the 1979 revolution and 2009’s Green Movement as an unintended effect of welfare policies. His point follows Tocqueville’s example in identifying relative dispossession as the structural cause of revolt. In Tocqueville’s case, the presence of “a kind of disjointed and spasmodic freedom” in the *ancien régime* explains why the revolution occurred in France as opposed to elsewhere in Europe. See Harris, “The Politics of Welfare,” 148; Harris, “A Martyrs’ Welfare State and its Contradictions,” 77-80; Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the Revolution*, 123. By contrast, the sense of empowerment that I describe here is not a reflection of social policy in ordinary times (i.e. a subject of structural analysis) but rather the unpredictable collective belief of the revolutionary experience (i.e. that which rests beyond structural explanation).

⁵²⁹ The ten-nights of poetry was organized by the Writers’ Association. For a brief summary of the event, see Abrahamian, “The Crowd,” 16.

moment to another — from vanguard agitation to mass action — realized a potential latent within accounts of sacrifice, what I referred to earlier as neo-individualism. In the shift from “professional actors” to audience members, the willingness to negate one’s individuality for the sake of a collective ideal gives way to the realization of the individual through the collective. Here, the individual does not appear *opposed* to the collective but rather realizes autonomous, uninhibited, and unplanned action *through it*. Mehrnough’s account accordingly adds an affective dimension to Kurzman’s point about pragmatism — the idea that a revolutionary mass participated when collective belief in the success of the revolution emerged or rather when the perception of collective participation promised to ensure individual safety. That kind of action is not strictly a matter of individual calculation to ensure self-preservation; it is also the joyful realization of individuality through the safety of a group.

The ascendance of neo-individuality corresponds with an ascendance of political speech — the beginning, not the end, of narrative. In this regard, Mehrnough’s sense of a “permission to speak” echoes Edward Said’s discussion of the “permission to narrate.”⁵³⁰ At the same time, it echoes Foucault’s radical democratic points about sociality as a necessary precondition for narrative. With respect to the latter, her reflection repeats the notion that assembly and association are prior to speech and politics. Mehrnough’s sense of individual freedom and empowerment emerged when and where she found herself in a collective, when and where she felt “closeness to everyone.” Combining her account with Ahmad’s — or rather, with the general thesis of an unpredictable and non-teleological collective subject — the “end of narrative”

⁵³⁰ Edward Said, in characteristic form, adapts a Foucauldian perspective in order to address misrepresentations of Palestinians despite the presence of more discourse than ever about Palestinians. In this “disciplinary communications apparatus,” effective narratives about the present actuality are “either attacked with near-unanimous force or ignored” (29-31). The absence of narrative as terrorism (i.e. anti-narrative) loses “the logic of cause and effect as between oppressors and victims” (36-37). See Said, “Permission to Narrate,” 27-48.

actually appears to be the place where the non-vanguard's narrative may begin. Discordance gives birth to concordance.

But lest we forget, the “end of narrative” only appears as such in relation to narrative itself. Concordance gives birth to discordance in turn. Or rather, discordance is an effect of narrative; it does not simply exist. Just as Ahmad's sense of empowerment appeared through an experience that exceeded the framework of his narrative, so too did Mehrnoush's experience of freedom appear against the limitations of the narratives available for her before the revolution's mass moment; it appeared by virtue of her dis-identification with the revolutionary vanguard.

Taken together, the interplay between concordance and discordance in the lived experience of the Iranian Revolution demonstrates the emergence of a collective self as narrative effect. How did this non-teleological dialectic play out in the revolution's mass moment? How did it inform the transition from the extraordinary to the ordinary? The following section responds to these questions by considering narrative and empowerment in collective practices of care — the reconstructive associational ethos that emerged in response to Iran's various “earthquakes.”

III

Revolutionary “Non-Politics”

The following section pursues the feeling of freedom as empowerment — a proverbial “permission to speak” — as it manifested in post-revolutionary efforts to bring about order by a second wave of Islamist activists. Their various initiatives comprise revolutionary practice as political and social reconstruction — the same ethos Foucault observed in response to Iran's “earthquakes.” The ordering quality of their actions mirrors the operation of narrative as

concordance. In following their actions, we may account for the continuity of ordering and reconstruction from revolutionary resistance to post-revolutionary state consolidation.

An account of the demonstrations held on the fortieth of Ashura [‘*arba ‘ayn-i husaynī*] after the Shah fled Iran [30 Dey 1357/20 January 1979] registers some of the narrative changes afoot.⁵³¹ Published in *Zan-i Rūz* at a moment of newfound press freedom, the account is sandwiched between an editorial emphasizing the need for reporting “reality” (as opposed to “distractions”) and an article about the families of political prisoners-turned-*shahīds*. The latter evoked familiar tropes regarding the death of Husayn and the need to report past injustice as Zaynab.⁵³² Each article repeats the suffering and severity animating vanguard activism in the revolution’s initial phase of uprising. By contrast, the article representing late January’s mass demonstration exudes overwhelming joy. The mother of a *shahīd* encountered by the author in the midst of the protesting crowd declares, “One day you will see my tears, but not today!” Shortly thereafter, the author is struck by the sound of what appears to be self-flagellation:

I am perplexed. On the Ashura of this fortieth, they did not beat their chests, they did not pound their heads, why now? I turn around, no, no... They are not beating their chests. In harmony with the music of self-

⁵³¹ “*Pā Bi Pā-yi Āzādī, Pīsh Qadam Ru!*” [“Step by Step with Freedom, Onward!”] in *Zan-i Rūz* [*Contemporary Woman*], no. 707 (7 Bahman 1357/27 January 1979): 4-9, 64.

⁵³² The editorial emphasizes the need to focus on the suffering in Nāzi Ābād instead of the *maisons* in Paris. See “*Har chi mīkhāhad dil-i tangat, bigū!*” [“Say Whatever Your Longing Heart Wishes”] in *ibid.*, 3, 66. See also “*Guftigū bā khānivādih-yi shāhidan*” [“Dialogue with the Families of *Shahīds*”] and “*Guftigū ba khānivādih-yi zindānīyān*” [“Dialogue with the Families of Prisoners”] in *ibid.*, 12, 60-1. That the political prisoners mentioned in the latter were all members of the OIPM suggests an editorial board sympathetic with the MKO. Positioning mothers as the central actors in protest activity aligned with a broader tactic later employed by the MKO, providing further evidence of these sympathies. For instance, an interviewee who was active with the MKO shortly after the revolution shared an account of a young woman based in a northern province whose assignment involved organizing the mothers of political prisoners and *shahīds* from the Pahlavi era; the MKO would deploy these mothers in post-revolutionary demonstrations when and where they anticipated violent attacks by the newly forming state. They did so deliberately in the effort to put police forces in an uncomfortable and even contradictory position. And yet, despite important differences in ideology, at this point in historical time (i.e. before the 22nd of Bahman), these particular differences were not yet significant for the public at large or the activist foot soldiers considered in this chapter. In this vein, the same interviewee recalls shooting at Pahlavi tanks on 10-11 February 1978 without any sense of who he was shooting with, all while receiving food and support from those who lived in the building.

flagellation, they steadfastly clap their hands together. And how they resonate, the cries of these hands, in the midst of all these cries!⁵³³

The article thus presents Shari‘ati’s account of *shahādat* in revised form without abandoning the narrative’s broader framework — without, in other words, “the end of narrative.” Against traditional renderings of *shahādat* as passive suffering and blind ritual performance, Shari‘ati had imagined an active disposition of defiance where pleasure could be found in the affirmation of pain. The revolutionary vanguard’s enactment of Shari‘ati’s account, its emplotment as uprising, rendered worldly pleasure impossible; the follower of Shari‘ati who was an early activist molded himself in the image of Husayn, anticipating physical death. But what of the revolution’s “non-political” observers who had been reluctant to participate in direct action? What of the non-vanguard? Worldly pleasure of the sort afforded by the revolution’s mass moment would seem to present less of an ideational contradiction for these parts of “the people”: those who stood in solidarity with the revolution’s initial activists; those who were less inclined to sacrifice their physical lives; those who later comprised the much safer crowds of the general strikes and large demonstrations. Their very worldly existence cohered with the narrative’s emplotment. Or rather, the revolution’s mass moment appeared differently from the perspective

⁵³³ “*Pā Bi Pā-yi Āzādī*,” 64. The contrast between suffering and joy may be further discerned in the language used. In activist literature recounting the fortieth-day protests in the first half of 1978 (addressed in the previous chapter of this dissertation), considerably smaller crowds were often described as “floods.” The hyperbole may be taken as an effort to agitate a larger movement into existence. For one such example, see *Dar bārayih qīyām*, vol. 1, 49. The author in this account uses a similar language to describe a veritably larger crowd of people. In doing so, however, she sheds the language of agitation and instead directly positions herself as an observer: “Have you ever had the fortune to be a spectator before a flood?” After Tasu‘a and Ashura, this had been her third “flood” witnessed. See “*Pā Bi Pā-yi Āzādī*,” 4, 8-9. The author’s characterization of these later demonstrations as her three “floods,” without mention of earlier demonstrations, echoes my earlier point regarding a temporal break in revolutionary history between an initial stage of activist agitation and a later stage of mass protest. For my categorization of the revolution in two general stages — activist agitation and mass participation — see fn357 in Chapter 4.

of Zaynab because Zaynab was always meant to stay alive. In this context, victory did not signal “the end of narrative” but rather narrative refiguration.⁵³⁴

In a sense, the distinction between these subject positions, between Husayn and Zaynab, resembles the distinction between the extraordinary and the ordinary. In light of this resemblance, just as the extraordinary and the ordinary are not strictly separate from one another but rather overlapping and mutually necessary, so too may the revolutionary subject at the onset of mass mobilization be understood on different terms. Instead of choosing between Ahmad H. (the Husayn-like activist based in Tehran) *or* the mothers of *shahīds* (who first chided and later celebrated victory), previously marginal Islamist activists straddled the movement from the extraordinary to the ordinary. In other words, these followers of Shari‘ati contributed through actions that bridged the extraordinary and the ordinary. In the process, they experienced a narrative that lingered, at times conflicting with their own efforts to affect closure.

Zibā L. got lucky once. Her friend was selected as a military conscript; she herself was selected as exempt. They laughed at the prospect of either one of them shooting a gun. And then, Zibā got lucky once more. Despite her degree in Management, she abhorred the thought of administrative work. She yearned to do something cultural, something artistic. Her brother had a friend, someone he had shared a cell with during his brief stint as a political prisoner, who had connections with The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults [*Kānūn-i Parvarish-i Fikrī-yi Kūdākān va Nawjavānān*]⁵³⁵ — one of the “non-political” state-

⁵³⁴ Again, as Aghaie notes: “The Karbala Paradigm has proven to be a very flexible and dynamic set of symbols and rituals.” See *Martyrs of Karbala*, xiii. Its flexibility and dynamism are on display here.

⁵³⁵ The history of this Institute is complex and largely untold. For an informative primer, replete with rare archival images, focusing on the Institute’s organizational structure, the establishment of libraries, and the activities of librarians, see Bakhtiari, *Iran: RPM*, vol. 2, 5-34.

sponsored associations where dissident intellectuals were employed and ostensibly distracted from political agitation.⁵³⁶ The friend pulled a couple of strings and Zibā found herself in a 6-month training program for librarians, led by some of Iran’s leading dissident writers, poets, and painters. She identified herself as non-political before the experience but claimed to have been politicized through it. Upon completing the course in 1354 [1975-76], Zibā was assigned an afternoon shift at a library in one of southern Tehran’s poorest neighborhoods.

There, she was struck by a profound sense of *lūtīgarī* and *mardānīgī* [masculine virtue and chivalry]. Over the course of her three year stint as librarian, Zibā reciprocated the ethos, developing a deep bond with the community.⁵³⁷ The young boys in the neighborhood called her cohort “the library’s ladies” [*khānūmhāyih kitābkhūnih*], walking them to taxi stations after work when night had settled in. They even fought fistfights on their behalf. “They felt as if they needed to take care of us” [*ihsās mīkardan ki bāyad az mā murāqibat bikunand*]. When asked what *lūtīgarī* was, Zibā responded:

Zibā: Taking care of others without expectations, without expecting anything in return. This sense of *lūtīgarī* is especially present in Iranian men who have a sense of guardianship and protection in relation to children and women ... It is an Iranian culture ... When one wanted to speak about a man as a good man, one would say he’s a *lūtī*. ‘He’s one of those *lūtīs*.’ Meaning, he’s a person who attends to kids and women, has no expectations, sacrifices [*īsār*] his money on this path, and gives his money — all out of concern for others. For example, one of the

زیبا: مواظبت کردن از دیگران بدون توقع داشتن از ...
توقع چیزی. به خصوص این حالت لوتی گری توی
مردهای ایرونی هست که حالت سرپرستی و نگه داری
نسبت به زنها و بچه ها دارند ... این یک فرهنگ ایرانی
بود ... مردی را میخواستند به عنوان مرد خوب اسم ببرند
میگفتند لوطی است. « از اون لوطیاست. » یعنی آدمی که
به بچه ها و زنها میرسه، توقع ای نداره، پولش را در این
راه ایثار میکنه، وقتش را میده، پولش را میده برای توجه
به دیگران. مثلاً یک خصوصیتی که به تختی نسبت

⁵³⁶ Ziba recounted watching the trial of a noted Pahlavi-era torturer (known as Tehrani) in the post-revolutionary period where he confessed that SAVAK had instructed him to place dissident intellectuals in either the television services or her Institute, i.e. *Kānūn-i Parvarish-i Fikrī*. For *The New York Times*’ account of these proceedings, see Jonathan Kandell, “Savak Agent Describes How He Tortured Hundreds,” *The New York Times*, 18 June 1979, A2. For coverage of the trial and confession in Persian-language periodicals, see “*Hizb-i tūdh-yi irān rā sāvāk rahbarī kard*” [“SAVAK Directed Iran’s Tudeh Party”] in *Ittilā’āt*, no. 15880 (26 Khordād 1358/16 June 1979), 9; “*Kushtār-i fajr’ 9 fadā’ī va mujāhid bi dastūr-i shāh būd*” [“The Tragic Kill of 9 Fadā’ī and Mujāhid Guerrillas Was Ordered by the Shah] in *Ittilā’āt*, no. 15885 (31 Khordād 1358/21 June 1979), 9.

⁵³⁷ *Lūtīgarī* and *mardānīgī* are difficult terms to translate. Generally speaking, they indicate masculine virtue. I discussed the *lūtī* in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. For more in-depth accounts, see Naficy, *A Social History*, vol. 2, 266-69; Adelhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, 30-52.

characteristics they would relate to Takhti the wrestler was that he was a *lūtī*, his *lūtīgarī*. He would give money to poor women, he would act as a guardian for poor families, paying attention to them. This *lutīgarī* was a pronounced and extraordinary characteristic of Iranian men.

میدهند، کشتیگیر، که لوطی بود، لوطیگریش. پول میبرد به زندهای فقیر و اینها میداد، خانواده ی فقیر را سرپرستی میکرد، توجه میکرد. این لوطیگری یک خصوصیت برجسته و فوقالعاده ی مرد ایرانی بود.

Despite her association of the trait with men, Zibā's personal experiences suggested that these practices were not limited to male gender identification. The "library's ladies," the young cohort who showed up for the afternoon shift, demonstrated their own version of chivalry and virtue. "Our relationship was not just that of a librarian" [*ravābitimān faqat yik kitābdār nabūd*]. Zibā recounted giving half of her monthly salary to buy clothing and art supplies for children, taking oaths on behalf of students facing expulsion from school, walking little girls home, comforting children's mothers in cases of domestic abuse — in short, going above and beyond her responsibilities as a state employee without expectations of receiving anything in return.

These interactions came to a head in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. A group of young boys she had kicked out of library for misbehaving took the opportunity provided by an atmosphere of sudden lawlessness to gather outside, cursing Zibā's name and threatening her with physical harm. Without recourse to a higher authority, Zibā drew on the practices she had learned from the community.

Zibā: All of a sudden, I called him over, one of those boys, and said I've got something to tell you. He came over and said, "What is it?" I said, "Look, you were in the library for a few years. Now you're older and you've left the library. I always thought, when I come to your neighborhood, I'm like your sister, like your *nāmūs* [female family member whose chastity and honor are preserved]. As an Iranian man, you have to take care of me as if I were your *nāmūs*. But you're standing in the street, cursing me out, bringing up my name so that everyone can learn my name, cursing. It's as if you were doing these things to your sister, to your mother, not to me.

Arash: What did he say?

Zibā: He said, "I'm at your service" and it was over. They no longer gathered in the street to throw rocks or

زبیا: یک دفعه من صداش کردم، یکی از اون پسر ها را، گفتم باهات کار دارم. آمد تو و گفت، چیه؟ گفتم، « ببین، چند سال تو این کتابخانه بودی. حالا هم سنت بالا رفته، از کتابخانه رفتی و اینها. من فکر میکردم که تو محل شما میآیم، من مثل خواهر تو، ناموس تو ام. تو، به عنوان یک مرد ایرانی، باید از من مثل ناموست نگاه داری بکنی. ولی تو تو خیابان وای می ایستی، به من فحش میدی، اسم مرا میآوری که بقیه اسم مرا یاد بگیرند، و فحش میدی. این مثل اینکه تو این کار رو به خواهرت میکنی، به مادرت میکنی، نه به من.

آرش: چی گفت؟

زبیا: گفت، « نوکر شما هم هستم. » تموم شد. و نه دیگه تو خیابان جمع شدن، سنگ بزنند و کاری... تموم شد. یعنی،

do anything... It was over. I mean to say, even though I kicked them out of the library, even though we had disagreements, just that phrase — “young man, I am your *nāmūs*” — led him to cool down from his state of anger, to no longer bother me, to no longer bother the librarians. These are the things I learned from them.

میخواهم بگم با اینکه من از کتابخانه بیرون اش کرده بودم، با اینکه با هم مخالفت داشته بودیم، همین کلام که « پسر، من ناموس تو هستم » باعث شد که از اون حالت خشم و اینها اش پایین بیاد و دیگه با من کار نداشته باشه، با کتابدار ها کار نداشته باشه. میگم، این چیزهای بود که من از اونها یاد گرفتم.

The revolution’s moment of disorder and lawlessness provided an occasion for the ethos connecting the neighborhood and the “library’s ladies” to come forth. From well before, both sides exceeded what was sanctioned and prescribed by the state in taking care of one another, appealing to autonomous unincorporated cultural principles that carried practical import. When exercised, these principles echoed an ethos of “non-political” associational activity as both state reproduction and resistance.

Similar practices — practices according to which a population would take care of one another beyond the directives or purview of the state, a kind of autonomous civic-mindedness — informed grassroots activism among Islamists during the transition from mass-based revolutionary uprising to post-revolutionary state consolidation. Where Ahmad H.’s activism could not see beyond the disruption of order, those Islamist activists working on the margins of these same events experienced empowerment less as contradiction and more as an opportunity to do something.⁵³⁸ Through the preservation of order in urban neighborhoods and the creation of order in rural villages, they went about reconstructing the state-effect on new terms. Instead of

⁵³⁸ Mohsen Nourbakhsh articulated a similar ethos as responsibility. A University of California trained economist active in the Islamic Student Association, who in 1360 [1981-2] at the age of the 30 became the director of Iran’s central bank and has since remained a political force as one of the few economists with an affiliation to Hezbollah, recalled a widespread feeling of responsibility in those early post-revolutionary years. Speaking of his selection in then prime minister Muhammad-Ali Rajā’i’s government as Minister of Economics and Finance, Nourbakhsh has said: “Until that moment, I had no experience in administrative work. But that feeling of responsibility, which at the beginning of the revolution existed for everyone, was in me too. At that time, it was felt that if an action is agreed upon and it is recommended that someone take responsibility for it, to the extent that it is possible, the individual must perform with requisite cooperation. I, too, with this sense of duty, accepted [the position].” See Amūī, *Iqtisād-i Sīyāsī-yi*, 64.

simply breaking with the collective will that brought about the demise of the previous regime, reconstruction worked through it.

Like Ahmad H., Mohsen R. was in his late teens and active in the Islamist protests that took place in the capital city. His involvement, however, began much later. His first recollection of direct participation in a protest was on the fortieth-day of those killed in Yazd in late March 1978; the protests he participated in took place in Tehran in early May. Like Mahmoud D., Mohsen attributed his relative absence to his geographic location. He was a university student in a provincial city during the Fall of 1978 when demonstrations began.

On the afternoon of 22 Bahman, Mohsen went to work with young men in his Tehran neighborhood to establish a Committee. Based off of credibility earned during the revolution, the group was allowed to gather weapons at their local mosque. Like similar efforts in other parts of Tehran, the Committee sought to preserve order. With the sudden absence of a police force, they resolved disputes and prevented theft while mitigating against “moral corruption.”⁵³⁹ Like Ahmad’s recollection of agitation, Mohsen’s Committee emerged semi-spontaneously [*khud jūsh*] through coordinated grassroots initiatives. Its moment of spontaneity, however, only lasted a brief period of time; within a matter of ten days, he remembered identity cards issued by the revolutionary leadership.⁵⁴⁰ Mohsen remained an active and committed member until 1983.

⁵³⁹ The Committees were a prominent and controversial feature of post-revolutionary state consolidation. For a discussion of their role in state consolidation and their ironic incorporation within the state, see Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, 56-59.

⁵⁴⁰ While the Committees in Tehran formed spontaneously through the autonomous and undirected initiatives of local youth, those in provincial cities formed through the institution and leadership of bazaar merchants, local mosques, and the clergy. Moreover, where the former appeared in opposition to the state, the latter appeared in coordination with the Pahlavi state, suddenly unable to provide order in a moment of state crisis. See Khosrokhavar, “Le Comité dans la Révolution Iranienne,” 86, 89. In this vein, provincial Committees more accurately reflected the dynamic of reproduction and resistance identified as central to Iran’s social transformation in Chapter 1 of this

Yet even within a context of state institutionalization, this particular Committee continued to develop its own initiatives. In other words, the “narrative” did not simply come to an end. Without any instruction or oversight from without, Mohsen’s Committee created a health clinic for the neighborhood, drawing a curtain across its office on the other side of which a female doctor and a male pediatrician provided volunteer services. Against the logic of a sharp break between the moment of the uprising and that which followed, his account presents an ongoing and negotiated set of practices. His Committee did not simply go from one extreme to another — from spontaneity to centralized state command. Rather, the process of transition was itself contested, leaving opportunities for a persistent sense of continued revolutionary activism.

Along with this pattern of negotiated action, Mohsen recounted efforts to retain the spirit of Shari’ati’s teachings by ridding Ashura practices of superstition well after 22 Bahman (and the issuance of identity cards).

Arash: What form did the culture of Ashura take after the 22nd of Bahman?

Mohsen: As I said before, the culture of Ashura was strengthened. Why? Because the clerical class had arrived. Before the revolution, the culture had a non-governmental quality. It was traditional. After the revolution, well, with respect to radio and television, schools, textbooks, newspapers, and the greater freedom of the clerical class and mosque activity, it became much more expansive. Naturally, its superficial quality overpowered what Shari’ati strove to do to with it. I mean, its bells and whistles so to speak increased, you know? In 1358 [1979-80], even in our mosque, where we were the be all and end all, where we were in control, we strove to get rid of the traditional and superficial appearances of demonstrations and Ashura — for example, setting the *‘alam* and *kutal* aside once and for all; changing the chants to revolutionary chants. We would even say, “Don’t give *nazr*. There’s no need to serve food.” We weren’t successful on that one. On some things we would win; on some things they would win... This was all under the influence of Shari’ati. But gradually this line of thought, which we

آرش: فرهنگ عاشورا بعد از ۲۲ بهمن چه شکلی داشت؟

محسن: عرض کردم، فرهنگ عاشورا تقویت شد. چرا؟ چون روحانیون هم آمده بودند. تا قبل از انقلاب بیشتر حالت غیر دولتی داشت، سنتی بود. بعد از انقلاب، خوب، با توجه به رادیو تلویزیون، مدارس، کتابهای درسی، روزنامه ها، و آزادی بیشتر روحانیت و فعالیت مساجد خیلی گسترده تر شد و طبیعتاً اون حالت قشری ترش غالب بر اون چیزی که شریعتی مثلاً میخواست، تلاش میکرد که چیزش بکنه. یعنی زلم زیمبلش به قول معروف بیشتر شد، میدونی؟ توی سال ۵۸، خود ما تو مسجد مان که یکه تاز بودیم و دستمان بود، تلاش کردیم که ظواهر سنتی و خرافی تظاهرات و عاشورا را حذف کنیم. مثلاً علم و کتل و اینها را دیگه بیاوریم بیرون، بگذاریم کنار. و شعارها شعارهای انقلاب بشه. حتی میگفتیم مثلاً نذر ندین دیگه، غذا نمیخواهد بدین که مثلاً موفق نشدیم. یک جاها ای ما بردیم، یک جاها ای اونها بردند... اینها تحت تاثیر آموزه های شریعتی بود. ولی به تدریج این جریان فکری که حالا مثلاً نمونه اش را ما تو محل خودمون داشتیم و جا های دیگه هم شنیده بودیم... این به تدریج از صحنه چی شد؟ با

dissertation. The consolidation of the Committees in the city was quick but equivocated; the consolidation of the Committees in the provinces was even more limited. See Bakhsh, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, 58.

saw examples of in our neighborhood and heard of elsewhere... What happened to this gradually? With the governance of the clerical class, it disappeared. The year 1358 [1979-80], on the 1st of Muharram in 1358 [21 November 1979], Mr. Khomeini delivered a message where he declared that Ashura and Muharram processions should be performed as originally intended — with the *'alam* and *kutal* and so forth. What did Mr. Khomeini emphasize in his message? That it be performed according to the old traditions. Those of us who were followers of Shari'ati were very disappointed. What does this mean? We've arrived. We want to have a kind of renaissance, to bring about revision and renewal. Things can't be as they were. Gradually, the substantive thought in Ashura was driven backwards.⁵⁴¹

حاکمیت روحانیت از بین رفت. سال ۵۸، اول محرم ۵۸، آقای خمینی یک پیامی دادند و طی اون اعلام کردند که مراسم عاشورا و محرم باید به شکل خودش برگزار بشه. همان علم و کتل و اینها... تو اون پیام آقای خمینی تاکید میکنه به چی؟ به اینکه طبق سنت های قدیمی برگزار بشه. و خیلی ما ها که طرفدار شریعتی بودیم خیلی دلخور شده بودیم. آقا یعنی چی؟ ما آمدیم میخوایم مثلا یک نوع رنسانس داشته باشیم دیگه و تجدید نظر های بکنیم. همیشه که مثل همانطوری باشه. به تدریج این تفکر محتوای از عاشورا به نظر من به عقب رانده شد.

We might say that the “end of narrative” occurred for Mohsen roughly one year after it had occurred for Ahmad. The differences between them were not solely a reflection of their respective life trajectories. They also reflected different understandings of Shari'ati. When presented with the notion that an “end of narrative” occurred with the revolution's victory on the 22nd of Bahman [11 February 1979], Mohsen challenged my (borrowed) account of Shari'ati.

Arash: ...After all, there is no expectation of victory in this narrative of Imam Husayn. I mean, there is no expectation that one will succeed in this world.

آرش: ...بالاخره این روایت امام حسین، انتظار پیروزی توش نیست، یعنی انتظاری نیست که طرف موفق بشود توی این عالم.

Mohsen: No. It's not like that at all.

محسن: نه. اصلا این نیست.

Arash: I'm interpreting it incorrectly?

آرش: اشتباه تحلیل میکنم؟

Mohsen: You see...

محسن: ببینید...

Arash: Because I wanted to ask a question about victory on the day of 22 Bahman. Was it expected or did it happen all of a sudden?

آرش: چونکه میخواستم سوال بپرسم راجع به پیروزی روز ۲۲ بهمن. قابل انتظار بود یا اینکه یک دفعه شد؟

Mohsen: It's right that Imam Husayn became a *shahīd*. It is true that he does not achieve victory. But the philosophy of *shahādat*, the understanding of it that Shari'ati advances, is entirely victorious... It is propaganda for uprising against injustice, against despotism... I say this as one manifestation of that kind of thinking, meaning that we too were on that path.

محسن: درسته که امام حسین شهید میشه. درسته که به پیروزی نمی رسه. اما فلسفه ی شهادت، اون برداشتی که شریعتی مطرح میکنه، اون کاملا پیروزی است... تبلیغ قیام علیه ظلم، علیه استبداد... من که میگم به عنوان مثلا یک گوشه ای از اون تفکر، یعنی ما هم تو همین جریان

⁵⁴¹ For a discussion of different interpretations of the Karbala paradigm in pre and post-revolutionary Iran, see Kamran Scot Aghaie's *The Martyrs of Karbala*. *'Alam* and *kutal* refer to symbolic banners popularized in Iranian Muharram processions. For a discussion of the term in general, see Jean Calamard and J.W. Allan, "'Alam Va Alāmat," 785-91. Whereas the *'alam* is wide and usually made of metal, *kutal* are narrow and made of cloth. *Nazr* refers to donations and charity given, usually to help the poor, in exchange for God's favor.

One cannot advance this interpretation that Husayn fails. Husayn is victorious... It is not passive [*infī'āl*] at all... It is not reactive. It is active [*fa'āl*]. It is not an object acted upon [*maf'ūl*]. One who believes in this path is not afraid to die. Why? Because death is not the end of life. Just as Husayn is alive, you too will remain alive. You go forth. Where you cannot defeat your enemy with weapons, you do so with your blood, with your death.

بودیم. اصلاً این برداشت نمی شود که حسین شکست خرده. حسین پیروز است... هیچ انفعالی نیستش... عکسالعملی نیست. فعال است. منفعل نیستش. کسی که معتقد به این جریان است از مرگ نمی ترسد. چرا؟ چون مرگ پایان زندگی نیست. همانطور که حسین زنده است تو هم زنده خواهی بود. میری جلو تا، اگر با اسلحه نمی توانی، با خون خودت، با مرگ خودت، دشمنت را شکست بدهی.

His response contains a noteworthy contradiction reflective of a pattern of transcendence in Shari'ati's thought. On the one hand, Mohsen granted me the notion that Husayn “does not achieve victory.” At the same time, speaking as one who was “on that path,” he insists that Husayn is active and victorious even in defeat. We might say that his adherence to the moment of transcendence in Shari'ati's story matches his own post-revolutionary activism in his neighborhood Committee — his continued identification as an active [*fa'āl*] subject as opposed to a passive object of action [*infī'āl, maf'ūl*]. In this rendering, what was salient about Shari'ati's framework was an abstract, even metaphorical, sense of sacrificial action and not the more literal understandings of *shahādat* as physical death in pursuit of right or truth.

With the victory of the revolution, the commitment to remaining “active” — the desire to do something when the victory of the revolution had already been achieved — became a common sensibility among the populace at large.

Mohsen: In the exciting environment that forms after the victory of the revolution, or in the revolution, the people — in my opinion, this plays a big role in national solidarity — all become self-sacrificial [*fadākār*]. Everyone likes to participate. Everyone wants to do something.

محسن: مردم تو اون فضای هیجانی که بعد از پیروزی انقلاب یا تو خود انقلاب شکل میگیره، این در اون همبستگی ملی به نظر من خیلی نقش دارد، یعنی همه فدا کار میشوند. همه دوست دارن که مشارکت بکنند. همه دوست دارند که یک کاری انجام بدهند.

Like Mehrnoush's expression of joy in collectivity, Mohsen's observation offers yet another addendum to Kurzman's concept of pragmatism. The same essentially conservative sensibilities that prevented large portions of the population from participating in the earlier stages of the uprising encouraged participation in civic engagement when the revolution had clearly

succeeded. Both cases, pre-revolutionary non-participation and post-revolutionary participation in the “dominant voice,” represented the safe and certain thing to do.⁵⁴² Participation in the local Committees offered one of the more celebrated forms of activity, providing a direct link between the revolution’s extraordinary and ordinary moments. Where Ahmad’s mode of activism involved an unqualified *disruption* of order — an unmitigated form of extraordinary action resulting in an “end of narrative” as the Pahlavi state began to fall apart — participation in the Committee involved the *preservation* of order.

Self-sacrifice was accordingly reimagined. The same issue of *Zan-i Rūz* from late January 1979 chronicles an emergent civic ethic among the youth of Nāzi Ābād, a neighborhood in the south of Tehran where “the people” of the revolution were said to reside.⁵⁴³ The article is written as a lesson for the individually minded in the city’s more affluent northern neighborhoods. As opposed to understanding self-sacrifice solely as death in revolutionary action, the article presents an ethic of self-sacrifice as civic-minded action. The director of a locally-established voluntary Islamic Cooperative responsible for redistributing medicine and foodstuff declares:

An activity that started years ago in this neighborhood and that will continue as long as we live is that we gather after 7:30 at the mosque where we discuss local problems and search for solutions... We’ll continue what we’re doing until the victory of our country’s Muslim *millat* [nation, people.] We expect the good Muslim people [*mardum*] of our neighborhood to observe justice, self-sacrifice, and generosity, to not buy more than they need. That is all!⁵⁴⁴

Like the earthquake relief efforts in Ferdows in 1968 and Tabas in 1978, local activists combatted the Pahlavi state by acting collectively beyond the state’s purview. They engaged in

⁵⁴² In a group interview with factory workers by two French anthropologists, recorded on 21 February 1979, a similar conservatism appears. The workers express (and lament) a collective reluctance to join pre-revolutionary strikes alongside adamant support for the revolution (after it had succeeded). See Vieille and Khosrokhavar, *Le Discours Populaire*, vol. 2, 7-9.

⁵⁴³ Mīnū Banākār, “*Az barubachi-hāyi khūb-i ‘Nāzi Ābād’ bīāmūzīm!*” [“Let Us Learn from the Good Kids of ‘Nāzi Ābād’”], *Zan-i Rūz*, n. 707 (7 Bahman 1357/27 January 1979): 10, 63-65.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

self-governance, redistributing goods and providing welfare services without state supervision, effectively taking care of themselves.⁵⁴⁵

These efforts were neither uniform nor uncontested. For this very reason, Shari‘ati’s emplotment of *shahādat* could continue, albeit on different terms. The same article profiles the efforts of local youth protecting a gas station.

The day the Shah left Iran, a military truck that had been settled here from awhile before abandoned its position. Fights and commotion over gasoline and oil increased. That night, all of the local youth gathered in Nāzi Ābād’s Vali Asr mosque and we decided to take responsibility for order [*intizām*] in the quarter in the spirit of cooperation and collaboration with the people [*mardum*] just as we ourselves had taken care of issues pertaining to directing traffic. From that night forward we began to work. Our security group [*gūrūh-i intizāmāt*] comprises ten individuals. From six in the morning until the end of the night, we are here. Overnight, four of us stay on as watchmen . . . But people [*mardum*] create problems for us at every hour. They haven’t gotten used to showing respect for the rights of others.⁵⁴⁶

The young committee member goes on to list the difficulties his group endures at the hands of the very neighborhood folk it intends to serve. A fistfight occurs in the midst of the interview:

A number of people approach with empty gallon containers for gas, but these kids aren’t ready to cede others’ turns to them. They attack the kids of order [*bachihā-yi intizāmāt*], a number of whom I see are injured with blood running down their face and arms. But even with all of this, they stand by their word with manly courage [*mardānih rūyi harf-i khudishān īstādi-and*].⁵⁴⁷

This dramatic rendering — of the effort to manage ordinary life under extraordinary conditions — echoes Shari‘ati’s emplotment of *shahādat*. Those who strive to preserve order through self-governance and self-sacrifice appear as victims of unjust and misdirected abuse without, however, relinquishing a posture of agency. In the effort to preserve order — to ensure the mundane functioning of ordinary life — they are active, even heroic.

⁵⁴⁵ For a related account of the atmosphere at the time, published elsewhere, see “*Yādāsh-t-hāyih haftih*” [“Weekly Notes”] in *Sipīd u Sīāh* [*Black and White*], n. 1094 (27 Dey 1357/17 January 1979), 3. The third “note” chronicles how the populace’s individualism had changed into a collective spirit of doing without. This copy of the magazine also includes a review of the newly opened press, where it notes that 100,000 copies of this issue were published. See *ibid.*, 4-5.

⁵⁴⁶ Banākār, “*Az barubachi-hāyi khūb*,” 64.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

Along these lines, Mohsen drew a distinction between a select group of activists continually ready for sacrifice and a general population momentarily taken by a desire for self-sacrifice but ultimately unable to follow through on a regular basis.

Mohsen: What happens to this atmosphere [of solidarity] over time? Under the influence of various factors, it gradually weakens. One [of these factors] is that, after a week acting as sentry, people got tired. Some were like this. They weren't able to do more.

...

Mohsen: This atmosphere is an atmosphere of excitement, an atmosphere of passion so to speak, which decreases under the influence of various factors. That is what I witnessed. When the war happened again a new wave of feeling took shape to defend the homeland, to defend the motherland, which lasted until '61 [1982], until Khorramshahr, after which point a new chapter gradually begins. First it is really intense: mobilization and the return of the *shuhadā*. These reinforce an atmosphere of passion and defense but then, gradually, with the passage of time, people get tired. Nobody considers fatigue in their analysis. Not those who do a class-based analysis, nor those who do a non-class-based analysis. Neither usually think of this — that, man, people just want to live and they get tired. There is only ever a small group that is always ready to work. It is a small group that goes forth from the beginning until the end, either getting killed or whatever.

محسن: این فضا {فضای همبستگی} به تدریج چی میشه؟ تحت تاثیر عوامل مختلف به تدریج کم رنگ شد. یکی اینکه مردم یک هفته که شب پاسداری میدادن، دیگه خسته میشدند. بعضی ها اینطوری بودند. یعنی توان شان بیشتر از این نبود.

...

محسن: این فضا فضای هیجانی است، فضای به اصطلاح احساسی که به تدریج تحت عوامل مختلفی، این چیزهای بود که ما شاهد اش بودیم، کاهش پیدا کرد. تا جنگ میشه جنگ که شد دو مرتبه یک موج جدید احساس دفاع از وطن، دفاع میهنی، شکل میگیره که اون هم تا سال ۶۱، تا خرمشهر، یک مقطع، یک فصل، از ۶۱ به بعد به تدریج تغییر میکنه. اول خیلی زیاد است، بسیجی و برگشت شهدا. اینها باز فضای احساسی و دفاع را تقویت میکنه ولی به تدریج بر اثر گذشت زمان مردم خسته میشوند. یعنی خستگی را هیچکس در معادلاتش نیاره. نه انهای که تحلیل طبقاتی میکنند، نه انهای که تحلیل غیر طبقاتی میکنند، معمولا اینو چیز ندارند که، بابا، مردم میخواهند زندگی کنند و خسته میشوند. یک گروه اندکی است که همیشه پای کار است. یک گروه اندکی است که از اول تا آخرش میره یا کشته میشه یا اینکه چیز میشه.

Implicit to his wise and pragmatic lament lies a likely unintended and subtle aggrandizement of the self. In the difference between the ordinary citizen who cannot endure a week's shift as sentry and the Committee member who can, the Committee member who speaks is exceptional. The erasure of the individual self through sacrifice paradoxically asserts the exemplary qualities of the self. The enduringly committed activist comes forth as a new kind of elite.

IV

Neo-Individualism in Narrative Care

In 1981-82, in a series of lectures we might imagine to reflect the influence of his experiences in Iran, Foucault locates the “care of the self” before the advent of Christianity —

that is, outside of and prior to the existing terms of order. The primary question animating these lectures is epistemological: Why has Western thought and philosophy omitted or marginalized the role played by *epimeleia heautou* [“care of oneself”] in favor of *gnōthi seauton* [“know thyself”]? The answer lies in a Cartesian “moment” (one that arrived well before Descartes) separating philosophy from spirituality.⁵⁴⁸

The echoes of the 1979 revolution are difficult to ignore. Foucault’s efforts appear to be an intellectual facsimile of the revolutionary moment in Iran; he too seeks to restore “spirit to a spiritless world.” The lectures present spirituality as a “return” [*de retour*] to a self that takes responsibility for its continual transformation; moreover, the separation that leads to spirituality’s marginalization is not produced by modern science but rather theology.⁵⁴⁹ Read in this light, Foucault’s “ethical turn” further affirms the sharp distinction drawn in May 1979’s *Inutile de soulever?* between the extraordinary (read: spirituality) and the ordinary (read: philosophy, theology, science).

But 1981-82 was not the first time Foucault addressed the topic of “care.” In 1977-78 before visiting Iran, he delivered a series of lectures where he discussed the concept on different terms. Therefore, instead of imagining a fundamental break in Foucault’s thinking introduced by the event of the 1979 Revolution — a radical transformation generated by “lived experience” as if “lived experience” spoke on its own — we can situate 1981-82’s lectures in a broader

⁵⁴⁸ Foucault, *Hermeneutics*, 2-18, Foucault’s choice of words when discussing pre-modern ethics (i.e. the “self”) contrast with his choice of words when referring to modern disciplinary power (i.e. the “subject”); that contrast has misled many to distinguish between “good” and “bad” discipline — a distinction predicated in terms of freedom. See Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 32-34. For examples of Foucault talking about practices of the self “outside” of existing modes of sociality, see Foucault, *Hermeneutics*, 154-55.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-29.

intellectual framework.⁵⁵⁰ From this perspective, the line between the extraordinary and the ordinary is more difficult to discern and define.

The primary question animating the 1977-78 lectures is also philosophical, but more focused on knowledge effects: can we identify a general technology of power within which the modern state appears, what Foucault calls a “governmentality”? The answer lies in a “pastoral type of power” or “a power of care.”⁵⁵¹ In this iteration, Foucault presents “care” as deeply tied to the emergence of biopower, a mode of governance that includes the contemporary welfare state. Practices of care that resist pastoral power are part and parcel of the same framework: both concern the “conduct of souls ... introduced into Western society by the Christian pastorate.” If pastoral power is about “the management of lives” through a “permanent intervention in everyday conduct,” then “counter-conduct” signals “refusal, revolts, and forms of resistance of conduct” that occur “*within* the field of the pastorate.”⁵⁵² Like “spirituality” in 1981-82, these “revolts of conduct” involve the care of oneself.⁵⁵³ But in 1977-78, practices of care were not imagined to exist outside of the logics founding modern power. Rather, “there was an immediate and founding correlation between conduct and counter-conduct.” In this sense, the kind of “care”

⁵⁵⁰ Despite their difference, Iranian studies scholars criticizing and defending Foucault on Iran have attempted to locate the Iranian Revolution as central to a shift in Foucault’s thinking in the early 1980s. For the former, see Afary and Anderson, *Foucault*, 4. For the latter, see Ghamari-Tabrizi, “When Life,” 289-92. Honig notably does not make this claim.

⁵⁵¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 120, 123, 127, 165.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 154, 193-96.

⁵⁵³ The resonances are particularly striking if we consider Foucault’s discussion of asceticism and the indeterminate anti-legalism of mysticism as forms of counter-conduct alongside his discussion of spirituality. In addition to asceticism and mysticism, Foucault discusses three other forms of counter-conduct: community, scripture, and eschatological beliefs. See *ibid.*, 207-14.

articulated in 1977-78 better coheres with a Foucauldian understanding of subjectivation as paradoxical duality.⁵⁵⁴

This discussion of “care” resembles the techniques involved in narrative. Where modern governmentality is predicated on a logic of care through depersonalized institutions, spirituality and resistance involve the care of oneself. Similarly, insofar as the writing of the novel involves an author’s effort to manage the unpredictability of its character’s lives — to manage their everyday minutiae in a manner akin to the management of everyday conduct through pastoral power — narrative may present a site of counter-conduct. In “narrative care,” there is no romantic outside, no extraordinary moment of liberation looming beyond.⁵⁵⁵

Counter-conduct thus appears in Foucault’s work as part of a broader argument against the anti-statism latent in neoliberalism. That anti-statism threatened to equate the welfare state with the fascist state, or “state governmentality” with “party governmentality” — a conflation that Foucault in his 1978-79 lectures overtly spoke against.⁵⁵⁶ On these terms, the earlier Foucault’s discussion of “care” denies a sharp distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary. In the context of biopower, resistance draws from the same principle that informs the ordinary; conduct is faced with counter-conduct.

We may similarly forge a link between an unthinkable revolution and the emergence of a welfare state in post-revolutionary Iran. The unpredictable or non-teleological features of the revolution are captured by Foucault’s discussion of a “collective will.” That “collective will” is

⁵⁵⁴ Subjectivation both subjugates and grants agency to the subject. The formulation challenges notions of agency as unconstrained. Instead, our ability to act is enacted by our simultaneous submission (without being determined by it). See Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 1-2, 10-18; Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 777-95; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 29; Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 29-30.

⁵⁵⁵ I borrow the concept of “narrative care” from Arne De Boever, *Narrative Care*, 4-10.

⁵⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, 40; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 185-92.

the effect of “non-political” associational practices or collective efforts at self-care in response to “earthquakes.” Rather than hold these moments apart — as exceptional moments whose unpredictable quality defies the logic of structural analysis — we may discern a point of continuity central to both the logic of revolt, on the one hand, and the functioning of a post-revolutionary welfare state, on the other. The lived experiences recounted in this section attest to the fact.

Yet this conclusion would rely on Foucault’s definition of neoliberalism as ordoliberalism — an understanding of neoliberalism as a new form of governmentality predicated on the reduction of the political to the social.⁵⁵⁷ As I have argued throughout this dissertation, that rendering of neoliberalism overlooks the continued role of the political in bringing about the effect of non-politics. Instead of taking state-phobia for what it proclaims itself to be, neoliberalism may be understood as a different kind of state governmentality — one predicated on the disavowal of the state through the state.

In this respect, just as a strict division between the ordinary and the extraordinary renders a partial and misleading picture of events, so too does a strict division between the welfare state and neoliberalism obscure the nature of the contemporary problem at hand. We are in the midst of a periodic shift, not an epochal one. The terms of our order rest in the very notion of periodicity. State-phobia has become the new state governmentality. The extraordinary has become the new ordinary.

⁵⁵⁷ “This then is the historical framework within which what is called German neo-liberalism takes shape ... It is something other than a political calculation, even if it is completely permeated by political calculation ... What is involved in fact is a new programming of liberal governmentality. It is an internal reorganization that, once again, does not ask the state what freedom it will leave to the economy, but asks the economy how its freedom can have a state-creating function and role, in the sense that it will really make possible the foundation of the state’s legitimacy.” See Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 94-95.

AFTERWORD

Revolutions come to an end when the parts of the movement that make them revolutionary are put to rest or set aside. And yet, features of the movement inform the post-revolutionary order. To better understand that order then, it is incumbent that we sift through two apparently conflicting historical patterns. This in turn raises a question: To what extent can the logics that emerge in the process of a revolt be put to rest or side aside without contravening the revolt as such? In what follows I recap the argument presented in this dissertation before turning to a series of sketches for future research about post-revolutionary state consolidation and the politics of the ordinary. My hope is that, in so doing, I may provisionally address this question in the context of the 1979 revolution.

This study outlined a logic of revolt in Iran between 1968 and 1979: the parallels between the emergence of a specifically revolutionary resistance to the Pahlavi state and the emergence of a neoliberal political rationality in the Middle East. The logic discussed here was one among others present at the time: not *the* logic, but *a* logic. In this respect, parallelism is central to the argument advanced. It was not the case that everything and everyone was determined by a neoliberal hegemonic order. Instead, I have appropriated and repurposed the concept of a periodic shift in the effort to account for the quality of the transition at hand.

Seen in this light, neoliberal governmentality is an indeterminate governmentality. It appears as non-appearance; its operative mechanism is disavowal. The exemplary manifestation of this governmentality at the level of the state is the reassertion of the state through actions that undermine the state. In post-1968 Iran, at points of convergence between transnational guerrilla warfare, individual human rights discourse, and “non-political” associational activity, we may discern the emergence of a parallel logic. That logic challenged the Pahlavi state insofar as the

state was an embedded liberal one. In this vein, at least in part, collective solidarity in revolutionary Iran was configured in terms of individualism and practiced as self-care — despite what appeared to be simply and strictly a collectivist outlook.

After having begun with Foucault's notion of governmentality, this study ended with Foucault's reflections on radical democratic change in Iran and his related writings on ethics. Both in the beginning and in the end, I have inhabited and amended Foucault's framework in response to my archive. This was not done to instrumentally use the Iranian experience for the purposes of advancing an argument in Euro-American political theory but rather as an attempt to push Euro-American theory to see what it does not by virtue of limits in its geographical imagination. To this end, I have engaged non-Euro-American theorists. For instance, I have presented a theory of indeterminate collective subjectivity in Shari'ati's work that exceeds available notions of radical democracy in the Euro-American tradition; this occurs by virtue of Shari'ati's emphasis on both traditions in Islam as well as notions of popular sovereignty. At the same time, I have provided a new reading of Iranian history. In fact, with respect to the latter impulse, it may just as well be contended that I have used Euro-American theory for the purposes of interpreting Iranian history. As I noted at the outset, insofar as this study is simultaneously a work of theory and history, it will have disappointed purists on either side.

I have made my argument on multiple fronts. First: I have recalibrated existing historiographies of the revolution. What seems like a minor shift in periodization regarding the starting point of a distinctly revolutionary forms of resistance — from 1963 to 1968 — actually signals a deeper reassessment of how we understand contemporary social transformation to occur. Instead of accounts that foreground ideology, we may view events in terms of political rationality if and when we situate the emergence of Iran's revolutionary resistance in relation to

post-1968 global and regional shifts — or rather, once we identify parallels between that revolutionary resistance and neoliberalism. This argument does not merely question existing notions of where the revolution begins but goes so far as to challenge the applicability of “beginnings.” In its place, I advance interpretive constructs such as parallelism or a periodic shift — constructs that align with the nature of indeterminate governmentality described herein. In an echo of this recalibration, I have engaged and reinterpreted Shari‘ati’s discussion of concepts central to the imaginary of an ideological Islamic revolution: *bāzgasht*, *shahādat*, *ummat*, *imāmat*. Here, a “return to self” is not actually a return to a past and/or an authentic self but rather a rendering of a collective subject to-come.

Second: I have used Rancière’s notion of dissensus to account for the role of narrative in this rendering as it unfolded in practice. Dissensus involves the making sensible of that which a normative order simply does not recognize. Unlike ideology, it is political subjectivation from below, not above. As such, it better accommodates understandings of the state as effect of disciplined social practice. Just as governmentality allows us to capture practices that both resist *and* reproduce the existing state effect, manifestations of dissensus as narrative involve revolts that are ordered and ordering, not simply discontinuous and fragmented. On these terms, I have drawn a link between the conceptual logic underlying ideas central to the revolution’s vocabulary — such as *shahādat* — and the practices that made the revolt possible.

Third: I have presented a new form of solidarity that accounts for articulations of collectivity in terms of individualism. One of neoliberalism’s disavowals (disavowal being an operation I claim is central to neoliberalism as rationality) involves the representation of a collective subject in individualist terms. In this vein, across multiple sites of popular culture and revolutionary politics, I considered an ironic making visible of the individual through

performances meant to negate the individual for the sake of the collective. This performative irony generated a mode of solidarity predicated on empathy — in other words, that which solidarity is not. Directing empathy for individuals inward within one and the same political community, certain artists and activists in Iran created a collective self that was “non-political” and revolutionary at once. This argument is not about the intentions of actors but rather the effect of their words and practices when taken together. The resulting mode of solidarity was predicated on the suffering *of* the collective *for* the collective as if the collective were interchangeable with the figure of the individual found in post-1968 rights discourse.

This has been a study of the extraordinary — a consideration of revolutionary resistance as emergence. As a result, the historical record I consider stops on 11 February 1979, the official date inaugurating a transfer of power from the Pahlavi state apparatus to a new (yet-to-be determined) state formation. This is not to say that an extraordinary political atmosphere did not continue to exist in the tumultuous months and even years following the event of the revolution. Rather, I have drawn a temporal distinction in order to mark a shift in the kind of activity and discourse prevalent at the time. By way of illustration, my final chapter considered the impetus to preserve order in the midst of the extraordinary — indeed, as a basis for generating a collective will and revolutionary social change. From about 11 February onward, the dominant impetus animating various forms of political activity was inverted. Hereafter the extraordinary functioned in the service of the ordinary — or, in other words, in the service of establishing some form of order and operating the country according to it.

This point of closure begets a series of questions: How does the account presented in this study help us understand, if at all, post-revolutionary politics? More generally, what can a study of the extraordinary teach us about the ordinary? What comes of a neoliberal logic of revolt the

day after? What happens to a rhetoric of disavowal that parallels notions of state-phobia when the time arrives to consolidate and reproduce the effect of the state?

If we are to presuppose a strict line of causality between a revolt and the kind of state it produces, then the fact that the post-revolutionary state in Iran is and has been a welfare state (that is, the very kind of embedded liberal state the logic of revolt discussed here is oriented against) can challenge the entire enterprise. In other words, in light of what came after, does the 1979 revolution in Iran *really* have anything to do with neoliberalism? This objection misses the nature of the argument advanced here, according to which the logic of an indeterminate and decidedly non-teleological revolt runs counter to structuralism. It also overlooks a basic problem with respect to modern revolutions in general. Again: the closure of a revolution requires putting an end to its revolutionary aspects. Let us ask the question once more, now with specificity: How did *this* revolution come to an end without overtly contravening itself? The following sketches provide provisional responses for what is, in the end, a question that rests beyond the scope of this study but that nevertheless bears on its significance.

I

Creating Order

Timothy Mitchell's discussion of modernity as a product of colonization relies on the idea that representations produce the effect of an external reality by pointing to its existence. The "world-as-exhibition," however, can also produce the effect of an external reality by *not* pointing to it. In other words, in an indirect fashion, the inability to represent can render reality as that which cannot be represented. In this sense, defiance of the order created by the Pahlavi state involved not just the disruption of order but also efforts to restore an order to its "rightful" place — one not directly signified by constructed modernity, a "return" to the self. As I have argued

throughout, without exceeding the parameters of the epochal shift that Mitchell's work describes, a periodic shift was afoot.

Visiting Tehran for the first time in the mid to late 1970s, Rahim Q. found a city lacking identity, a society he described as out of order [*yik jāmi 'ih kāmīlan bī huviyat u biham rīkhtih*]. In Shiraz, Rahim noticed a similar incongruence in the very organization of city streets. From Zand Street to the north, architecture imitated European styles; from Zand Street to the south, it retained its traditional style. The administration of Shiraz University and the annual Arts Festival exacerbated the disorder. In his perception, the former boasted resources comparable to (if not exceeding) sister institutions in the United States at the time.⁵⁵⁸ The latter drew large crowds of locals for its avant-garde performances. One street performance at Darvāzeh Isfahan, the intersection separating the city's supposedly modern and traditional halves, crossed the line. In Rahim's recollection and estimation of events, this performance turned the tides. Whereas student activists were careful not to lead annual demonstrations on the 16th of Āzar beyond university grounds because they feared locals turning against them, in 1356 [1977-78] it seemed as if the entire city had risen in protest. For Rahim, the city's festering disorder had set the stage for a triggering event.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁸ By way of confirmation: in a separate interview, a student at Tabriz University in the same period, reflected on the differences between the two institutions. He had gone to school with a keen interest in politics and was enthused to be assigned to Tabriz University because of its reputation as a hotbed of activism. In the interview, he directly contrasted this perception with the reputation ascribed to Pahlavi University in Shiraz where students were commonly known as spoiled and soft [*sūsūl*].

⁵⁵⁹ I cite Rahim's perceptions of the causes for revolt in Shiraz not as reality per se but rather as a representation of reality informing the direction of his activism after the revolution. Nevertheless, documentary evidence confirms the subjective atmosphere he describes — at least in part. For instance, anxiety about the reception of performances in the 10th Annual Festival of 1355/1976 may be discerned in the declassified state communiques collected in *Jashn-i hunar-i shīrāz bi rivāyat-i asnād-i sāvāk* [*The Shiraz Arts Festival According to SAVAK Documents*]. One source of anxiety revolved around the performance of *ta'zīyih* (theatrical displays of Imam Husayn's martyrdom). Might the name of the event, a festival [*jashn*], cause a perception of disrespect if the event includes content that is clearly not celebratory? Will the crowd be expected to applaud instead of crying, as was customary, at the end of the performance? (300-302). By the 11th Annual Festival in August and September of 1356/1977, similar state communiques expressed concern over an organized effort on the part of clerics to denounce the Festival following a

Almost immediately after the revolution succeeded, Rahim actively participated in what would become one of the more iconic organizations to appear in post-revolutionary Iran: *Jihād-i Sāzandigī* [The Construction Jihad, hereafter JS]. A key institution among a loose network of para-state organizations forging a new link between state and society, JS provided welfare and relief services for rural villagers.⁵⁶⁰ Before it was officially established in June of 1979, it had been a series of spontaneous grassroots actions by university students like Rahim who had cut their teeth organizing against the Shah.⁵⁶¹

As an activist, Rahim too could be counted among the followers of Shari‘ati.

Rahim: I wasn’t there [Hosseiniyeh Ershād] myself, but I would get his books and his cassette tapes; they were passed around. With the lack of identity we’d see in Tehran in those days, finding an identity was calming. The idea that, man, our religion isn’t some loose and beat-up religion. It’s a good religion. Now Shari‘ati took this same religion — I don’t say this as criticism, but as praise ... perhaps from some people’s perspective, it’s a criticism — Shari‘ati introduced the religion as he wished. He wasn’t concerned with its original form. He would search for his own objectives in his religion and, for instance, highlight those points. For this reason, Shari‘ati was a person that religious

رحیم: من نبودم ولی کتاب هایش را، نوار هایش را من میخواندم، نوار هایش را میگرفتم، دست به دست میچرخوندیم. با اون بی هویتی که ما تو اون سال ها تو تهران میدیدیم، پیدا کردن یک هویت آرامش بخش بود. که، بابا، ما مذهبمان مذهب ول و درب و داغون نیست. مذهب خوبی است. حالا، این مذهب را هم باز شریعتی — من این را به عنوان انتقاد بهش نمیگم، به عنوان حسنش میگم، شاید از دید بعضی ها انتقاد باشه — شریعتی مذهب را اونجوری که میخواست معرفی میکرد. به اصلش کار نداشت. اون اهداف خودش را توی مذهبش جستجو میکرد و مثلاً اونها را highlight میکرد. به خاطر همین یک

series of performances that contravened Islamic principles. That year, events corresponded with Ramadan, creating even more immediately symbolic tensions (383-87). The performance that ultimately triggered discontent, to which Rahim referred, was entitled “Pig. Child. Fire.” [*Khūk. Bachih. Ātash.*]. It took place in a storefront on Ferdowsi Street. In its wake, a number of clerics and members of the bazaar met to plan strikes. Notably, while these documents affirm that popular unrest took place, they also indicate that local clerics and bazaar merchants ultimately backed off from even a strike. Both the Festival itself as well as events around Ramadan took place without disruption (388-90).

⁵⁶⁰ JS was part of what Eric Lob calls post-revolutionary Iran’s “counter-movement.” Lob highlights non-coercive measures used by the post-revolutionary state in the effort to consolidate. The services provided by these organizations, much like the corporatist welfare institutions first established by the Pahlavis, were meant to counter the appeal of leftist challengers by winning hearts and minds. Lob, “An Institutional History,” 37-42, 74. For a broader discussion of welfare in the transition from pre to post-revolutionary Iran and the establishment of a “revolutionary welfare regime,” see summary statements in Harris, “The Martyrs Welfare State,” 53-54 118-19; Harris, “A Martyrs’ Welfare State,” 68. These works extend and further elaborate Abrahamian’s rendering of the revolution as a populist movement — one that did not fundamentally change state structure but rather involved political reconstruction, better delivering the Pahlavi state’s modernizing agenda through cultural appeals. See *Khomeinism*, 17.

⁵⁶¹ Lob, “An Institutional History,” 72-73. See also “*Daftar-i tarh-i jihād-i sâzandigī dar tihrân ijād shud*” [“A Central Planning Office for the Construction Jihād was Established in Tehran”] in *Ittilâ‘ât*, no. 15882 (28 Khordād 1358/18 June 1979), 1.

people labeled a communist, communists labeled a religious person, SAVAK labelled a spy, and oh I don't know, the seminary labeled a SAVAK agent. Nobody saw him as one of their own. At the same time —

Arash: But the people were in favor of him?

Rahim: They were in favor. The youth. Those who were not part of any specific group and were searching for a new perspective, they liked what he had to say. His words made religion grand.

آدمی بود شریعتی که مذهبی ها او را کمونیست میدانستند، کمونیست ها مذهبی میدانستند، ساواک جاسوس میدانست، نمیدانم حوضه ساواکی میدانست. همینجور. هیچ کس از خودش نمیدانست. در عین حال —

آرش: مردم ولی طرفدارش بودن؟

رحیم: طرفدار بودن. جوان ها. اونهای که توی دار و دسته ی خاصی نبودند و دنبال حرف جدید بودن، از حرفهای ایشان خوششان میآمد. این حرفها مذهب را بزرگ کرد.

These observations teach us more about Shari'ati's reception than Shari'ati as such. As noted in Chapter 2, Shari'ati offered a position that was position-less — to refer to his own formulation, a “principle of indetermination.” Analogously, Rahim ended up forming part of the Islamist student activists involved in demonstrations during the revolution in the loose but widespread pro-Khomeini Islamist coalition. On the basis of this experience and the credit he had earned through it, he engaged in what he called “an entirely spontaneous” [*bi sūrat-i kāmīlan khud jūsh*] initiative, approaching the Representative of the Imam in the offices of his provincial governor and asking for funding to spend in dispossessed areas. While others disparaged Shari'ati for his innovations, Rahim appreciated his effort to create something new; through his work in the villages, Rahim did his part to similarly create something new as well. In both cases, novelty involved a “return” to lost order.

Over the course of his activities with JS, Rahim experienced a feeling of togetherness — a feeling that resembled what Mehrnoush, in a different context, would describe as “deep freedom.”

Rahim: ...I was expelled [from the university]. And since I also had political issues, I was under surveillance. Basically, I wasn't comfortable and I went to Tehran. I got more involved with the revolutionary kids in Tehran. We got more involved in the issue and whatnot. When the revolution was victorious, well, just that I was able to return and continue my studies was a huge opening for me. The country had also opened up in general. People would look at each other with positivity [*bā dīd-i musbat*].

رحیم: ... من اخراج شدم. و چون مساله ی سیاسی هم داشتم، تحت تعقیب هم بودم. عملاً راحت نبودم و رفتم تهران. با بچه های انقلابی تهران بیشتر درگیر شدیم و بیشتر وارد مسائل شدیم و اینها. اینکه انقلاب که پیروز شد، خوب، من همین که میتوانستم برگردم ادامه تحصیل بدهم یک شکوفائی خیلی خوبی بود برای من. کشور هم کلاً باز شده بود. مردم خیلی به هم با دید مثبت نگاه میکردند. دنبال این میگشتند یک کاری، از دستشان میآید، یک کاری

They were searching for something to do, whatever they were capable of. All of the groups — the communists, the non-communists — had set up stands and were active. We looked to ourselves and saw that we needed to start some activity too, now that things are open. That we could, for instance, go to the provincial governor and say give us this much money and he would give it — that was a huge opportunity. We received 400,000 *tuman*. The cost of 10 Paykans. We took it without any oversight to spend in [the village]. This put a responsibility on our shoulders. That a system, a government, gives you that much money and says “Go to deprived areas and do whatever you can!” That it respects your ideas so that whatever you do is good. Therefore, well, we would see the country like that. We saw the country as an extension of ourselves. We saw that they saw us as an extension of themselves. I spent one year in areas that didn’t have showers. We didn’t have a proper place to sleep. We would sleep wherever we could. We worked so much we would fall over from fatigue. And we’d have this fantastic, pleasurable sleep. Those days are part of the most pleasurable memories of my life. Because you really felt like you were being productive. We felt like every day that passes, every step we take, produces a positive outcome for these villagers.

بکنند. همه ی گروه ها — کمونیست ها، غیر کمونیست ها، دکه برای خودشان گذاشته بودند، فعالیشان را میکردند. ما هم دیگه خودمان دیدیم که بایستی یک فعالیتی شروع بکنیم. و الان باز است. این هم که مثلاً می رفتیم استانداری و میگفتیم اینقدر پول به ما بده و میداد، خیلی امکان است. ما ۴۰۰ هزار تومان پول گرفته بودیم. پول مثلاً ۱۰ پیکان. برداشتیم، بدون حساب کتاب ببریم توی چیز خرج کنیم. خب این مسئولیت میگذاشت گردان ما. اینکه یک سیستم، یک حکومتی، اینقدر پول میدهد دست شما میگه « برو تو منطقه ی محروم، هر کاری از دستت میآید، بکن! » و به فکر شما احترام میگذارد، هر کاری تو بکنی خوبه. اینه که، خب، ما کشور را اونجوری میدیدیم. کشور را مال خودمان میدیدیم. میدیدیم که اونها هم ما را از خودشان میدانند. من یک سال تو مناطقی بودم که حمام نداشت، جای خواب درست حسابی نداشتیم، هر جا میرسیدیم میخوابیدیم. آنقدر کار میکردیم که از خستگی میافتادیم. و یک خواب لذت بخش عالی داشتیم. این روزها جزو لذت بخشترین خاطرات زندگی من است چون واقعاً احساس مثبت بودن میکردی. احساس میکردیم که هر روز که میگذرد، هر قدمی که بر میداریم، برای این روستای ها یک نتیجه ی مثبت دارد.

Just as Zibā L. came to be known as one of the “library’s ladies,” Rahim came to be known in the village as one of “Khomeini’s kids” [*bachihāyih khumaynī*]. Like Mahmoud D. (who also came from a provincial background), Rahim’s experience of the “dominant voice” was different from Ahmad H.’s; both felt empowerment, not confusion, after the revolution’s mass moment. For Rahim, the feeling of seeing the country as an extension of himself — his feeling of empowerment, his “narrative” — lasted until the beginnings of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980. Yet unlike the individuals discussed in Chapter 5, Rahim’s application of these energies toward the creation of a new order reflects a changing set of circumstances. Instead of applying principles of ordering for the sake of producing a rupture with the prevailing system — an extraordinary moment of disorder, albeit one that expressed resistance and reproduction at once — Rahim’s account reflects the application of an extraordinary sensibility toward the creation of order.

And yet, an orientation towards order through extraordinary means produced unanticipated consequences. In other words, Rahim's involvement in JS addressed the malaise of disorder plaguing Shiraz in ways he himself did not foresee. When asked about increased rural to urban migration despite JS's efforts, Rahim reflected on what he perceived to be a lack of planning.

Rahim: Some of these people by virtue of our own civil engineering initiatives... With the civil engineering we did, we would displace them from one place to another ... Generally speaking, development work must depend on the village itself. The initiatives that we took, we were a bunch of young people without experience — I didn't know what would happen with migration. For example, we worked for three years and then we finally started to think about what would happen with the issue of migration. These initiatives that we're taking for the village, the opportunities that we're creating for them, what returns will it have? What is its economic expenditure? We finally started to think about these things. Someone should have thought about these things from before and turned them into an action plan — so that we would have been a part of that action plan and then slowly worked our way up to a decision-making nucleus, so to speak. But from the beginning we made decisions ourselves, executed them, and then when they too learned what we were doing they got rid of us. They no longer needed us.

رحیم: برخی از اینها با اقدامات عمرانی خود ما، با کارهای عمرانی که میکردیم اینها را جا به جا میکردیم ... یعنی اصولاً اقدامات توسعه ای بایستی متکی به خود روستا باشد. این اقداماتی که ما کردیم، ما یک سری جوان بی تجربه — من مهاجرت نمیدانستم چی میشه. و حتی مثلاً سه سال کار کردم، تازه آمدیم تو فکر که مثلاً قضیه ی مهاجرت چی میشه. این اقداماتی که ما میکنیم برای روستا، امکانات برای اینها ایجاد میکنیم، چه بازگشتی دارد؟ صرف اقتصادی چیه؟ تازه حالا میافزادیم تو این فکرها. در صورتی که قبلاً بایستی یکی این فکرها را میکرد و بعد اینها را تبدیل به action plan میکرد، ما تو اون action plan قرار می گرفتیم، حالا بعد به تدریج میآمدیم بالاتر و میآمدیم تو اون به اصطلاح هسته ی تصمیم گیری. ما در ابتدا خودمان تصمیم گیری میکردیم، اجرا میکردیم، بعد که این کارها را یاد گرفتن اصلاً حذفمان کردن. دیگه به ما احتیاج نداشتن.

These statements express a common technocratic critique and lament against the course of post-revolutionary politics in Iran. At the same time, they reveal an important aspect of post-revolutionary state consolidation: the extent to which ordinary and everyday activists dramatically changed the social order from below. Rahim's actions created circumstances where those in the village would simply leave to never come back.⁵⁶² Upon arriving in cities, these

⁵⁶² Kamāl Athāri provides a similar assessment with respect to The Housing Foundation, tracing unintended consequences and paradoxical outcomes between the Foundation's initial plans (which were intended to reverse rural to urban migration and to incorporate popular participation), on the one hand, and what it actually ended up doing in practice, on the other. According to Athāri, The Housing Foundation was more effective in providing relief (*imdād*) than it was in building long-lasting institutions based on sustained popular participation. In this respect, despite the fact that the Foundation dramatically increased the number of housing units available in Iran's provinces, rural to urban migration and informal housing actually increased after the revolution. See Athāri, "Sanjish dar andākhtan-i tarhī naw" ["Deliberation in Laying a New Plan"], 49-57, especially 56-7.

villagers brought their own sensibilities into the country's urban centers. In this sense a kind of order had been "restored" against Rahim's intentions. Instead of changing the villages, he said, the villages changed the cities.⁵⁶³

Thus, if the Pahlavi state's method had been to order with an outcome of disorder, in Rahim's case the terms were reversed. An attempt to create order occurred through disorder. What did it mean for a welfare state-effect to occur without a plan? What does it mean to wish to create a new order (one that "restores" things to their rightful place) without an initial design for doing so, without a plan that anticipates long-term consequences? How does this lack of initial planning — an understandable effect of a non-teleological, indeterminate, "irreducible," and "unthinkable" revolution — shape ordinary politics in the post-revolutionary period?

II

Founding Indeterminacy

At that time, my perception was that a plan for a country is like piety for an individual. Piety means you have a goal and you set criteria, limits, boundaries, and brakes upon yourself in order to reach it; that you don't cross certain lines; that you maintain those lines within a framework of boundaries until you achieve your goal. This is the Islamic interpretation of piety which, in my opinion, at a social level, means having a plan. I personally believe that if a country wishes to progress, to achieve excellence, it must have a plan. It must have piety in its society. If a country does not have a plan, it will not progress.

- Ezzatollāh Sahābi⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶³ Rahim's lament is a bit of an overstatement. These developments later produced the effect of newfound empowerment in a welfare state. Continued migration from the provinces to the cities, like the provision of services to provincial Iran, fundamentally changed the country's social and political dynamics. The villagers who appeared in cities acted as newly empowered city dwellers, making demands on the state. For an account of these later changes, see Harris, "A Martyrs' Welfare State and its Contradictions," 77-80.

⁵⁶⁴ Amū'ī, *Iqtisād-i Sīyāsī*, 58. Sahābi was one of the first directors of post-revolutionary Iran's Planning and Budget Organization (PBO). This passage appears at the end of an extended oral history about political economy in the immediate aftermath of the revolution.

In his discussion of ordo-liberalism, Foucault describes the German state as “something new” — the radicalization of a “state-forming commercial opening.” This process, a long time in the making, realized itself when Germany’s socialist party finally came over to the new political consensus. The last step involved the SPD’s renunciation of Keynesian economics so that “even flexible planning” was said to be “dangerous for the liberal economy.”⁵⁶⁵ The paradox, of course, is that neoliberalism functions through the planned absence of planning.

By virtue of historical contingency, elements of state consolidation in post-revolutionary Iran involved a similar planned lack of planning — even as the lack of planning resulted in what was, in effect, a repetition of Keynesian economics. The views expressed in the epigraph to this section, the final statements of an extended oral history interview with one of the post-revolutionary period’s first directors of economic policy, evince the exasperation of a liberal planner in an unplanned environment.

A lack of planning in post-revolutionary Iran may have simply been an expected momentary lapse, the by-product of “unthinkable” revolutionary social change and political competition with a rising leftist opposition. In this vein, over the course of his interview, Sahābi attributes the problem to ideology and partisan politics, a gesture common to technocratic discourse since 1979. But what if the absence of a plan itself played a more systematic role in the post-revolutionary state consolidation and the politics of the ordinary?⁵⁶⁶ Ironically enough, this possibility may be explored through an analysis of the drafting of Iran’s new constitution.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁵ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 86, 91.

⁵⁶⁶ In the case of welfare, Harris refers to the consequent establishment and persistence of a dual institutional apparatus — one technocratic and planned, the other ideological in rhetoric and unplanned — as “unusual.” See Harris, “A Martyrs’ Welfare State and its Contradictions,” 68-69. My efforts here may be read as an attempt to explain the “unusual.”

⁵⁶⁷ This comes despite an emphasis away from founding laws and notions of sovereignty and legitimacy in Foucault’s analysis of governmentality. In contrast to *raison d’Etat*, Foucault put forth the idea that from the 18th

A preliminary draft of the Islamic Republic's constitution was first produced by Hassan Habibi in Paris and then, over the first six months of 1979, revised twice by two separate commissions in Iran. A final draft was published on 14 June.⁵⁶⁸ The document circulated widely in newspapers where, with the endorsement of Ayatollah Khomeini, it was examined and debated by the general populace. Rather than review this document through the mechanism of a representative council, a smaller 76-member assembly of experts convened to quickly approve it as is within a limited period of time.⁵⁶⁹ Against the expectations of the original drafters as well as the provisional government, this assembly worked well beyond its limits in further revising the published version of the preliminary draft. The assembly completed its work over the course of the summer of 1979 and by November of that year the first official constitution of the Islamic Republic was ratified.

century onwards “an internal regulation of governmental rationality” appeared that was de facto and intrinsic to the operations of government. It was no longer legal; it did not have to do with external principles of right. And yet, Foucault notes that these de facto limitations could and would be transcribed as law, even though they did not function as a basis for the state's legitimacy as such. See Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 10-14. In short, we may analyze governmentality through founding laws without contradicting the framework in general. What matters is *how* we analyze.

⁵⁶⁸ There are various accounts as to who authored the Preliminary Draft. See Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, 22; Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent*, 258fn18; Amū'ī, *Iqtisād-i Sīyāsī*, 41-43. According to Schirazi, after Habibi gave a preliminary draft to Khomeini 1 January 1979, revisions were made by a commission that included five civil jurists. According to Ezzatollah Sahābi (interviewed in Amū'ī), the version that was published in 1979, while maintaining the spirit and structure of the original, included both political and economic changes. Revisions were first made by the Council for Revolutionary Plans [*shurā-yi tarhāyih inqilāb*] of which Sahābi was a part. The primary revision made at this stage was to decrease the power of the presidency; the first draft of the constitution had been modeled on the 1958 constitution of the fifth French republic. Then, the Revolutionary Council made further economic changes, giving the document a social democratic spirit. For a discussion of the composition of the Revolutionary Council, see Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, 51, 64-6.

⁵⁶⁹ The constituent assembly was initially designed to include over 400 popularly elected members before being reduced to a 72-member body. For an account of the process behind the composition of this assembly, see Schirazi, *Constitution*, 28-30. For a first-hand account of the debates that occurred in the Revolutionary Council leading to this decision, see Amū'ī, *Iqtisād-i Sīyāsī*, 44-46.

The published preliminary draft is marked by the presence of multiple and often conflicting sources of legitimacy.⁵⁷⁰ The sources include popular sovereignty, natural law (or fundamental rights), Islam, and the rule of law.⁵⁷¹ The conceptual and textual tensions between them are numerous, indicating the fact that legitimacy was in fact a highly contentious and unresolved feature of the post-revolutionary moment. Take, for example, articles 135-137. Article 135 states that a judge must find a judgment for every case “in the (existing) laws.” In cases where the existing laws are unable to furnish a suitable ruling, the judgment must be “inspired by” Sharia, established custom, and the public interest (Article 136). Article 137 then states that the judge is subject to and cannot execute decrees in conflict with the rule of law (presumably on the basis of Sharia, established custom, or the public interest).

Islamic law — like the public interest — is presented here as an “inspiration” that supports a broadly liberal legal framework under circumstances where the general framework proves to be inadequate. Yet Articles 2 and 4 of the same document state that “the system of government” in the new regime (i.e. the rule of law) is derived from “the spirituality and ethics of Islam” while Article 3 justifies the use of public opinion, or popular referendum, as the

⁵⁷⁰ By sources of legitimacy, I am referring to founding, constitutive principles. For a general discussion of constituent power, see Loughlin and Walker’s “Introduction” in *The Paradox of Constitutionalism*, 1-8. For a critical engagement of these principles, see Tully’s “The Imperialism of Modern Constitutional Democracy” in *ibid.*, 315-38. Tully notably interprets the separation between constituent power and constitutional form as particular to a European history imposed on non-European peoples.

⁵⁷¹ The Draft Constitution of the Islamic Republic includes 151 articles. Articles that refer to ‘the will of the people,’ popular vote or the ‘public interest’ include: 1, 3, 15, 17, 28, 48, 51, 55-63, 77, 82, 85-90, 115, 141, and 148. Articles that refer to natural or ‘fundamental’ rights, or natural law provisions protecting individual rights include: 6-10, 14, 15, 22-29, 31, 37, and 40. Articles that refer to Islam and/or the *shari‘ah* include: 2-5, 11-12, 18, 66, 82, 84, 106, 131, 136, 142-148. Articles that refer to the rule of law or modern constitutionalism broadly conceived include: 23-25, 27, 30, 31, 33-36, 38, 40, 42, 50, 68, 74, 78, 110, 114, 116-120, 125-126, 131, 132, 135, 137-138, 141-142, and 145. It is important to note that inasmuch as differences exist *between* these sets of articles (i.e. between the sources of legitimacy) so too do the articles *within* each set define the sources themselves (i.e. popular sovereignty, natural law, and Islam) in an inconsistent and ambiguous fashion. For a full copy of the revised constitution with accompanying text of relevant articles from the draft constitution, see *Mashrūh-i muzākirāt*, vol. 4, 53-279. For the text of articles from the Draft Constitution that were not included in the revised version see *ibid.*, 283-286. For an English language translation, see “Draft Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

foundation of the new system; this article notably does so with reference to verses from the Quran. In the end, it is unclear as to which principle would take precedence in the case of dispute — popular sovereignty, Islamic law, or the rule of law. The entire text is ridden with these tensions, making it impossible for those seeking to ground authority in terms of legitimacy to discern which source is in fact most legitimate and who for that matter would be responsible for determining the most legitimate source's validity.

The revised constitution of November 1979 reduced the tensions between the sources of legitimacy found in the preliminary draft by reducing those sources to two: Islamic jurisprudence [*fiqh*] and popular sovereignty.⁵⁷² In particular, Article 5 of the revised constitution introduced *vilāyat-i faqīh* [the guardianship of the jurist] as an overriding principle meant to resolve all potential disputes. The article reads as follows:

During the Occultation of the Lord of the Age (may God hasten his renewed manifestation), the governance and leadership of the community [*vilāyat-i 'amr va imāmat-i ummat*] devolves upon the just and pious *faqīh* [Islamic jurist] who is acquainted with the circumstances of his age; courageous, resourceful, and possessed of administrative ability; and *recognized and accepted as leader by the majority of the people*. In the event that no *faqīh* [Islamic jurist] should be so *recognized by the majority*, the leader, or the Leadership Council, composed of *fuqahā* possessing the aforementioned qualifications, will assume these responsibilities in accordance with Article 107.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷² A number of similar articles (and tensions) also appear in the revised draft albeit in a mitigated form. Schirazi defines these tensions in terms of the Islamic, democratic, and secular (i.e. modern) “elements”; he includes fundamental rights in the democratic category. See Schirazi, *Constitution*, 8-21.

⁵⁷³ The majority of this translation is taken from *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 29-30, *emphasis mine*. Algar translates *faqīh* as “a scholar of the Islamic religious science, especially jurisprudence.” For the Persian text of Article 5, see *Mashrūh-i Muzākīrāt*, vol. 4, 60. Algar translates the crucial words *vilāyat-i 'amr* and *imāmat-i ummat* as “governance” and “leadership” of the “nation.” While these are the most approximate meanings, it is nevertheless important to note that the authenticity of these terms within the Shi'a tradition of jurisprudence has been questioned. See Schirazi, *Constitution*, 48. Moreover, “nation” is an uneasy translation of the *ummah* — which I have instead rendered as “community.” When defending Article 5 in the constituent assembly debates, Beheshti defines these terms as “the center where governance and leadership is exerted” (*markaz-i sighl-i hukūmat va rahbarī*). See *Mashrūh-i Muzākīrāt*, vol. 1, 378. Article 107 states that if an individual such as Ayatollah Khomeini (who possesses the appropriate order of theological training and the support of a “decisive majority of the people”) is not present, then “experts elected by the people” will select a replacement in a leader who possesses “outstanding capacity for leadership” or, if such an individual cannot be found, they will appoint a 3-5 member Leadership Council. These requirements were famously changed just before Khomeini's death in 1989 through further revisions to the constitution. For an account of these changes, see Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 154-94.

According to Article 5 — as well as Articles 107-110 where the rights and responsibilities of the *faqīh* are explained in detail — a religious jurist of the highest stature and training, who also possesses the popular support of a decisive majority of the population, must be endowed with the ability to make final decisions regarding disputes that occur within the framework of the constitution. The presumption here was that Article 5 would combine Islam and popular sovereignty in a manner that would not subject religiously ordained jurisprudential rulings to the whims of the majority; in short, it checked the will of the majority against the expertise of the *faqīh*.⁵⁷⁴ At the same time, it would recognize popular sovereignty in terms of the support Khomeini had garnered as the undisputed leader of the revolution. Khomeini was the nation's first *valī-yi faqīh*.

And yet, perhaps unintentionally, the combination of Islam and popular sovereignty produced the appearance of an indeterminate collective subject at the heart of the new state's founding law.⁵⁷⁵ This unintended consequence, again, begets the questions posed above: What are the links between this juridical order and the neoliberal political rationale underlying the revolutionary uprising that made it possible in the first place? What of legitimacy when and where the state is not unquestionably legitimate, when and where *raison d'Etat* has been exceeded? The challenge for a revolution produced by a negative collective will is that any effort to give it positive content invariably disappoints. In response, the new state could either persuade

⁵⁷⁴ The conflation between the will of the majority and legal expertise holds precedence in the Shi'a tradition through the practice of *marja'īyat*. For a discussion of the relationship between this principle and *vilāyat-i faqīh*, see Amirpur, "A Doctrine in the Making?"

⁵⁷⁵ Ghamari-Tabrizi thoroughly examines this point from the perspective of popular sovereignty's influence on the implementation of Islamic law in Iran. In this vein, 1979's unplanned process of constitutional drafting produced an unintended consequence where Islam became subject to popular sovereignty; Islam's appearance in a republican framework opened interpretations of *fiqh*, a domain reserved to religious jurists with specialized training, to non-specialists. See *Islam and Dissent*, 36-88.

anew or simply move beyond ideology (which inheres in discussions of legitimacy). The move beyond would ostensibly involve coercion and/or the provision of welfare meant to secure regime resilience.

The revisions to the preliminary draft constitution, however, suggest yet another path alongside these in the quest to achieve post-revolutionary state consolidation in Iran. In the absence of legitimacy, perhaps the most effective way to consolidate and close a revolution may be to keep it open. In this sense, the indeterminate nature of the sources of legitimacy in the revised constitution transcribed a broader indeterminate governmentality; both before and after the revolution, indeterminacy was produced through the combination of Islam and popular sovereignty. In this respect, the state's founding law could reflect practices oriented toward closure by predicating that closure on preventing closure by anyone else. State consolidation could occur through perpetuated yet controlled opening.⁵⁷⁶ If Khomeini represented a negative collective will in the uprising, then *vilāyat-i faqīh* could manifest that negative collective will in ordinary political time.

In this sense, final revisions to the constitution reflect a move from liberal to what I have called indeterminate governmentality. In the epigraph above, Sahābi presents the collective as if it were an individual; just as an individual sets limits for itself through piety, a collective does so through planning and order. This particular internal regulation reflects the logic of liberal governmentality: it is no coincidence that Sahābi was designated to formally and publicly speak against Article 5 in constituent assembly debates.⁵⁷⁷ In many ways, his predilection for

⁵⁷⁶ The tactical flexibility suggested by this reading of Article 5 was particularly necessary for consolidation in circumstances where members of the revolutionary coalition who had now turned into the opposition continued to believe in disparate causes. The history of the Left in post-revolutionary Iran is illustrative. For instance, Mehrnoush claimed that her feeling “deep freedom” continued until 1360.

⁵⁷⁷ Amū‘ī, *Iqtisād-i Sīyāsī*, 47-50.

technocratic and centralized planning exemplified the liberal opposition permitted to exist, but ultimately set aside, in official spheres during the revolution's early years.⁵⁷⁸

Perhaps the differences between Sahābi's notion of a pious state and Article 5 reflect a move toward the kind of governmentality found in hyper-administrative states — a clear break.⁵⁷⁹ And yet, there are crucial ways in which Article 5 ironically mirrors Sahābi's positions, suggesting something else.⁵⁸⁰ Echoes of his insistence on technocratic expertise and economic planning devoid of partisan politics (the “non-political”) may be found in Article 5's rendering of the *ummah*, or “the people,” as an object of administration and management for religious jurisprudence. Instead of economic experts, we have religious experts; the rule of experts is present in both iterations.

From this perspective, the outcome of the revolution both was and was not a matter of indeterminate governmentality. On the one hand, the factual emergence of a welfare state in post-revolutionary Iran, which appeared through a competition with oppositional forces against Sahābi's protestations, actually aligns with Sahābi's position. This feature of events would certainly signal the end of a revolution predicated on indeterminate governmentality. As I noted at the beginning of this Afterword, closure involves putting to rest and setting aside the parts of a revolution that make it revolutionary; in the Iranian case, the appearance of a welfare state

⁵⁷⁸ According to his account, Sahābi repeatedly found himself in positions where he was in the minority, arguing against interventions in economic planning based off of partisan politics by a majority of elites concerned with countering the appeal of various leftist factions. He proudly presents the PBO at the time as an entirely scientific organization that was, at its core, technocratic. See *ibid.*, 30, 33-35, 40, 56-57.

⁵⁷⁹ For a discussion of differences between types of governmentality, see Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 92. My characterization of neoliberalism as an indeterminate governmentality differs, of course, from Foucault's characterization of it as the reduction of the political to the social by virtue of my emphasis on the operation of disavowal.

⁵⁸⁰ Other parts of the constitution more explicitly incorporate Sahābi's sensibility, including a plethora of articles about the provision of welfare and the protection of private property through centralized planning. See Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 35-36.

marked that transition. At the same time, however, the end came about through means that mirrored what it was not. Article 5 may be read as evoking the ethos of expertise and management found in technocratic knowledge (the end of the revolution) while perpetuating the indeterminate governmentality found in the logic of revolt.

At a level of abstraction one step removed from what the law says, we may reflect on the significance of these apparently conflicting tendencies. What is this duality if not the perpetuation of indeterminacy? Beyond the model of creating “free” markets through state action, how else might indeterminate governmentality be practiced? Where the institution of indeterminacy would contradict the principle as such, Article 5 suggests points of continuity between the extraordinary and the ordinary in post-revolutionary Iran.

III

Iran’s Constituent Moments?

In his discussion of post-revolutionary American politics, Jason Frank begins with the figure of the people. The people are simultaneously an “authorizing fiction” for state consolidation as well as that which reveals the “underlying contingency” of the fiction. On this basis, Frank theorizes what he calls “constituent moments” — moments “when the underauthorized ... seize the mantle of authorization, changing the rules of authorization in the process.”⁵⁸¹ To what extent does this theory travel to other revolutionary contexts? What would post-revolutionary Iran’s version of “constituent moments” look like? How might theoretical discussion of the people change in a context where the people are not only a marker of indeterminacy but also authorized in terms of indeterminacy?⁵⁸²

⁵⁸¹ Frank, *Constituent Moments*, 7-8.

⁵⁸² This point bears some similarities with Hamid Dabashi’s discussion of Shi’ism as paradox. See Dabashi, “The End of Islamic Ideology,” 484-85. My point goes one step further. I understand Muslim practice as historically

By investigating a moment of parallel emergence between neoliberalism and Iran's revolutionary resistance, this dissertation creates a framework for the future study of these questions. A moment of emergence does not signal a deterministic relationship but rather a site of possibility for both power and resistance alike. In fact, examining aspects of the 1979 revolution on these terms can help scholars understand contemporary social movements not only in Iran but also in the greater Middle East — movements that have occurred in a context more explicitly marked by the prevalence of neoliberal discourse.

To return to the initial provocation that inspired this study's historiographical reassessment, we must remember that 2011's Arab uprisings occurred very shortly after 2009's Green Movement in Iran. As others have noted, these were disparate events in many respects. Most importantly, where the former was revolutionary, the latter was a call for expanded citizenship rights within the context of the Islamic Republic's existing terms of order. But the call for citizenship in a context where the terms of order were once reconfigured in line with a periodic shift to neoliberalism should make us pause before simply discarding points of continuity. Indeed, despite efforts to posit a sharp break with the so-called ideological nature of the 1979 revolution, contemporary descriptions of a non-ideological social transformation in 2009 resonate with the disavowals heard two years after in neighboring countries and thirty years before in Iran itself.⁵⁸³ We would do well to listen to the parallels.

situated, looking to the context of a periodic shift where indeterminate governmentality presents a viable option for the exercise of governance and resistance to it. This reflects a difference in framework. Where Dabashi is concerned with questions of legitimacy and ideology, I have attempted to understand political subjectivation on more democratic terms.

⁵⁸³ Dabashi, one of the more prominent advocates of the idea that 1979 was an ideological revolution, proclaimed "the end of Islamic ideology" in celebratory tones with 2000's parliamentary elections. He then went on to describe 2009 as a "post-ideological" movement. See *ibid.*, 480-81; Dabashi, "An Epistemic Shift in Iran." As to disavowals, the reader will recall my earlier reference to characterizations of the 2011 Arab uprisings. Mikdashi in particular presents these uprisings as perpetuating neoliberalism in the very act of resistance; this occurs through presentations of collective justice claims in individualist terms. See Mikdashi, "Neoliberalism's Forked Tongue."

علت خودکشی غلامرضا تختی قهرمان کشتی ایران وصیت تختی مدالهایم را به یگانه فرزندم بدهید

بهاء ۲ ریال



تختی خدا با بابک عزیزم را بتو میسپارم طبق وصیت نامه تختی مدالهای قهرمانی او در موزه حضرت امام رضا بامانت گذاشته خواهد شد اختلاف خودکشی تختی بر اثر اختلاف خانوادگی بود یک اسلحه شکاری را تو میبیل و سه فشنگ خفیف از جیبم در حوم تختی بدست آمد در آخر بن برک تقویمش این جمله بچشم میخورد من سهو دیکسر گردان هستم تختی بر ای سعادت فرزندش حاضر به جدائی از نیش تختی از سه روز پیش در یکی از هتلهای تهران اقامت کرده بود غلامرضا تختی قهرمان مهر وف کشتی بر اثر اختلافات خانوادگی خودکشی کرد.

خبر نگار ما که امروز با کارکنان هتل آتلانتیک گفتگو کرد گزارش داده شد. تختی بر شب دیر وقت به هتل آتلانتیک مراجعه کرد و اطاقی خواست و اضافه کرد که چون در است نمیخواهد بخانه برود و از کارکنان هتل تقاضا نمود که نامش را در دفتر هتل ثبت نکنند تختی روز بعد در پرویز پس از صرف صبحانه از هتل خارج شد اما شب به هتل بازگشت و وارد اطاق شماره ۲۳ گردید و دیگر خارج نشد کارکنان هتل صبح امروز متوجه شدند که اتومبیل تختی پنجره است برای اینکه ناراحت نشود به اطاق او تلفن کردند تا کلید اتومبیل را بدهد اما رفقت با جسد تختی رو برو شدند.

غلامرضا تختی ۳۷ ساله قهرمان معروف کشتی جهان امروز در هتل آتلانتیک خودکشی کرد.

اولین اطلاع

ساعت یازده صبح آقای گرگانی دادستان تهران خبر رسید که غلامرضا تختی قهرمان کشتی در هتل آتلانتیک خودکشی کرده و مرده است در اطلاعی که به دادستان تهران رسید اضافه شده بود که یک وصیت نامه از تختی باقی مانده است دادستان یکی از آقایان بازرسان دادسرا و یکی از پزشکان قانونی را مامو و تحقیق در باره علت خودکشی تختی نمود. جسد تختی در ساعت نیم بعد از ظهر از هتل به پزشکی قانونی منتقل شد.



نقل از کیهان



Translation

The Reasons for the Suicide of Gholāmrezā Takhti, Iran's Wrestling Champion

Takhti's Last Will: Give my Metals to my Only Child

Cost: 2 Riāl

Takhti: Dear God, I entrust my dear Bābak to you. According to Takhti's last will, his championship medals will be held in a trust at the Imam Rezā museum. The controversy (*ikhtilāf*) surrounding Takhti's death pertained to familial discord (*ikhtilāf*). A hunting weapon was found in the late Takhti's automobile and three light cartridges were found in his pocket. On the last page of his calendar, the following sentence is seen: I am the wandering Jew. For his son's well-being, Takhti was prepared to separate from his wife. From three days before, Takhti was residing in one of Tehran's hotels. Gholāmrezā Takhti, the famed wrestling champion, committed suicide as a result of familial discord.

Gholāmrezā Takhti, 37 years of age, famed global wrestler, committed suicide today in the Atlantic Hotel.

First Notice

At eleven o'clock in the morning, news reached Mr. Gorgāni, Tehran's public prosecutor, that wrestling champion Gholāmrezā Takhti had committed suicide in the Atlantic Hotel and is dead. In the notice that reached the public prosecutor's office, it was added that Takhti had left behind a last will. The public prosecutor appointed a detective and a coroner to investigate the reasons behind Takhti's suicide. Takhti's corpse was transferred from the hotel to the coroner at half past noon.

Our reporter, who today interviewed the staff at the Atlantic Hotel, reported: The night before last, Takhti called on the Atlantic Hotel at a late hour and asked for a room. He added that, since it is late at night, he does not wish to go home. He asked the hotel staff not to register his name in the hotel's registry. The next day, yesterday, after eating breakfast, Takhti left the hotel. But he returned to the hotel last night, entered room 23, and no longer left. This morning, the hotel staff noticed that Takhti's automobile had a flat tire. So as not to upset him, they called his room to obtain the key to his automobile. But they went and encountered Takhti's corpse.

Quoted from *Kayhān*

بانهایت تأسف در گذشت شادروان جهان پهلوان غلامرضا تختی را بعموم
ملت ایران مخصوصاً ورزشکاران تسلیت عرض نموده و مجلس شب هفتم
آنمرحوم در روز شنبه ۲۳/۱۰/۴۶ در این بامویه منعقد خواهد بود



که شد در زندگی زار و مکرر
همه در مرگ او گریبان و مضطر
مسدال نقره و زد بهر کشور
ز بعد پهلوان یسزدی و اکبر
از این ماتم لباس سوک در بر
بهخشایش ورا بر آل حیدر
بفضل خویشتمن ای حسی داور
کنی اغماض از او در روز محشر

در یخ از تختی آن گسر دلاور
بعمر خویش پایان داد و بگذشت
بیسورد او زمیندهای کشتی
دو چشم خلق ما روشن بدو بود
خصوصاً بچه های خانی آباد
خدایا صبرده بر خاندانش
بکن محشور با آل (محمد) ع
عموماً از تو خواهیم ای خداوند

چاپ شهباز

« از طرف کلیه جوانان خانی آباد غلامرضا فهمانی »



بیاد بود
قهرمان حماسه‌ای ایران

تختی

پرورد گارا!!! تنها تو میدانی راه یافتن بقلب يك ملت ، کاری تا چه پایه دشوار است !
تنها تو میدانی که طی قرون متمادی در پهنه بیکران کشاکش بی پایان زندگی - تنها
کسانی زنده مانده اند که طپیدنیهای قلبشان - باطپش قلب ملتها، هم آهنگی داشته است

تو ، تختی عزیز !

با علم بمحبوبیت خارق العاده‌ای که داشتی ، هرگز آن فروتنی و آن بزرگواری
آسمانی را که شایسته يك انسان برجسته قرن ماست ، از دست نداده‌ای .
چه بسا که در چهار گوشه این دنیای کران ناپدید . تو پرچم عزیز ایران
را بر تارک افتخارات جاودانی ، باهتزاز در آوردی ... و با سرشک شوق انسانی ،
گلهای همیشه شکوفای ابدیت ملت ما را آبیاری کردی .
تنها همین يك رنگی تو با ملت بود که تورا جاودانه زنده نگه خواهد داشت .

- تسلیت به مادر عزیز و به بابکت .
- تسلیت به ملت و ورزش دوست ایران .
- تسلیت به بازماندگان خانواده ات .

(کارکنان : کارگران مؤسسه چاپ و انتشارات بیروز)

Translation

In memory of Iran's epic champion, Takhti

God!!! Only you know how difficult the task of finding the path to a nation's/people's [*millat*] heart is! Only you know that over protracted centuries, in the unending struggle of life taking place in the environs of the unemployed, only those have remained alive whose heart beats in harmony with the beating hearts of nations/peoples [*millathā*].

You, dear Takhti!

In spite of your extraordinary popularity, you never lost the otherworldly modesty and generosity befitting an outstanding human in our times.

How many times, in the four corners of this world of hidden shores, you brandished the dear Iranian flag on the back of eternal glory... And with tears of human joy [*sirishk-i shawq-i insānī*], you watered the ever-blossoming flowers of our nation's/people's perpetuity [*abadīyat-i millat-i mā*].

The good faith and sincerity [*yikrangī*] harbored between you and the nation/people [*millat*] alone will forever keep you alive.

Condolences to your dear mother and your Bābak.

Condolences to the sports-loving people [*millat*] of Iran.

Condolences to the family you left behind.

(The personnel and workers at the Pirouz institute of printing and publishing)

Translation

Special Supplement. *Kayhān* 1.

Wednesday 1 Dey 2535 — 30 Zayhajah 1396 — Number 10047

Islam's Great Men

By: Doctor Sādeq Jalāli

This Pure Blood...: The Life and *Shahādat* of Husayn (Peace Be Upon Him)

From Long Ago, the Umayyid Wolves Searched for their Prey

The Life and *Shahādat* of Husayn (Peace Be Upon Him) in 8 Special Supplements

Tomorrow is the first day in the month of Muharram. The month of mourning, the month of Husayn (Peace Be Upon Him). A month in history that Islam looks upon differently. A month colored by the pure blood of Husayn (Peace Be Upon Him) and his companions. From this day onward, in 8 special issues, *Kayhān* presents to its readers the story of Husayn's (Peace Be Upon Him) life and the event of his *shahādat*.

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