

Islamic Perspective

Journal of the Islamic Studies and Humanities

Volume 22, Winter 2019
Center for Sociological Studies
In Cooperation with London Academy of Iranian Studies

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The Journal of Islamic Perspective is a peer reviewed publication of the Center for Sociological Studies, affiliated to the London Academy of Iranian Studies (LAIS) and aims to create a dialogue between intellectuals, thinkers and writers from the Islamic World and academics, intellectuals, thinkers and writers from other parts of the Globe. Issues in the context of Culture, Islamic Thoughts & Civilizations, and other relevant areas of social sciences, humanities and cultural studies are of interest and we hope to create a global platform to deepen and develop these issues in the frame of a Critical Perspective. Our motto is homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto. Contributions to Islamic Perspective do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial board or the Center for Humanities and Sociological Studies. The mailing address of the journal is:

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This Journal was printed in the UK.

ISSN-2046-8946

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122 Royal Langford, 2 Greville Rd,
London NW6 5HT, UK.
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The Return of the Volksgemeinschaft

On Islam and European Identity

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Abstract

There is a struggle within post-secular Europe over two competing ways of thinking about who and what belongs to Europe. This struggle manifests itself within two competing German concepts of community: *volksgemeinschaft* and *willensgemeinschaft*. The first, defined as the “ethnic community,” argues that what it means to be European is inseparable from Europe’s “pre-political foundations,” i.e. race, language, shared history, shared culture, and memory. The second concept, understood as the “willed community,” is rooted in the universalism of the European Enlightenment; it argues against defining the community by pre-political foundations, and rather advocates an “achieved” nationhood. From the perspective of non-European immigrant Muslims and immigrant descendent Muslims in Europe, their existence as Europeans depends on the latter sense of community, for it is an “achieved” nation that allows their “non-identity” to be wholly assumed within the modern “achieved identity.” Nevertheless, openness to the assimilation of the non-identical is precisely what those who advocate for the *volksgemeinschaft* say will transform Europe into something other than Europe: an amalgamated America-like *vivre-ensemble* (living together), wherein the non-identical becomes identical not with Europe, but with the post-*volksgemeinschaft* amalgamation. This essay is meant to explore and interrogate the heated discourse between these two concepts of community, with the practical intent of understanding their fundamental antagonisms and where it points in the near-future.

Key Words: Volksgemeinschaft, Willensgemeinschaft, Pre-Political Foundations, Enlightenment, Identitarianism, Immigration.

Introduction

The continual and growing presence of Muslims in the European ethnosphere, especially after the Syrian refugee crisis of 2014-2015, has led to bitter divisions within Europe. The increase in culture, racia⁸

681, ethnic, and religious diversity, the multi-cultural reality of modern Europe, and its “threat” to the traditional identity of Europe as a Greco-Roman, Christian-cum-Enlightenment civilization, has bolstered the ranks of far-right identitarian groups and nationalist anti-immigrant political parties. It has also contributed to the rise of newer forms of “palingenetic ultra-nationalism,” i.e. fascism (Griffin, 1993). What these group have in common is that they all believe Europe has entered into a severe *ernstfall* – a crisis situation – wherein the cumulative particularities that constitute Europe as a civilization distinguishable from other civilizations is under threat of being lost by its increasing cosmopolitanism. Europe, in other words, by its openness towards the Resten world in the form of mass immigration and multiculturalism, is producing the conditions for its own population replacement, its own cultural demise, its own civilizational suicide: The “Great Erasure” and the “Great Replacement” (Kurtagic, 2016; Camus, 2018). For the identitarians, the agent that is most representative of this *untergang* (downfall) is the growing Muslim *ummah* (community) living within the traditional borders of the European ethnosphere. In their thought, the Muslims are the eternal “non-identical,” an anti-identity, in that they cannot by way of their own pre-political foundations, including their religious traditions, be made identical with the traditional identity of Europe (Adorno, 1999: 362). Thus, they remain “anatotists,” those dwelling within the “wrong place.” However, what has given them the legal right to claim to be “topical,” i.e. those dwelling within their “rightful place,” is the concept of *willensgemeinschaft*, the Enlightenment ideal of an “achieved” community – an “achieved” nation of citizens.

In order to understand the antagonism between the Muslim *ummah* in Europe, and by extension North America, and those who argue that they are anatopists, we must first examine thoroughly the idea of *willensgemeinschaft* and *volksgemeinschaft*.

The Ethnic Community versus the Multi-Ethnic Citizens

The struggle for Europe’s identity centers around the discussion of what it means to be a “nation.” According to the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, the term “nation”

itself “reflects the historical genesis of the nation-state,” as the Roman word “Natio” was the name of the “goddess of birth and origin” (Habermas, 1996: 494). In the classical sense, the term “nation” refers predominantly to “peoples and tribes who were not yet organized in political associations,” but were related through kinship relations conditioned by geographical proximity (Ibid.). As such, they are united by the pre-political foundations of “common language, customs, and traditions,” which serve as the basis of their common identity, but not their common polity (Ibid.). In other words, their common descent, expressed through their shared cultural, linguistic, and historical resources, had not yet united them into a common political state. When the “nations” began to construct the state from within themselves and their common resources, the “nation-state” was born, as it sealed governance and ethnos in a symbiotic relationship. In this sense, the state, regardless of its form, reflected the ethnically homogeneous nation in its wholeness. For most of history, those that were “non-identical” to the nation, i.e. those foreign to the pre-political foundations in some way or another, were either persecuted by the state or, at minimum, left unrepresented by the state. The state, in its identity, was the highest most reflection of the identity of the homogeneous nation.

Although the supra-national state determinately negated the ethnos-bound state in the Christian and Muslim empires, the aforementioned conception of the ethnically-bound nation persisted within Europe up to the beginning of the modern age. The Bourgeois Enlightenment, with its humanistic universalism, crafted a competing form of nationhood that undermined the pre-modern nation-state. Again, according to Habermas, “with the French Revolution, the ‘nation’ became the source of state sovereignty... Each nation is now supposed to be granted the right to political self-determination” (Ibid.). This “self-determination” of the state includes the autonomy to decide who is and is not a member of the nation. In other words, the state that arises from the ethnic complex of the demos is replaced with the state that self-determines its own membership via the will. No longer does the state automatically include all members of the ethnic complex within its ranks. Likewise, no longer does the autonomous state exclude all members that are outside of the historical ethnic complex. Rather, the “democratic state,” divorced from the imperative of ethnic homogeneity, creates its own demos: the *political demos*. This post-ethnic political demos, predicated on membership through the assent to certain *political* ideals, as opposed to pre-political foundations, is what is called the *willensgemeinschaft*: the “democratic community” or the “willed community.” With the severance of the demos from the ethnos, what is born is the *nation of citizens*; what is left behind is the *nation of ethnic descent*. That is not to say that modern

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willensgemeinschaften are not populated predominantly by those within the homogenous ethnic community. Even until today, the population of the European states are predominantly constituted by those who share within the traditional pre-political foundations. Even France, where the concept of the modern willensgemeinschaft originated, and which has the highest level of non-ethnically French citizens, the ethnically French remain the dominant ethnic group. Rather, it is to say that ethnic homogeneity, which once was the origins and basis of the nation-state, no longer serves in that capacity, and therefore those who are non-identical to the historical ethnic complex are capable of enjoining themselves to the achieved “citizenship” (*staatsbürgerschaft*) of the modern willensgemeinschaft. Thus, the citizens, in all their identity-complexities, find their identity *as citizens* not within their pre-political foundations, but rather in their common political practices – their rights and responsibilities as citizens of a given state and members of an achieved demos.

The reality of this move from the ethnically-bound nation-state to the achieved citizenship via the assent to political values, coupled with the dictates of European capitalism, has opened up the formally homogenous European ethnosphere to an ethnic, religious, and racial complexity hitherto unforeseen. As such, those who in prior times would be understood to be non-identical, or anatomic, are able to now claim full citizenship within the European ethnosphere whilst retaining their own cultural, religious, and ethnically-bound practices, which originated outside of the traditional European ethnosphere. Citizenship via the assent to political ideals, values, and principles, divorced from the historically-bound ethnos, allows the “new” citizens to claim both their “homeland’s” ethnically-bound identity as well as their European citizenship in both their fullnesses, at least in theory. This leads to many citizens of the European states to claim full political rights and obligations of those states, while remaining differentiated and distinguishable from the dominant European culture and identity. This chasm between the political citizen and the cultural anatomicist – being united within one person – has caused many conservatives and nationalists within the European ethnosphere to question this modern (or postmodern) identity of Europe. If one can claim the political and economic fruits of the modern willensgemeinschaft without being from, or sufficiently reflecting any of European pre-political foundations, then what really does it mean to be a European, or in its particularity, German, French, Dutch, Italian, etc.? Can one truly belong to Europe if one is merely a political citizen without having any of the pre-political foundations? Is being European only a matter of citizenship, or is it still enrooted in ethnos?

The ever-increasing problems associated with multiculturalism, multi-racialism, and the neutrality of the state towards religion, has motivated some to reintroduce the concept of *volks-gemeinschaft* back into the public sphere as well as into national politics. It is feared that if there is no insistence on some level of pre-political foundations, then Europe will eventually cease to be Europe, as it will in time cease to have a distinguishable identity rooted *in its own* cultural, historical, and ethnic resources. It will, in a sense, become another America; a *willens-gemeinschaft* crafted by the amalgamation of numerous ethnicities, races, and cultures: the democratic “melting-pot.”

Return of the Volksgemeinschaft

In response to what the far-right views as the *überfremdung* (over-foreignization) that is taking place within the European ethnosphere, social conservatives, especially far-right identitarians and ultra-nationalists, have argued for the implementation of the *volks-gemeinschaft* as a way of reconfiguring and reorienting the nation back towards a premodern, pre-Bourgeois definition of a nation – one that is either in part or in whole defined by pre-political foundations (Johnson, 2018). In arguing for the reversal of the Enlightenment’s concept of *willens-gemeinschaft*, they believe that they may be able to not only remove Europe from the path of self-identity-destruction, but that they will be able to restore a level of homogeneity that Europe took for granted prior to the modern period. In this sense, the resurgence of the concept of *volks-gemeinschaft* is an attempt to produce a future homogenous or near-homogenous *ethnstate*, one that is predicated not on the democratic assent to liberal political values, but one that is rooted firmly in the soil of the pre-political – the soil of the historically and biologically given: *blut, boden, und kultur* (blood, soil, and culture).

Because the *völkisch* community is predicated and defined by the complexities of pre-political foundations, which have inherent exclusionary parameters, the nature of the *volksstaat* (ethnic state) is also exclusionary. What was the natural state of the ethnic-bound society before the modern nation-state, i.e. ethnic homogeneity, is within modernity weaponized against the non-identical. That is not to say that there were no ethnic or religious minorities residing within pre-modern Europe; rather, it is that the natural state of Europe in regards to its “white” ethnicities (Aryan and Slav predominantly) were simply the given – it was the non-political default that needed not to be politicized for any given reason, as it was the natural state-of-being that was left relatively undisturbed, with only a few major

disruptions (Ottoman Turks in the Balkans, Islamic Iberia, Mongol Invasion, etc.). However, with the growing sense of *überfremdung*, such a call for the return to ethnic homogeneity takes on a political role: it is now the concept and method by which the former default-situation can serve as a future rescue for a modern dysgenic situation, wherein the former homogeneity is no longer the default ethnic setting.

The desire to flee from the present and return to an idealized past is rooted in what I call *apóleiaphobia*, the “fear of loss,” or “fear of losing.” This agonizing fear stems from the universal fantasy of life without loss, life without the pain of loss, and life without the suffering of loss. The wish-fulfillment that speaks of the restoration of lost things, is translated into a political vision of a return to a pre-loss state-of-being, which provides the calming illusion that we as a people will no longer have to face the agonizing loss of what we loved and desire to have back: our idealized past. Thus, the call to return to the past, even through impotent day-dreams, attempts to avoid the reality of mourning, grieving, and our innate sense of loss for a way-of-being-in-the-world that was always destined to pass through history. This nostalgic longing, translated into political language, is one of the sources of the retrotopian-restorative politics of the *volksgemeinschaft*, and it is one that, paradoxically, would ultimately fail to be satiated by retrotopian political schemes, as all “restorations” of idealized pasts are anachronistic and therefore doomed to experiential impotence.

The insistence of reinstituting a *volksgemeinschaft* also follows the logic of Carl Schmitt, Hitler’s theological jurist, and what he viewed as the *essence of politics*: the friend-enemy distinction (Schmitt, 1996). The *volksgemeinschaft*, being defined by that which is outside of the political, i.e. that which one finds oneself “thrown into” (*geworfenheit*) through history and nature (ethnicity, language, shared history, religion), identifies and stigmatizes those who find themselves unable to adopt and/or appropriate such results of history and nature (especially race and ethnicity). Unlike in the *willensgemeinschaft*, wherein that which defines the nation can be adopted and appropriated through the intellect and will – both of which are conceptually non-dependent upon the results of nature and history – within the *volksgemeinschaft*, the nation is defined by that which cannot be adopted and/or appropriated by the intellect of will. Trans-racialism, the idea that one can “identify” oneself as being a member of another race or ethnicity through an act of conscious decision, does not cancel the reality of genetics and biological racial differences, even if such differences are miniscule in comparison to the overall

uniformity of human genetics. Consciousness does not dictate reality of ethnicity or race in this sense. For those in favor of the *volksgemeinschaft*, the institutionalization of the pre-political foundations inherently excludes those from outside those foundations, and therefore Muslims, especially those coming from outside of the European ethnosphere, cannot find a way to claim “Europeanity” without doing so inauthentically (*uneigentlichkeit*). Thus, they are thus systematically barred – by the inheritance of nature and history – from claiming to be a genuine member of the *volk* within the parameters of the *volksgemeinschaft*.

This begs the question: What about ethnic Europeans who convert to Islam? Aren’t they inheritors of the same pre-political foundations that define the *volksgemeinschaft* whilst choosing another religion? Nationalist thought has an argument for this scenario too. However, the argument against this kind of “corroded” ethnic-identity has a metaphysical response, one that has little to do with pre-political foundations found within the material realm that we’ve discussed thus far.

The Particularity of Geist and Seele

Hegel famously thought that history was the explicit manifestation of the movement of *geist* (spirit) through time and space. History, for Hegel, was defined by the dialectical unfolding of reason/mind within the realm of mankind and his affairs. When one learned to read history, one learned to understand and appreciate the wisdom of *weltgeist* (world spirit). Another German idealist philosopher had a similar but more localized version of such a *geist* – one that fully accounted for the particularity of *geist* within a given ethnically-bound nation.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte, in his *Thirteenth Address of the German Nation*, spells out his understanding of the unique spirituality of each nation; he argued that all nations have a spirit that guided their development, expressed their inner-most being, and was differentiated from all other nation’s *geistes* (spirits). As such, a particular *geist* of a particular nation cannot be mixed with others *geistes* without producing necrogenic effects. He says,

Spiritual nature was able to present the essence of humanity in extremely diverse gradations in individuals and in individuality as a whole, in peoples. Only when each people, left to itself, develops and forms itself in accordance with its own peculiarity, and only when in every people each individual develops himself in accordance with

that common quality, as well as in accordance with his own peculiar quality – then, and then only, does the manifestation of divinity appear in its true mirror as it ought to be; and only a man who either entirely lacks the notion of the rule of law and divine order, or else is an obdurate enemy thereto, could take upon himself to want to interfere with that law, which is the highest law in the spiritual world. Only in the invisible qualities of nations, which are hidden from their own eyes – qualities as the means whereby these nations remain in touch with the source of original life – only therein is to be found the guarantee of their present and future worth, virtue, and merit (Fichte, 2017: 114-115).

After establishing his perspective that all of humanity, separated by the nations they form on the basis of their natural kinship and geography, have a “spiritual nature,” he argues that the amalgamation of such differentiated nations will have a deleterious effect:

If these qualities are dulled by admixture and worn away by friction, the flatness that results will bring about a separation from spiritual nature, and this in its turn will cause all men to be fused together to their uniform and conjoint destruction (Ibid.).

For Fichte, the quickest way to lose contact with the spirit of one’s ethnic nation was the “admixture” of such a nation with another. Although he is unclear as to how this “admixture” occurs, one can assume that by “admixture” Fichte means either co-habitation of various peoples within a particular geographic territory, and/or the miscegenation of ethnicities. Either way, “separation from the spiritual nature” leads to the “conjoint destruction” of peoples’ particularity as ethnos-bound communities, and therefore the mutual destruction of their geistes. Fichte does not take into account the possibility of a dialectical process occurring through such an admixture. In other words, he couldn’t see how it would be possible to give birth to a new spirit through the determinate negation of the old spirits. In his formal logic, that which was negated is negated abstractly, with no remainder to be preserved in a new and higher form (Hegel, 1993: 54). The amalgamation is not a new and “fresher form” of the idea, representing new possibilities within the history of mankind, as Hegelian dialectics would argue, but rather is an abstract negation leading to the deaths of multiple spirits (Ibid.).

Fichte was not the only philosopher to argue that the particular geist of a given ethnicity ought not to be blended with the spirit of another. The German

Nietzschian philosopher Ludwig Klages, also thought that history was defined by certain bio-centric life forces (Klages, 2013). In reaction to what he thought was Hegel's insufferable optimism, Klages argued that in the case of the Germans, which was his primary concern, life forces were divided into two opposing camps: *geist* (spirit), which is indicative of modern worldviews, as it reduces all life to mere materialism, instrumental-reason, and the cult of efficiency, and *seele* (soul), which enhances life in all its mysterious vigor and wonder. Rooted in Nietzsche's *lebensphilosophie* (life philosophy), Klages believed that *geist* must be overcome by *seele*; modernity must be overcome by pre-modernity, Christianity must be overcome by paganism, "linear progress" must be overcome by a retrotopia: a return to an idealized former way-of-being-in-the-world, including one that rejects the modern notions of *willensgemeinschaft*. Today's *völkerchaos* (chaos of mixed peoples) is the product of the multi-ethnic and multi-racial post-secular state, which in turn is the product of modernity's destructive and dysgenic *geist* (in the name of progress). In this state, much like in Fichte's address, the Germans suffer a loss of their particularity, their life-giving force, and become a people without a soul: efficient in instrumental-reasoning, but cold, calculating, and soulless. As such, for reactionary philosophers such as Klages and his followers, such a modern *geist* must be abstractly negated in the Western nations. *Seele*, in all of its ethno-differentiated forms, must replace the monolithic-universalizing-*geist* as the polytheistic *animi* of Western societies.

It is no stretch to argue that since the *willensgemeinschaft* is a product of the modern world, with its rejection of pre-political foundations as the basis of the modern state, that an updated version of Klages' *lebensphilosophie* would argue for the rejection of the state predicated on such a non-biocentric conception of a nation, as such peoples would not retain, nurture, and fulfill the *seele* of their homogeneous ancestors, but would rather embody the universalizing *geist* of an amalgamated materialist-minded modernist peoples – the very dysgenic essence of modernist "progress." The fact that Klages can be read in such a way is evidenced in the fact that certain members of the far-right intelligentsia, who advocate for the "Whitopia" (white ethnostate) of the *volks-gemeinschaft*, have begun to appropriate him in their anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim politics (Andersen, 2018), both in Europe and North America.

Against Klages, there have been other philosophers on the Right, such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, who have rejected the idea of a bio-centric spirit that is metaphysically instilled – or is accessible – in all members of a given ethnos. For

example, Nietzsche believed it was the great individuals, the heroic geniuses, who were what he called the *übermenschen* (Nietzsche, 2005: 11-16). His disdain for Germans as an ethnic group was renown, and he brooked no idea of the Germanic people as-a-whole as being somehow the carrier of a great and triumphant spirit. That belonged exclusively with the individuals who transcended the dictatorship of the herd, the masses, the mediocrity. Similarly, the student of Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, believed that Germans were the carriers of a particular spirit, but he stopped short of saying that all Germans, by mere virtue of their ethnic appearance (*erscheinung*), i.e. the immediacy of their shared blut und boden, were animated by that *rassengeist* (racial spirit). Race, for Heidegger, was also about national particularity and its requisite *eigentlichkeit* (authenticity). There must be both blut, boden (*autochthonous*) and an authentic identity with the geist born from such blut and boden (Tawney, 2015: 38-46). His disdain for German communism, as well as the biological “vulgarity” of the Nazis’ *rassenpolitik*, convinced him that the *Deutsche geist* (German spirit) did not animate the totality of the German peoples. Those Germans who emphasized the universality of the human race over the particularity of the German ethnicity, or even Aryanism over German-ness, lived and thought in an *uneigentlichkeit* (inauthentic) state. They were not reconciled to their inherited geist and therefore were in a state of exile from their particular *rassengeist* (ethnic spirit). This lack of particularity was the precondition for the destruction of ethnic uniqueness (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, the philosophical argument, that each peoples have within their own ethnic community a particular geist, which should not be amalgamated with other peoples and their geistes, is a form of metaphysics that accomplishes the same result as the materially bio-centric argument: it erects a non-political barrier that attempts to make a successful willensgemeinschaft impossible, as the intangible yet ever-present geist of a particular people can be denied to the non-identical. Since they do not share the same pre-political foundations from which the European geist proceeds from, their pre-political foundations are a physical marker that announces that they do not, and cannot, possess any of Europe’s various geistes, no matter how integrated and assimilated they think they are. Muslims, according to this logic, belong to a different geist, and thus can only assimilate within Western societies in a superficial way; they can adopt the language; share in national holidays and festivities; they can eat the national cuisine; they can share in all the rights and responsibilities of being a political-citizen within the democratic state, but since their origins are in another ethnic nation’s geist, they are forever barred from being fully integrated and assimilated. This, it is argued, is a metaphysical reality that

cannot be transcended by intellect or will. As such, the ethnically-bound *geist* is an impenetrable metaphysics, which ensures the permanent alienation of the non-identical within the Western ethnosphere.

For traditional liberal theorists, the *geist* of a nation, if it exists at all, is not necessarily rooted within any bio-centric pre-political foundation. Rather, *geist* can be detached from *ethnos*. The democratically-derived *geist* of the modern *willensgemeinschaft* resides within its political philosophy, i.e. its foundational ideals, values, and principles. Thus, detached from race, ethnicity, language, religion, common history and descent, it remains open to all that consent to such values. In that consent, embodiment, and fulfillment, the democratically-derived *geist* is made apparent in history. For the critics of this liberal conception of *geist*, such a democratically-derived spirit seems fickle, confused, or even contrived, for what concrete people does it represent? Is it not just wishful thinking of a people who are in need of a *political* adhesive after the *natural* adhesive of *ethnos* is removed?

Critique of the Willensgemeinschaft

For those on the far-right, the identitarians, nationalists, and alt-fascists, it is this openness that is decidedly the exposed flank of the West. They argue that all ethnically-bound people have their homelands, and such homelands are (and should be) respected as being their exclusive homelands. Why should this not also apply to the West – the homelands of the Western peoples? Rooted in the works of Alain de Benoist, the “right to differ,” i.e. the right to remain homogenous within their own geographic territories, is a right that is granted to all nations. No nation has the right to interfere and or colonize the territory of the others. As the white nationalist Greg Johnson has written, “we believe that all peoples have the right to their own homogeneous sovereign homelands, wherever that is possible. We want ethnostates for ourselves, and on the Lockean principle that we will take what we need for ourselves but leave other people the option of doing the same, we wish all peoples well and will honor the ethnonationalist principle wherever it is asserted” (Johnson, 2018: 56). Thus, in pursuing the ethno-nationalist principle of the right to differ, Europe has the right to insist that the foreign-born citizens, immigrants, and refugees, return to their own nations, as their presence in the West is a violation of the West’s homogeneity and sovereignty.

Vivre-ensemble, or the “friendly living together,” is viewed as a corruption of the eternal connection between the pre-political foundations and the *geist/seele* of the people. In other words, the far-right sees immigration as the destruction of their nation-state’s historical pre-political foundations, but also destroys the metaphysical element that proceeds from and binds together that ethnic nation-state. Without such a metaphysical adhesive, all the state is left with is “civil patriotism,” or “constitutional patriotism,” which, as many in the post-secular multi-cultural democratic states experience, might not be strong enough to produce the level of social solidarity required for a democratic society to remain democratic. Democracy, they argue, works well within a culturally and ethnically homogenous society; it does not work well within an ethnically polyphonic society, wherein a cacophony of racial, ethnic, or religious factions struggle amongst themselves for control of the apparatus and resources of the state. It is perceived that each group vies for their own particular interest (the interest of their particular ethnic-matrix), which exists as an abiding factor above the universality of national citizenship. In this sense, the perception of “divided loyalties” undermines solidarity within the citizenry.

“Social trust,” it is argued, remains consistently low within ethnically and culturally diverse nations, especially among the less-educated working class. The “reptilian brain” (basal ganglia) in much of the masses inhibits their ability to trust those whom they view as inherently different from themselves. For example, when someone who shares the same ethnic-matrix as oneself is unemployed and on government provided welfare, the high level of social trust allows one to give the benefit of the doubt to that person, precisely because that person is perceived positively due to the fact that they share the same pre-political foundations. Those shared pre-political foundations allows the perceiver to see himself within the suffering of the neighbor. As such, they are viewed as being good people who are “down on their luck,” and thus deserving of moral consideration by both the state and the neighbor. However, when the individual is of a different ethnic-matrix, especially a minority ethnic-matrix, the low social trust level determines a radically different conclusion. They are unemployed because they are a member of a “foreign” race or ethnicity, who are inherently lazy, parasitic, and unintelligent. The perceiver cannot visualize themselves in the suffering of the foreigner, therefore there can be no sympathy or empathy for their plight, no matter how legitimate it is. Being so, they are not only undeserving of moral consideration from the state and the neighbor, the very fact that they are on welfare is a crime against both the state

and the neighbor, as their benefits are considered to be theft from the hard working members of the perceivers' own ethnic-matrix.

With this in mind, the far-right argues that ethnic homogeneity is the precondition for a successful democracy, since democracy is predicated upon social trust. Additionally, it is argued that ethnic homogeneity is not only the precondition for a *volksgemeinschaft*, but also for a successful *willensgemeinschaft*, as it is the introduction of foreign others that exaggerates the inherent differences within a single ethnic group. All nations, regardless of their ethnic-matrix, will have differences and disagreements, and within the democratic *volksgemeinschaft*, as well as the *willensgemeinschaft*, those differences will be adjudicated through democratic deliberations. However, when social trust is very low due to a high degree of racial, ethnic, and religious diversity within the *willensgemeinschaft*, such inherent differences are magnified and exaggerated, often times beyond reconciliation. Since the oppositional voices are often from a different ethnic-matrix, regardless of their citizenship, the motivations for their oppositional positions are considered suspect, as the change in policies they advocate appears to be clever attempts to undermine the nation and its "traditional identity," i.e. its assumed normative ethnic-matrix identity. The "others," it is thought, represent an entirely different people, a different *geist*, a different civilization, and within thus are the origins of their attempts to change the status quo. A state of suspicion remains normative within a highly diversified *willensgemeinschaft*, because the reptilian brain, which drives the suspicion of what many perceive as "foreigners," even if they are fellow citizens, fails to overcome inherent bias, even when such change is beneficial to the historically dominant ethnic complex (Metzl, 2019). Nevertheless, the nationalists say, "they may be citizens, but they're not of us. We must be on guard against their suspicious actions."

Unbehagen in der Willensgemeinschaft: The Future of Islam in Europe

The struggle that is currently at the forefront of the civil discourse through Europe – more so than in the United States, even despite its growing nationalism – is one that the Muslim community should pay close attention to. Because of (1) the weakness of confidence in regards to Europe's contemporary identity and how it relates to its pre-political foundations, (2) the growing presence of Muslims within the public sphere, and (3) the growing backlash against the rapidly changing face of Europe – its diversification due to "outside" influences, the Muslims of Europe will remain in

a precarious position for some time to come. As long as the democratic willensgemeinschaft of the Western states holds, Muslims can continue to claim their full rights as citizens and members of the body politic within Europe. However, as we've seen in some countries, especially France, the völkisch sentiment can bleed from the Far-Right into mainstream liberalism and even, in a few cases, the Left. As we witnessed in the rhetoric immediately following the *L'affaire Charlie Hebdo* (2015) and France's Burkini ban (2016), the insistence on the "national culture" as being the normative culture, to which all members of the democratic nation-state will have to abide, can take on a political character: the suppression of substantive freedom in the name of abstract freedom. The xenophobic far-right is expected to always call for a *xenelasia* (expulsion of "foreigners") in some form or another. However, when that call becomes mainstream, and migrates from the far-right into the otherwise "tolerant" center-left, the successful yet unstable willensgemeinschaft is threatened. When the equilibrium is upset, and the balance of public opinion turns against the freedom of conscious, autonomous thought, and cosmopolitan cultural expression, the future of the willensgemeinschaft is in question.

The modern experiment with "nation-building," i.e. *E Pluribus Unum* as an "achieved unity" within a diverse population, has always been a tenuous social experiment. Throughout human history, nations have been bound by their pre-political foundations, and those pre-political foundations have served as the basis for their state, which has been the highest expression and manifestation of their nationhood. The metaphysical concept of *geist* or *seele*, rooted also in those pre-political foundations, served as an additional adhesive to the nation, allowing it to tolerate severe disagreements within itself without sacrificing an equilibrium of social trust. The relative homogeneity of the nation-state allowed for the traditional nation-state to project its own negativity outside of itself – onto the distant other, for whom it could build cultural, social, and even physical barriers against (Hegel, 2010: 359-363). The willensgemeinschaft is another issue; achieved unity via constitutional patriotism can be found to be weak when the willensgemeinschaft has no metaphysical adhesive outside of the political values, principles, and ideals that it is founded upon. Since the bio-centric adhesive has been removed from the political-constitutional realm, it is left merely with its political ideals, which are haphazardly accepted by the masses, who too often are willing to accept those ideals for themselves and for those who share in their own pre-political foundations, but are unwilling to extend those ideals to those fellow citizens who do not share their pre-political foundations. In this case, the negativity of the dominant ethnic-

matrix is thrown not against others *outside* of the national-community (per se), but against the others *within* the national-community, the “anatomists.” This lack of social trust is the Achilles heel of the democratic willensgemeinschaft, and one of the driving factors for the calls for the return of the volksgemeinschaft.

The call to return to a volksgemeinschaft, or the “ethnic community,” which was once the default norm, is a call for a retrotopian return to an age before the modern detachment of demos and ethnos. It is a dream of those who are frustrated by the dysgenic and dynomic nature of the modern democratic and multicultural society. As the Muslim community continues to grow in Europe, so too will the backlash among the nationalist minded. The worst thing the Muslims could do is to retreat from their commitment to the willensgemeinschaft into a fundamentalist tribalism that mirrors those who call for a return to the volksgemeinschaft, and call for the end of democracy, the end of political freedoms, and the Islamicization of Europe. If the experiment of the modern democratic willensgemeinschaft is to be successful, it will need the Muslims of Europe to be fully engaged in the democratic discourses and debates, in order for the majority of those Europeans from within the historical pre-political foundations to see that their Muslim neighbors, in all their fullness, actually contribute to the furthering of a better European geist. Such a modern geist will not be the same as it was before modernity; it will be determinately negated by modern Europe’s polyphonic population, and will be better for it, as it will transcend the tribalism of Europe’s past, and the neo-tribalism that some call for today.

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Intellectual Trends in the post-Revolutionary Iran

A critical analysis of three decades of public debates on society, governance, religion and the role of intellectuals

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Abstract

In this article, the author is attempting to inquire into intellectual trends in post-revolutionary Iran. He has gone through the works of Soroush, Malekyan, and Kadiwar in regard to various questions of religion, society, governance, state and religious governmentality. His main idea can be summarized as the following: There has been a break-away of religious intellectuals from conceptualizing religion in terms of a jurisprudential framework, which has created new ways of understanding religion and its locus within the Iranian society of the 21st century.

Keywords: Soroush, Kadiwar, Malekyan, Post-Revolutionary Iran, Religion

Introduction

The most challenging taxonomy of intellectuals in Iran is post-Revolutionary intellectuals' classification on the basis of religion according to which they are divided into two camps of religious intellectuals and secular intellectuals (Ghudarzi, 1386: 82). Having assayed the process of intellectualism in post-Revolutionary Iran during 1980s, 1990s, and the first decade of the 21st century, this essay seeks to give an account of the ideas of Abdulkarim Soroush, Mohsen Kadiwar, and Mustafa Malekyan, as the respective representatives of these decades.

Aufklärung: A Conceptual Makeover

Jean Paul Sartre believes an intellectual is the one who “becomes aware of the polarity that does exist between the quest for practical truth (with all the measures it has) and the prevailing ideology (with its traditional system) both in himself and the society. This self-awareness of intellectuals secures its concreteness through being engaged in his own professional activities and duties and it is indeed consisted of laying bare the essential inconsistencies lied in the expression of the truth that he needs to succeed in his affairs through the myths, values and traditions. In other words, an intellectual seeks to retain and secure his own hegemony by attempting to involve other classes in the aforementioned discourses” (Sartre, 1380: 66). But according to Max Weber, intellectuals in their search for a meaning of the world particularly where the process of disenchantment is already completed, have sought to relocate the world in their rational pattern and make sense of this world's pains and agonies (Sadri, 1386: 99). Edward Saeed also believes that the intellectual is an individual who possesses the liability to demonstrate, embody, and clearly vocalize a message, a point of view, an intellectual bent, a philosophy or an opinion for or on the behalf of a group of people; this is a hard role for the intellectual to play as it requires coming to grips with the fact that his task is to raise critical questions by challenging traditionalism and dogmatism (Saeed, 1388: 30). According the various definitions of intellectualism, we can devise the sum total of features as the following: rationality, scrutiny, critique, criticism, power of discernment, inquisitiveness, promotion of fraternity and equality, law, disenchantment, enlightenment, commitment, and rebellion against dogmatism.

Intellectual Tradition in Iran

Intellectualism, understood either as the intellectual tradition or being a public intellectual, like other modern products in Muslim countries such as Iran, appear as an "other". Iranian intellectuals in tune with intellectuals throughout the world have always devoted themselves to the study of the relevance of their own culture and intellectual and social identity with modernity, with the tradition/modernity duality as their central issue. Intellectualism in Iran is perceived as a political concept; this is the very reason that Iranian modernity instead of having been founded upon philosophy and culture is grounded on such political concepts as democracy, socialism, parliamentarianism, etc. The Iranian intellectual has delimited his own cultural and social role according to political relations, and instead of seeking cultural developments in the society, he has always appeared as a social persona by focusing on politics and the critique of power. The birth and death of every epoch of history of the Iranian intellectual tradition have been accompanied by political developments; this is why any categorization proposed by researchers of the history of Iranian intellectual tradition has been drawn – whether consciously or unconsciously – according to significant political events (Kazemyan, Aftab, no 27: 15).

Religious Intellectualism

Those intellectuals who have their roots in the conflict of Iranian religious culture and modernity, and who seek to fill the gap between their own traditional-religious background and the achievements of modern world, are religious intellectuals. What distinguish them from secular intellectuals are their religious concerns and their application of religious language within the expression of modern ideas. Religious intellectuals, especially Islamic intellectuals, have grounded their thoughts in the revival and reformation of religion. In their view, the task of religious reform is not to reform the foundations of religion, but rather to revive the forgotten edicts of religion. For Islamic intellectuals, it is to revive Islam and purifying it from its acquired distortions and superstitions, uphold the sovereignty of Islam, and bring back a glorious life to the Muslims (Yusefi Eshkawari, 1376: 16-17). Religious intellectuals in the politico-social domain have also been heavily influenced by the "mainstream paradigm" which appear in every age. Thus, religious intellectuals have actually played the same role as other intellectuals in encountering colossal changes and transformations that occur in the world (Kazemi, 1387: 101). Religious intellectualism in contemporary Iran became the most challenging rival of the

clergy in the interpretation of religion. The overthrow of the clerical monopoly of interpretation of religion by religious intellectualism was the first challenge through which traditional discretion based religious judgment (*ijtihad*) was replaced by modern hermeneutic methods (Kazemi, 1387: 121). For religious intellectuals, the first step toward reformism was shifting from blind imitation of traditional interpretation to a modern and much more liberal approach (Sharabi, 1367: 31). This group of intellectuals, beside their acquaintance with traditional references, was benefited from an *ijtihad* free from traditionalist myopic approaches. Moreover, the critical role of religious intellectuals in Iran is simultaneously concerned with modernity and the West, religion and tradition, and even with the stream of *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment) itself. But in practical domains, these intellectuals pursue a "local" operational strategy in Iranian society (Kazemi, *ibid*: 71-72).

Intellectual Movement in 1980s

With the outburst of the Islamic Revolution, a new epoch emerged in the history of Iran, the region, and some even argued in the world (Esposito, 1990). If the previous epoch was the age of a secular and semi-modern totalitarian regime that sought to modernize the country based on the models of development proposed by the international capitalist pressure groups, after the Revolution a nativist political regime based on a political interpretation of Islam has come to dominate the Iranian society. The marriage of religion and political power created new situations in the domain of ideas and culture in Iran, which were indeed natural outcomes of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The official ideology of Iran's revolutionary establishment in 1980s was not in favor of intellectual activities. Religious radicalism, or the so-called "revolutionary fervor" of this period also curbed the atmosphere for intellectuals and forced many of them, especially those in favor of liberalism (and later on those who supported socialist discourses), to leave the country. The Cultural Revolution and the dismissal of intellectuals and secular professors from universities and academic institutions accelerated the migration of Iranian elites or forced them to reevaluate their intellectual strategies in a fundamental fashion. Thus the post-Revolutionary intellectuals must be divided into two groups: domestic and *émigré* intellectuals. Meanwhile, domestic intellectuals tried to adapt themselves with the censorship that was dominant in Iran's intellectual atmosphere and with the imposed restrictions by the revolutionary state. Thus, one can regard the 1980s as the declining decade of intellectual discourse in Iran. The arch-debate of this period was intellectuals' own quarrel over the significance of

historicism and positivism that had its origin in the translation of Karl Raymond Popper's works and the reliance of some of intellectuals like Abdulkarim Soroush upon them, which was severely criticized by Ahmad Fardid and his followers, particularly Reza Dawari Ardakani (Brujerdi, 1377: 241-270). This squabble, despite the tumult that it raised among intellectuals, did not have enough philosophical depth and was often characterized by trivial debates and verbal tussles. During this decade, some intellectuals like Ahmad Fardid and Reza Dawari Ardakani pointed their critiques toward liberalism, while others like Abdulkarim Soroush preferred to target Marxism, Socialism, and its Soviet versions of Leninism and Stalinism. This decade hosted various intellectual circles whose activities were devoted to the idea of "civil society." The "Kyan Circle" was regarded the most renowned research center of post-Revolutionary reformists whose runners sought to publicize intellectual debates by focusing on Soroush's ideas through the publication of "Keyhani Farhangi" between the years 1988-1990. Upon their studies of the occident, they came to the conclusion that the assimilation of positive elements within Western society, and their internalization through local and indigenous values, is the best solution. In tune with this strategy, they insisted on overcoming three assumed gaps that exist between the Iranian identity, the Islamic paradigm, and the Western model (Mashayekhi, 1382: 8). Under the slogan of "political development" and joining the global community, they gradually moved toward Western and liberal ideology and paradigms. This journal triggered such a commotion in such issues as science and religion, liberty and social justice, Islam and West, and religious and political establishments that its editorial board had to resign due top pressures leveled by the establishment's conservative wings, which later on came to be known as "pressure groups". This journal was suspended in 1990 and by the following year it resumed its work with a new editorial body in concordance with regime's cultural policy (Jahanbakhsh, 1383: 221). Furthermore, Iran's developments by the end of 1980s prepared the ground for religious values either to lose their colors or be reinterpreted in line with novel understandings in Iran. Some argued that new generations' grievance of political Islam gave rise to an atmosphere of despair and indifference toward religion. In other words, this persuaded religious intellectuals such as Mehdi Bazargan to criticize the idea of political and ideological Islam as the sole possible reading of religion. His approach was heavily relied upon within the modern intellectual tradition, which sought to propose a non-ideological interpretation of religion by describing it as the main reason of Islamophobia. He argued that if we did not force religion into poking its nose into social and political affairs many problems broached by new generations of

Muslims would become pointless and religion could revive itself again in an acceptable fashion (Bazargan, 1377: 72). To cut the long story short, one could state that during the first decade of the Revolution there was no sign of a strong religious intellectualism due to various socio-political and religious issues, such as the war with Iraq and steady consolidation of clerical rule in the political map of Iran. It was only from 1988 onward that the religious intellectual community began to prove itself as a "religious circle which takes modernity seriously," thanks to such factors as the transition from the revolutionary experience as the first form of governance, war termination, charismatic leader's departure, and the publication of some papers by Soroush in Kyan Journal.

Intellectual Movement in 1990s

With the relative opening of the cultural atmosphere within the country, religious intellectuals in 1990s tried to change the "univocal society" into a "multi-vocal" and pluralistic society through the propagation of books, articles, and lectures (Kazemi, 1383: 11). Along with this group of intellectuals, a new generation of secular intellectuals emerged in Iran who devoted themselves more to social and political criticism and diverted their efforts toward the reproduction of liberalist, feminist, postmodernist, and neo-Marxist doctrines. The principal concern of Iranian intellectuals of 1990s was modernity and the obstacles modernization presented for the country. This concern is still regarded as the main issue with the Iranian intellectual discourse.

Besides the intellectuals within the country, however, a dynamic and diverse Iranian intellectualism took a critical shape abroad. Thanks to the translation and publication of works by intellectuals in the domains of human sciences and modern philosophy, during this decade the path was tiled for the emergence of new debates. Such intellectuals as Dariush Shayegan, Aramesh Doostdar, Mehrdad Mashayekhi, Abbas Milani, and dozens of other Iranian renowned intellectuals across Europe and United States. Their work, having criticized the ruling regime of Iran by mobilizing extensive critiques against the intellectual trends itself, has played an indispensable role in the promotion of Iranian intellectualism. What distinguishes the domestic intellectuals from the *émigré* intellectuals is most of all the tone of their speeches and writings.

Those Iranian intellectuals who live in Europe and the US, thanks to their unrestrained freedom of expression, articulate their views on politics, religion, and

the social situation in Iran in an expressive, transparent fashion, and sometimes in sharp and critical terms, while the domestic intellectuals are widely stricken by an extensive self-censorship in the expression of their ideas and views and have always refrained from sharp-tempered intellectual criticisms that are prevalent among Iranian émigré intellectuals. In other words, the Iranian intellectuals who work in Iran tend to express their ideas in a very conservative manner. Religious intellectuals in 1990s more than any other time insisted on the fulfillment of the idea of civil society. This idea is indeed equivalent to all global values of freedom, democracy, individual rights, etc., which have been debated by other intellectuals for a century. During this period, the social and political action of religious intellectuals was reformist in contrast to pre-Revolutionary decades. By introducing their local ideas, they engage themselves in the reconstruction of a global civil society so as to clear more space for religion in the rearrangement of global community through the modification of modern ideas (ibid: 106). This group of intellectuals sought to lay the ground for the development of modern and liberalistic ideas through "the minimization of religion" and "the tenderization of jurisprudence". Abdulkarim Soroush and Mujtahid Shabestari are among the most important representatives of this trend; they broached the idea of civil society and social and political categories by non-judicial interpretations of religion. Here we can mention such names as Ramin Jahanbagloo and Ali Mirsepassi as secular intellectuals in this domain. Moreover, in this decade, a reformist trend took form among religious intellectuals that was consisted of various distinct groups. Some of them had emerged from leftist religious intellectual trends; some were new generations of *Nehzat Azadi Iran* (Freedom Movement of Iran), and some others were the culturalist intellectuals who pursued the project of religious reformism in a democratic and liberalistic spirit. This trend gradually changed into a "religious secularism current," which holds a positive view of modernity and its achievements. This movement, which took form within the discourse of the Islamic Revolution and against the official religious paradigm that was dominant in Islamic Seminaries of Theology and ruling political regime in Iran, sought to propose an alternative paradigm within the boundaries of the existing Islamic state. This trend, which began to grow from the second decade of the Islamic Revolution, was to come up with new readings of religion through the application of modern epistemological and hermeneutical attitudes, and to propose a paradigm of religious modernity based on modern liberal teachings. The main target of this secular trend was to break the monopoly of the official clerical interpretation of religion, which was intended to provide the required theoretical basis for the ruling regime. This

initiative of religious intellectuals was concurrent with some modern theological debates that passed into the field of Islamic theology from Christian theology and challenged the official reading of religion as a political legitimacy machine. These debates were broad, and ranged from possible and new methods for dynamic jurisprudential argumentation (*ijtihad*), human expectations from religion, epochality of religious understanding, the scope and role of religion in human life to believers' need for political, social, economical guidance. In a nutshell, these debates covered all extra-religious patterns that are the results of human experiences that are explicitly outside the traditional religious domains. A remarkable characteristic of the secularist religious outlook is the effort that this generation of religious intellectuals has made in offering a reading of religion that is in total harmony with all dominant liberal values in modern world; a religion which is politically democratic, with a social ideal rooted in liberty and human rights, and an economic ideal based in utilitarian individualism, which has been reduced to a spiritual factor in human life. Iran's political developments of 1990s left a radical impact on secular trends among the various camps of religious intellectuals. The construction period (President Rafsanjani's Administrations) and Iranian politicians' strong appeal to a free economy and the presence of technocrats and bureaucrats in the government resulted in the marginalization of ideological forces and prepared the social context for modern readings of religion. The epochal victory of reformists in the presidential election of 1997, which in turn had its origin in the religious attitudes of the so-called minimalist religious intellectuals, uncovers the reciprocal relationships of this trend and social conditions of 1990s. The secularist trend of religious intellectualism found numerous advocates among students and the newly emerged middle-class due to the political situation of 1990s. It had a remarkable influence on religious thought insofar as all traditional religious scholars and eminent figures of Islamic seminaries devoted themselves to the criticism of its ideas and interpretations of religion. Religion's ability to answer the needs of Iranian society in this period had been seriously challenged; the path for the critique of religion, religious culture, and dominant religious tradition in the Iranian society had been laid. The most eminent figure in secularist trend of religious intellectualism is Abdulkarim Soroush.

Abdulkarim Soroush

Soroush is one of the most outstanding religious intellectuals who remains heavily influenced by empiricism. Having relied heavily on the works of liberal thinkers like Karl Popper in England from 1969 until the Revolution, Soroush took advantages of these ideas in his criticism of Marxism that was the dominant intellectual trend in 1970s. His scholarship in the history of Islamic theology, particularly concerning Ash'ari theologians like Abu Hamed Al-Ghazali, and in the methodology of modern sciences, allowed him to lay the groundwork for a modernist reading of Islamic theology in Iran. Soroush pursues Islamic studies in a Kantian spirit (Razaghi, 1376: 87). By proposing his theory of epochality of understanding and insisting on the revision and criticism of religion, Soroush stood face to face with the dominant traditional perspectives. Soroush's reliance on rationality and scientific method, and his efforts to create a secular view of religion through deliberate application of analytic philosophy, and in particular by resorting to a post-positivistic approach, and insistence on pluralism and liberal democracy, puts him in the camp of modernist system-builders (Pedram, 1382: 115).

Hermeneutical Theory of Expansion and Contraction of Religious Knowledge

Hermeneutical theory of expansion and contraction of religious knowledge is the building block of Soroush's theories. It seeks to distinguish between the essence of religion and religious knowledge although the latter is grounded on the former. However, it should not be understood as being synonymous with the essence of religion (Soroush, Kyan, no 2, 7). Religion is perfect as such, he adds, and the Lord has sent whatever he considered necessary for man, but human knowledge and understanding of it is defected and ever-changing (Soroush, 1373, 164). From this ever-changing essence of human knowledge, he concludes that the principal factor in the development of religious knowledge is its interrelation with other human episteme, and every change in religious knowledge happens as a result of a development in human extra-religious knowledge (Nasri, 1381: 128-139). According to Soroush, religion itself, along with all its components, is true, but in religious knowledge the true and the false have been intermixed; the ideas of religious scholars are full of inconsistency and discrepancy (Soroush, 1379: 440-441). Soroush opines that religious knowledge is a human knowledge and like other epistemic branches is in constant development, evolution, expansion, and contraction, and this expansion and contraction is the immediate result of an expansion and contraction that occurs in other fields of human inquiries. The understanding of religion, thus, is an ever-changing and hierarchical form of cognition (Soroush, Kyan, no 2, 8). In his view, as philosophy and empirical

sciences are not whole and constantly seek perfection, jurisprudence, exegetics, ethics, and theology are also far from being ideally perfect. The final outcome of his perspective could be that the understanding of Shari'ah needs constant revival and reconstruction, and the constituents of religious knowledge should always be rearranged so as to keep its harmony with the ever-renewing components of extra-religious knowledge (ibid: 249). Soroush is of the belief that the epoch must become religious, i.e. that peoples' mores and goals should take the *form* of religion, on the one hand, and the religion must be epochal, i.e. that the epoch's epistemic treasures should be applied in deciphering Shari'ah on the other hand (ibid: 314). In his words, the real intellectual is the one who is aware of the necessity of epochalization of religion and takes serious steps in this direction; the task of religious intellectuals is to teach the believers to content themselves with minimum certainties of minimal religion and in practice cling to what is solid and decisive and pass the allegorical dimensions to the Lord (Soroush, Kyan, no 4, 9).

The Clergy

Relying on his hermeneutical theory of expansion and contraction Soroush concluded that no understanding of religion is sacred and unconditional and no particular group could have any claim of exegetical monopoly. He defines the clergy in terms of a religious source of livelihood and believes that everyone who keeps his pot boiling through religion is indeed a member of the clergy caste (Soroush, Kyan, no 245, 2). On the contrary, the non-cleric scholar in Soroush's view is an individual who, while devoting himself to religious knowledge or religious praxis, has an independent source of income. In his view, neither knowledge nor moral integrity or even jurisprudential skills are the measures according to which one can decide whether someone is a cleric. The criterion is only the *form of livelihood* (ibid: 3). Accordingly, a religion that is knitted to material and political interests, thus transforming into an ideology, will miss the chance for development and evolution. That is why the level of religious understanding is becoming so unsophisticated (Soroush, Kyan, no 46, 25). Thus, Soroush refuses to entrust the religious affairs to the clergy, for in his view by earning his livelihood through religion the clergy will change into an institution whose function will be to sustain this institution itself (ibid: 26). The political consequence of this debate was that it resisted the vocational monopoly of the clergy. As a consequence, it furthered Soroush's quarrel with jurists and the supporters of the *rule of jurisprudence* (Soroush, Kyan, no 46, 232).

Religious Government or Religious Democratic Government

Following the project of religious secularism, Soroush proposes the idea of a democratic religious government. In his view, the difference between a religious government and a religious democratic government lies not in their forms, but rather in their ends. The religious government deliberately builds its peoples' world so that they build their own hereafter; this is the eschatological end of religious government. However, both governments – religious and unreligious – can follow the same building strategy (Soroush, 1376: 375). According to Soroush, the religious government is a government that has its roots in the believers' unreligious rights and governmental duties of religious people. This government is primarily obligated to address its people's needs (through rational and empirical methods), so that they could procure welfare, and as a consequence devote themselves to sublime values and their spiritual needs, including the freedom to choose their own faith (ibid: 380).

In Soroush's view, the primary assumption in making democracy requires religious criteria that are consistent with democracy, and in those societies whose religious criteria are not in the proper pitch with democracy, no democracy shall occur there (Mirsepasi, 1381: 76). Soroush believes that religious governments could be either democratic or undemocratic. This depends on: 1) their share of common sense, and 2) how much they care for human rights (Soroush, 1372: 279). By answering such questions as "whose is the government," "whether we have any right to govern at all or not," Soroush seeks to build a bridge between democracy and religious government, and to move from religious government to democratic religious government. Soroush regards such values as freedom, justice, rationality, and human rights as extra-religious rights, and believes that every religion that is not willing to respect human natural rights jeopardizes its legitimacy (ibid: 281). But his insistence on the pivotal role of reason does not imply that Soroush is in favor of liberalism. Rather he emphasizes that in a religious society, whose people receive the religion with open arms, freely and without any coercion, the authority of any unreligious form of government will involuntarily lead to undemocratic model of government (Jahanbakhsh, 1383: 248). In the course of the secularization of religion, Soroush proposes the idea of "minimal religion" as he believes that we cannot heap a heavy load up on religion. Thus, those who behold religion from outside need to take this point into earnest consideration: maximal religion is at odds with religion itself. Those who provoke unintelligible expectations of religion (in the domains of ethics, praxis, economy, hygiene,

programming, governance, and the like) and urge religion to carry a heavy load, gradually destabilize its grounds of legitimacy (Soroush, (a) 1378: 110). According to Soroush, religion cannot help us to choose the better form of governance, because the planning for and the management of various aspects of social life should be handled by the administrative institutions in a rational manner. Religion is not obliged to offer a particular method or program of governance. Jurisprudence is neither an administrative science nor a governmental policy. What religion has to teach the believers in this regard is minimal in scope (Soroush, (b) 1378: 17).

Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism in Soroush's view is grounded on two foundations: one is our various interpretations of religious texts and the other is our varied interpretations of religious experiences (Soroush, 1377: 2). Religious pluralism in Soroush's sense, does not imply that all religions are equally legitimate, but it is an account of the diversity that exists in the world, whether this diversity is a diversity of truths, or a diversity that simultaneously hosts both truth and untruth (ibid: 92). In fact, Soroush regards religions as a combination of true and untrue propositions and believes that the religious diversity that is dominant in the world demonstrates that the legitimacy and supremacy of a religion cannot be proven through reason and argument. According to a theory of this kind, the supremacy of a religion over other religion is not fathomable because of their incomparability, but rather the believers' insistence on their belief throughout the history, despite many disputes and argumentations, shows that the secret of the diversity of religions is much more complicated to overcome through theological debates (Soroush, 1380: 38).

Intellectualism Movement in the 21st Century

The secularization of religion project came to its end in the early years of the 21st century by opening a new chapter in the Iranian religious intellectualism that was immediately followed by the students and middle-class's leaning toward nonreligious intellectuals. It can be said that throughout the first decade of the 21st century, maybe even earlier, that despite the fact that the Iranian intellectual community grew larger, its intellectuals lost their prophetic role. This development had its roots in the changes that the Iranian society underwent particularly through the expansion of technological progresses, the rise of modern media, the promotion of higher education, and the wider access of Iranians to original intellectual and scientific sources. These developments had intellectual consequences, the most

significant of which was Iranian society's deliverance from such dualisms as eastern/western; although another dualism has recently emerged, i.e. religious/secular dualism. During this decade, Iranian society is increasingly thinking of its social life's scientific and pragmatic problems, such as coexistence, tolerance, urbanism, and the youth. These dilemmas could not be overcome exclusively by intellectuals alone. After this event, we shall witness the advancement of specialism and the reign of expertism. During the early years of the 21st century, we have witnessed the emergence of diversity within the religious intellectual trend. One of the reasons for this is Soroush's absence from Iran, which led other representatives of religious intellectual trend to seek other sources of inspiration and thus to break the Soroushian monopoly within the religious intellectual movement. The most important occasion in this regard was the advancement of social and political freedoms during the reformist government, which gave rise to a variety of new intellectual trends indeed (Farasatkah, Shargh, no 1012, 5). Thus, not only the religious intellectuals released themselves from the bugbears of the 1990s, but it tilled the path for new intellectuals to emerge. This in turn opened the door for dialogue between the intellectuals. The addressee of 2000s' intellectualism was a generation who bloomed during the age of development, privatization, and media, and devoted itself more than anything else to the supreme role of the *self* or the *individual*. This generation, suffering from the setbacks before reforms and reform movement, reflects increasingly upon the existing intellectual values within the culture, discourses and the prevailing norms in the institutions (government and political parties). The intellectual atmosphere of the first decade of the 21st century is no longer confined within the Iranian national borders and has found a global audience. During this decade the past and new intellectuals lost their previous central status. Politics also gets itself involved in the public sphere. Generally speaking, Iranian society in the first decade of the 21st century experienced a more open atmosphere. During Khatami's administration, in the final years of 90s and the opening years of 2000s, the cultural institutions and reformist newspapers were active and democratic concepts were discussed. This group has had the most fruitful output among religious intellectuals and was regarded as the most significant inheritor of the religious intellectual tradition. Yet this intellectual fraction does not perceive itself in an exclusively religious fashion. Without being restricted to the classic problematiques of religious intellectualism, this group examined pragmatic ideas in dealing with the problems of Iranian society. At first glance it might seem that the most intellectual development in this decade was the emergence and the advancement of the liberal trend, while during the first years of

the 21st century – and particularly during the consolidation of ultraconservative government—we witness the formation of a conservative trend among Iranian intellectuals. Part of these intellectuals belongs to the religious intellectual trend and the rest are members of the left or so called “secular tradition.” The implementation of economic policies during the past decades is one of the sources of emergence of conservative intellectuals. Some observers believe that the economic policies of the Rafsanjani administration – the policies that were more or less pursued by the Khatami administration – followed the advice of the International Monetary Fund (IMF); that advice had the color of conservative policies (Farasatkah, *ibid*: 10). Of course, this perspective needs to be assessed in a critical fashion as the economic policies of the conservative ruling class has by now demonstrated the partial accuracy of the previous governments economic policies – which were surely not conservative by nature. Among the eminent figures of the first decade of the 21st century are Mohsen Kadiwar and Mustafa Malekian.

Mohsen Kadiwar

Mohsen Kadiwar was born in 1959 in Fasa city near Shiraz. After finishing his studies in electronic engineering during the opening years of the Islamic Revolution, due to his profound interest in Islamic Studies and human sciences, he moved to the Shiraz Seminary of Theology, and thereafter in 1981 he joined Qom Seminary of Theology. After 1983 he began to teach some theological courses. In 1988, he obtained the degree of Ijtihad in jurisprudence. Along with studying and teaching in the Qom Seminary, in 1999 he received his Ph.D. in Islamic philosophy and theology (transcendent theosophy) from Tarbyat Modarres University and taught at the universities of Imam Sadegh, Shahid Beheshti, Sheykh Mofid, and Tarbyat Modarres. Since 1991 he was in charge of the office of Islamic Thought of the Institute for Strategic Researches. He has published many articles on *Illuminative Philosophy* and books on Islamic studies, philosophy, jurisprudence, and politics such as *A State of a Spiritual Leadership* (1998), *State in Shiite Jurisprudence* (2000), and *The Book of Reason* (1998) (Roodi, 1379: 19-22).

The Necessity of Critique and Revision of Religious Thought

Kadiwar views critique as a necessary step in the scientific life of societies. He believes that critique sustains scientific life as a process of theoretical refutations and verifications. Scientific critique leads to the epiphany of truth and the revision and edification of reality (Kadiwar, *The Book of Reason*, 1377: 196). Moreover,

Kadiwar insists on the necessity of revision of religious thought and invites religious scholars to devote themselves to the edification of Islam in its primordial form. In Kadiwar's view, religious thought, including Islamic thought, gradually becomes tainted with superstitions, irrational beliefs and customs, and the brilliant face of Shari'ah is sometimes dimmed by the rust of ignorance and prejudice, as it often takes a part for the whole (ibid: 165). He does not regard any of the Islamic sciences, such as jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, and mysticism, as a substitute for Islam, but rather they are merely paths through which the wayfarers can reach their Beloved One. The absolute dominance of each one of these sciences within religious thought, according to Kadiwar, not only brings an irremediable havoc upon other sciences and slows down their growth, but it also perverts the dominant science and gives an abnormal picture of religion (ibid: 166). In his view, religiosity (*religious leben*) regains its integration only within the sacred triangle of intellection, devotion, and edification.

Reformation of Religion and Religious Thought

Along with the necessity of expurgation of religion and seeing it as a whole, Kadiwar debates the issue of reformation of religious thought in Islam and Iran. Religious thought must be revised according to temporal and spatial conditions, Kadiwar claims, and religious precepts should be purified from various historical and spatial-temporal necessities, including particular circumstances of the revelational epoch (Kadiwar, 1381: 405). To implement such a reformation, he adds that we need to transform our perspective of Islam by shifting it from a historical point of view to a teleological outlook. The spiritual and teleological Islam that has delivered itself from historical and geographical necessities of the age of revelation understands religiosity in terms of the knowledge of the spirit of religion and Islamic ideals. According to this attitude, thus, religiosity is not measured in terms of the attachment to exoteric meanings derived from the historical and geographical circumstances of the age of revelation (ibid: 405-406). In his study of the process of shifting from historical Islam to a spiritual Islam, Kadiwar speaks of three models and historical phases in Iran:

First, the invariable/variable model, which has been grounded in the division of Islamic precepts into variable and invariable according to which invariable precepts constitutes the beating heart of the Shari'ah, and variable precepts are temporal and dependent upon transitory interests.

Second, the governmental model of jurisprudence, which is an initiative of Imam Khomeini and an outcome of practical engagement of religion with social problems in the modern age, implies some noteworthy points in Kadiwar's view. These are as follows: 1) Taking historical and spatial-temporal circumstances into account in all religious precepts is necessary for an efficient *ijtihad* related to jurisprudential enterprise. 2) Jurisprudence is a theory of management of human and social affairs from the cradle to the grave, and one can expect to find the answers to all political, economic, social, cultural and even military problems of human societies within. 3) Islamic state is the practical philosophy of jurisprudence for human society and its security is necessary. 4) The unconditioned authority of jurisprudence allows him to freely make justice-based decisions on a wide range of social issues so as to ensure people's interests. 5) Revealed prescripts are desired by accident and Islamic state for the promotion of justice is desired by itself. This attitude leads to the formation of an *etatist religion* that is a serious challenger of religious faith, spirituality, and religious conscience.

Third, the model of "spiritual and teleological Islam" seeks to ground itself upon the positive points of the previous models. This model can be outlined in a concise manner in this way: 1) The measure of credibility of religious prescripts is always their relationship with justice and rationality. 2) The religious prescripts in the age of revelation have surely been just, rational, and normal. Every religious prescript that does not have these later qualities must be excluded from the circle of invariable canonical precepts and taken as an extension of variable and temporal prescripts. 3) The legislator is God and his messenger and the non-immaculate cannot take on the religious legislation. 4) This model seeks to deepen religious understanding by restricting the domain of influence of jurisprudence and the canonical discourse. Thus, Islam as a religion for all times and places, which is dependent upon the intelligent, just, and rational values and precepts, must be equipped enough to answer the modern expectations. This is apparently the soundest way to defend religion in modern times, Kadiwar argues (Kadiwar, 1389: 408-431).

Civil Society and Religious Society (The Role of Rationality and Human Experience in Social Management)

Kadiwar suggests three sociological readings of civil society. In the first reading, civil society is understood in terms of culture. This conception emerged after the Renaissance in the West and sought to define the civil society in terms of secularism, anti-religionism, and instrumental reason, which are totally in conflict

with religion and religiosity. In the second reading, civil society is seen as an ideology and its narrators seek to draw some principles from the first experience of civil society in the West and cleanse it from its indigenous qualities and make of it a framework to manage their world and people. These sociologists view the realization of the ideology of civil society as the condition of happiness and prosperity in this world. In the third reading, civil society is regarded as a method and a science by which one can run the society; this method may be used by other cultures, ideologies, and religions, save the autocratic systems, to reach social happiness. Kadiwar embraces the idea of civil society as a method and believes that this conception – like the rest of social and political notions– has gone through fundamental transformations. After a close examination of quadruple phases of conceptual evolution of the idea of civil society, including Classical Greek, Liberal, Marxist, and the contemporary readings of civil society, Kadiwar chooses the contemporary reading as he finds it less problematic. The contemporary conception of civil society, Kadiwar argues, is essentially Hegelian, and has emerged successfully out of the critiques that have been leveled against it. According to this reading, civil society has its roots in a middle domain, located between the individuals, the society, and the state. This domain is beyond individual interests and is not controlled by the official power. Thus conceived, civil society is an arena within which people appear as the individuals who has two objectives in sight: firstly, the relocation of their wills; secondly, the exchange of their wills with the state so as to direct it. A society of this kind has the rule of law and diversity as its cornerstones and one can find in it a variety of political and social ideas and voices that are recognized by the law (Kadiwar, 1379: 234-236). Civil society as a method, according to Kadiwar, emerges as the bridge between the people and the society. Everyone who is to embrace civil society should take this basic quality into earnest consideration (ibid: 236). On the necessity of civil society, he opines that the denial of civil society as a method results in a sort of totalitarianism that gradually penetrates into every domain of the society that Kadiwar calls it the dictatorship of the majority of masses. The qualities of a civil society in this sense consist of free organizations, cooperation, pluralism, competition, and the recognition of people's rights. But a religious society in his view has two major features that whenever one of them disappears the religious society falls; firstly, the entire or majority of the population must be religious, and secondly, the religion should be the main concern of the society (ibid: 237).

Religion/Politics Relationship

On the marriage of religion and politics, power and state, Kadiwar insists on the avoidance from excess and negligence and views their independence from each other and religion's supervision of politics the most ideal kind of relationship. Before the revolution, according to Kadiwar, some of the clerics had been removed from the political scene as if religion was merely concerned with individual morality and the hereafter. After the revolution, we confront another excess that has trivialized religion by entrapping it in everydayness, and this led to the politicization of religion. Kadiwar regards the merger of two institutions of religion and politics one of the most significant problems of the third decade of the revolution. Politics should be handled by the government while religion needs to be managed by religious authorities, Kadiwar claims (Roodi, *ibid*: 167). To ensure the sanity of religion and politics, these two institutions must be independent of each other. Religion should not be a matter of the state since we cannot have a society where believers would play political tricks within the boundaries of religion. By tying religion to politics we expose the religion to everyday political problems. By doing so religion loses its sacrosanct state and is reduced to mundane games of politics. Thus religion must be preserved for the days that the politicians have lost their appeals and the public looks to go beyond mundane politics (*ibid*: 168). Of course, the nature of preservation itself is an important issue that needs to be discussed thoroughly. Because if that is taken to mean a passive mode of social inaction, then this is a repetition of modernist readings of religion in the public square, this is deeply question-begging. On this, we need to turn to other public intellectuals such as Shariati and Allama Jafari.

Religious Government

Kadiwar draws two diametrically opposed portrayals of a religious government. A religious government, according to the first depiction, is identified by the role that religion plays in social and individual affairs as the absolute authority (Kadiwar, *Which Government? Which Freedom?*, 1378: 207). Religious management in this sense originates in religion itself and particularly in jurisprudence and religious law.

Kadiwar's second illustration of government relegates the management of people's affairs to common sense because religion has nothing to do with particular situations and the social and political management of the society is a rational matter. When society is managed in a rational manner, religiosity is also ensured by religion's supervision (*ibid*: 209). In the first type of religious government, the

management of society is assigned to the clergy, while in the second type, the society is steered by professionals who are Muslims. But religious authorities supervise this steering to guarantee the implementation of Shari'ah laws (ibid: 211). In this government, no one takes the other one's place as everyone has his own predetermined place in the system. A council of clerics elected by Muslim citizens is in charge of ensuring the observance of revealed precepts. The religiosity of citizens does indeed guarantee clerical supervision of laws and general policies (ibid: 212).

Jurisprudence and Politics

Kadiwar seeks to draw a clear line between jurisprudence and politics in Islamic society, which enables him to argue that Islamic society's need for jurisprudence is beyond any sensible doubt. However, the question in this context is how to specify the position of jurisprudence in context of society where Islam has the supreme role. The major role of jurisprudence is legislation, he argues, for the civil, penal, and commercial statutes needs to be jurisprudentially examined lest they have any conflict with revealed precepts. Thus, Kadiwar assigns a collateral task to jurists, i.e. general deductions from Qur'an, tradition, reason, and consensus of Islamic community (Kadiwar, Aftab 35: 4). Kadiwar argues that although jurisprudence is one of the most significant and noblest Islamic sciences, we cannot have an irrational expectation of it and try to replace it with such sciences as economics and politics. A jurist is obliged to debate on general precepts and it is up to believers themselves to apply them to real life situations. Most political issues are context-bounded and the jurist is not professionally eligible to deal with them. The leadership of an Islamic society, Kadiwar claims, should have the qualities of ingenuousness, trustability, as well as religious and moral competence. He believes that the idea of authority of qualified jurist (*velayat-e-faqih*), more than having religious grounds, is based on Plato's theory of "philosopher-king." But what has the utmost compatibility with politics is the Socratic Method of spiritual edification of human beings, which finally leads to the moral integrity of the society. The society must be managed through a just, scientific, and democratic manner, and although jurisprudence is one of the professions that are necessary for running the Islamic society, there is no revealed reason for jurists' direct involvement in politics (ibid: 4-5).

The Authority of Jurist or The Counsel of Jurist

After long debates upon the issue of the jurist's authority, Kadiwar concludes that "the rule is that no one has any jurisdiction over others. Every individual is responsible for his own affairs within the framework of reason and Shariah law and no one is allowed to meddle in her/his personal affairs and destiny" (Kadiwar, *Rahi Now*, no 7: 16). The statesmen are the advocates of their people in public affairs and do not have any authority over their personal affairs (Kadiwar, *Rahi Now*, no 12: 16).

Mustafa Malekyan

Mustafa Malekyan was born in 1957 in Shahreza near Isfahan. By 1973 he began his undergraduate studies in mechanics at the University of Tehran and then turned to philosophy. After receiving his MS in mechanics he moved to the Qom Seminary of Theology. Malekyan's intellectual life has two respective phases of traditionalism and modernism. In the second phase of his intellectual life, he proposed a new paradigm in religious studies. He called this paradigm the project of rationality and spirituality and devoted his *A Path to Liberation* to this project. Hereunder we discuss some of his ideas:

The Theory of Rational Spirituality

The project of "rationalized spirituality or religion" is one of Malkyan's central ideas, as it seeks to demonstrate the impossibility of traditional religiosity in modern times. According to Malekyan, the modern man cannot any longer approach religion in a traditional spirit and s/he has only two options: either "to give up the religion" or "to accept the religion in a modern form". Malkyan calls this new form "modality spirituality." Thus conceived, spirituality is the flipside of traditional understanding of religion that is no longer defensible. To state the matter otherwise, spirituality is supposed to take the place of religion for modern humanity (Hashami, 1385: 268-272). This is a kind of diversity-oriented unitarianism that has a minimalistic view of spiritual issues and has grounded itself on modern rationality. Rationalized religion is necessary because "traditional religiosity in modern times even if it would be desirable is no longer possible, while spirituality is both possible and desirable", Malekyan argues. For two reasons Malekyan does not apply the idiom of "religion" for this new understanding of religion and the quintessence of religions; one is that religion has had negative emotional repercussions along with its positive reverberations throughout history, and the

other reason is that spirituality has basic differences with religion that can be taken at last as the archetype of religions (Malekyan (b), 1381: 310). Malekyan aspires to lead people to an ideal life that has three qualities: 1) Joyfulness; "people should enjoy all possible pleasures and endure the least of what they see as pain and grievance." 2) Goodness; a human being should live in a way that could lighten the burdens and sooth the pains of other people. 3) Valuableness; the value of life is determined by knowing if life is worth being lived. In fact, different religions and schools of thought have given different answers to the question of ideal life: one proposes fundamentalist religion and the other prefers a modernist religion, while someone may choose traditional religion. But according to the project of rationality and spirituality, one should realize that humanity can achieve an ideal life through rationality and spirituality. Malekyan articulates three forms of rationality (theoretical rationality, practical rationality, and verbal rationality) and three forms of spirituality (ontological, epistemological, and psychological) and believes that if these six come together then an ideal life could be realized. By the rise of the modern world, Malekyan argues, the religious subject finds themselves in the crossroads of modernity and the ideal life.

The project of rationality and spirituality seeks to tackle this aporiatic situation by reconciling rationality with religion. For this reconciliation it proposes a new interpretation of rationality and religion, so as the people have a joyful, good, and valuable life. Malekyan invites the intellectuals to devote themselves to the pursuit of truth and relieving their fellowmen from their pain and grief. The modern world is managed by "sovereign reason" and spirituality represents the "rationalized religion", according to Malekyan. Contrary to historical religion, the rationalized religion enjoys the following qualities: minimal devotion, lesser dependency upon historical events, insistence on religious experiences, egalitarianism, desacralization of figures, and putting religion at the disposal of humanity: thus there is no conflict whatsoever between rationality and spirituality (Hashemi, 1385: 270). Having announced the possibility of unification of rationality and spirituality and the impossibility of union of rationality and historical religion, Malekyan seeks to demonstrate the feasibility of complete individualization of belief because his intended spirituality is no longer grounded in a historical text. Malekyan divides happiness into two types of worldly and spiritual, and believes that worldly happiness should be pursued in the light of human experience, and reason and religious consultation is not pivotal in this realm. Although the pursuit of spiritual happiness needs the light of religion, this does not imply that there is no substantial role for human reason and experience anymore (Malekyan (a), 1381: 306).

Malekyan has debated religious actions under two categories, moral actions and ritual actions, and concluded that the rationality of such moral actions as justice and honesty is less challenged and ritual actions can be rational only if they are declared symbolic (ibid: 272). He denies any agreement and consistency between rationality and devotion and states that we cannot say that A is B since S supposes it to be so (ibid: 277). The major function of religious precepts and teachings, Malekyan states, is to prepare human existence for spiritual evolutions. Malekyan regards these spiritual evolutions the kernel that is shrouded within the hull of religious precepts (ibid: 299). The major reason of the indispensability of spirituality is the inability of traditional interpretation of religion to sooth pain and grief. Malekyan believes that it has always been on the top of human expectations for religion to identify their source of pains and sorrows and demonstrate how to relieve them of it (Malekyan (b), 1381: 313). Historical religion, Malekyan claims, was appealing for the people of the past since it implied a metaphysics that was intelligible in their eyes. However, this metaphysics gradually lost its credibility. He believes that parts of religions' convoluted metaphysics are not rationally acceptable today. This is why traditional understanding of religion has not been successful in detecting and soothing human pain and sorrow. Having said these, Malekyan concludes that today we need to propose an alternative understanding of religion (ibid: 314). Resorting to a functionalistic view of religion, he expressly describes spirituality as an alternative for religion and believes that spirituality is neither identical with, nor similar to, religion, but it is basically a *different* method that is applied by individuals in their life (ibid: 355). Malekyan draws a line between faith and devotion and believes that a spiritual subject does not behave like a devoted person and never says that A is B since X says it to be so. He adds that this is the process of desacralization that spirituality seeks complete (ibid: 395).

Religious Pluralism

Malekyan has worked on aspects of religious pluralism. His stance on this issue is inspired by the notion of spirituality which is indebted to Buddhism. According to Malekyan's reading of Buddhist doctrine, all religions including the monotheistic and non-monotheistic, revealed and non-revealed, religions seek to reduce human pains and sorrows and forsake guidance, salvation, and eternal bliss. In Malekyan's view, among contemporary religions, Buddhism is the best religious doctrine that is most compatible with the modern subject's needs and aspirations as it does not have a heavy metaphysics or any metaphysics at all. Every religion is appealing for a psychological reason. This is why some people are interested in Judaism, others in

Christianity, and again some others in Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, etc. But for the modern subject, a religion that is most appealing is a religion that is less jurisprudential, dogmatic, and devotional. It is only this form of religion that would be interesting for contemporary human beings, who are this-worldly, humanist, libertarian, anti-devotional, and egalitarian (Malekyan (a), 1381: 239-240).

Religion and Science Conflict

By insisting on a conflict between religion and science, Malekyan enmeshes the modern subject in a gigantic challenge. Resorting to their own cognitive faculties and findings, they have created theoretical, practical, and artistic schools in different sciences, on the one hand, and there is a host of people throughout history that claim to have been chosen by heaven to communicate the Lord's revealed words to people, on the other hand. The problem is that these two types of findings are inconsistent with each other, Malekyan argues. What should we do with this inconsistency? (Malekyan (a), 1381, 37) He thinks that the human sense of limitation is the source of religion, and if there was no such an experience of dispossession and limitedness in the human person then no religion would ever emerge on the earth. Moreover, this is not a sense shared by all generations and individuals throughout history (ibid: 235). Malekyan believes that today we need to read the Qur'an in a manner that makes it a source of inspiration for rationality and spirituality because the reconciliation of rationality and spirituality is the most serious issue of all before contemporary humanity (ibid: 491). We can judge a religion according to the role that it plays in reducing human pains and sorrows through the removal and justification of limitations (ibid: 239). Religion has been revealed to make our souls paradisiacal so as to remain a good person even in a corrupted and hellish society like a beautiful lotus that grows within a smelly and muddy swamp (ibid: 250).

The Necessity of Modernization and Reformation of Religion

Having noted that all religions once faced the hard question whether to remain unchanged and go or to change and remain, Malekyan states that no intelligent believer would sacrifice their goal for some contemptible means. In his view, religion, in the past epochs, has not answered human questions that arise with every epoch. Thus, human beings in every epoch and in any particular society need to continuously turn to religion by critically appraising this "silent narrator" (Malekyan (a), 1381, 305).

The Clergy

The clergy is responsible to reconcile the cultural values of their time with religious traditions. They must communicate the message of the scripture to their time in the language of the zeitgeist (Malekyan (a), 1381, 396).

Religious Government

Malekyan's account of the inefficiency of historical religions, due to their heavy metaphysics and literalism, is a good reason to consider him as an ardent proponent of secularism, who believes in the separation of religious and civil affairs. But the truth of the matter is that he takes a very equivocal stance in this regard. He shows much sympathy for secularism and believes that if religious beliefs were objectively verifiable there would be no escape from a religious government. But religious beliefs are surely not objectively verifiable, Malekyan states. Religious, metaphysical, moral, and anthropologic propositions are not objectively verifiable like logical, mathematical, experimental and intuitive propositions (Malekyan (b), 1381, 255). If a type of mushroom is proven to be poisonous, Malekyan argues, the government shuts down its production without referring to public opinion. However, the immorality of adultery and bribery must be decided according to public opinions. Even the belief in God's existence which is the building-block of religion has not been demonstrated in a way that no one could cast doubt, argues Malekyan (ibid: 256). Having said these, he concludes that a religious government does not have any feasible justification and it is not indeed intelligible to make serious decisions according to objectively unverifiable affairs without referring to public opinion (ibid: 257). There is "only one occasion where a religious government could be compatible with secularism and that is when the majority of people in a particular society are adamant in their decision to have a religious government by arguing that in despite of unverifiable nature of the religious beliefs we insist on establishing our state on religion ... and also institutionalize them in our society" (ibid: 258).

Modernity

Malekyan says that we are willy-nilly a modern subject. The modern person can no longer accept religion like the traditional person. The modern subject has two options; either to give up religion or to accept it on new terms. He calls this new understanding of religion "spirituality", and states that "I personally believe in this new understanding of religion because the traditional understanding of religion

neither realistically nor pragmatically is defensible” (Malekyan (b), 1381, 269). According to Malekyan, the modern subject differs on various epistemological, emotional, theoretical and practical grounds from the traditional subject. He divides the components of modernity into two groups of avoidable and unavoidable. On the unavoidable components of modernity, Malekyan states: 1) we should accept the good and the true because it is irrelevant to stand against them, and 2) we should question reasonably the bad and the false.

Malekyan seeks to replace traditional religion with spirituality and believes that any individual finds themselves in need of spirituality when they discern an inconsistency between religion in its traditional and historical form and the avoidable and unavoidable elements of modernity. In tackling this inconsistency, Malekyan states, we need to resort to a novel understanding of the new religion, i.e. spirituality, which is not incompatible with two aforementioned characteristics (ibid, 273). After noting that if traditional religion is in conflict with the unavoidable elements of modernity, it should be given up and replaced with spirituality, Malekyan enumerates many unavoidable components of modernity that have no consistency with traditional religion. Thus, he issues the needed warrant for conversion into spirituality. The unavoidable components of modernity that are allegedly in conflict with traditional religion are as follows:

1. The major characteristic of modernity is rationality, which is precisely in contrast with the devotionism of traditional religion. Thus, Malekyan invites people to self-ruling (autonomy) in contrast to other-ruling (heteronomy) by arguing that religion must be stripped off its devotional elements as much as possible (ibid: 275).

2. There is a kind of suspicion towards history in modernity. The modern subject knows that history is a science of probability and not one of certainty. This uncertainty is in contrast with religion's dependency upon the acceptance of some historical events (ibid: 276). Malekyan suggests that this inconsistency can be overcome by replacing religion with spirituality which is less dependent on historical events (ibid: 278).

3. Worldliness is one of the components that Malekyan praises. Religions' otherworldliness is not consistent with modern subjectivity because the modern subject is looking for interests rather than values (ibid: 279). It is not intelligible to believe in the otherworldly rewards of praying and fasting. Religion must give solace, joy, hope, and satisfaction to human beings in this world. According to

Malekyan, people should experience everything in this world and spirituality is a type of experiment within the parameters of religious experience.

4- He praises the decline of classical metaphysics in the realm of spirituality by arguing the erosive role of religions' heavy metaphysical systems.

5. He speaks of desacralization and believes that all people must be seen in the same light (ibid: 283). What people talk about must be judged according to the reasons they provide (ibid: 284).

6. Historical religions involve temporal doctrines while spirituality seeks to overthrow these temporal doctrines.

Religion must serve human interests as it is *for* humanity and not the other way around (ibid: 286) and nothing should be superior to human beings (ibid: 287). There is not much room within the parameters of spirituality for many elements that are inalienable components of historical religion, he adds (ibid: 287). Since Malekyan believes that the quintessence of religion is devotionism, and in addition he seems to understand the essence of modernity in terms of rationality, he finds them totally inconsistent. According to Malekyan, we have neither devotionism nor rationalism in their absolute sense. Such notions as devotionism, rationality, modernity, religiosity, and the likes are ideal-types. In other words, being religious and modern are also gradational and some grades of these are prone to be synthesized. These notions are only irreconcilable in their absolute sense, but one can be partially religious in the traditional sense and partially modern. This is almost the case with all of us, Malekyan states. In Malekyan's view the question of religiosity and modernity is more serious and problematic than earlier thought. In contrast to his predecessors, Malekyan considers the relation between religiosity (where its fundamental essence is devotion) and rationality (where its elemental core is reason) as the foremost theological problem of our epoch and seems to believe that religious beliefs are not rational for most of modern people (Hashemi, 1385: 67). The most cherished characteristic of modernity, according to Malekyan, is free-thinking; one's search for reason and the refusal to bow before anything in the absence of sufficient reason (Malekyan (b), 1381: 378). Two characteristics of rationality, i.e. the respect for reason and liberty, i.e. the reverence for autonomy, make modernity and modern worldviews respectable despite their deficiencies and imperfections (ibid: 379).

Conclusion

The question of public intellectuals changed into an enigmatic and paradoxical issue after the rise of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The religious intellectuals were treated and perceived differently by the state and societal strata thanks to their respective critical or partisan approaches towards power. An intellectual like Hassan Rahimpour Azghadi (b. 1964) who advanced remorseless criticisms of such issues as colonialism, imperialism, modernism, Occidentalism, and western social sciences, and did not accept any official critical position vis-à-vis the government, was received warmly by the authorities; his works were published with utmost convenience, and he held numerous lectures in Iran's universities with his speeches broadcast on the state television. However, it should be noted that he has not been successful in attracting public attention. Those intellectuals who pointed their criticisms toward the state by critiquing various aspects of power in Iran, whether those who sought to propose an alternative model of governance or those who thought their criticisms could be helpful in the reformation and fortification of ruling regime, all were reprimanded by the authorities and removed from the public square (e.g. Seyed Hashem Aghajeri who was even sentenced to death for his critical assessment of the institute of imitation). The three religious intellectuals discussed in this work belong to the latter group of intellectuals who consecutively emerged within Iran's intellectual scene during three respective decades of post-Revolutionary Iran's history. In other words, the state's pressures, news boycott, and their dismissal from intellectual scenes did not reduce their popularity in wider society. Our study of these three religious intellectuals' views revealed many of their shared opinions. For example:

- I) All three intellectuals are well-versed in religious discourses and traditional sources.
- II) All three intellectuals insist on breaking the clerical monopoly on the interpretation of religion, desacralization of the clerical caste, jurists and figures, and have defied the dominant traditional trend.
- III) All three intellectuals are interested in modernity.
- IV) All three intellectuals seek to restrict the domain of influence of religion and believe in a minimalist religion, and instead embolden the role of rationality in the public square.

V) All three intellectuals believe in criticism, reconstruction, revival, and reformation of religion and religious thought and speak of "epochal religion".

VI) All three intellectuals are somehow in favor of religious pluralism.

VII) All three intellectuals believe in the separation and autonomy of religion from both politics and state.

VIII) All three intellectuals have critiqued the model of Islamic Republicanism that is represented by the state in Iran today – by arguing that the impact of republicity has decreased immensely since the establishment of the post-monarchical state, while the role of totalitarian reading of religion in the running of state affairs has increased day by day. Regarding the reactions that have been made in response to the critical views of these three intellectuals, and the restrictions that have been imposed on their personal and scientific lives, one can easily conclude that *critique* in its scientific sense has yet to succeed in clearing space for itself in Iran. Of course, this is not to deny the seasonal, so to speak, appearance of relaxation of rules in Iran vis-à-vis critical discourses (e.g. during the Reformist Era in late 1990s and early years of the 21st century, or at the second round of the ultra-Conservative Era of President Ahmadinejad's office, which we can witness harsh critiques of all aspects of his legacy by certain public figures).

IX) All three intellectuals seek to reconcile religion and modernity with each other without thinking critically about modernity and about the very possibility of reconciliation of this twain. This is why an inherent paralysis is traceable in their debates that thwart intellectual efforts, in general, and religious intellectualism, in particular, in Iran. Of course, this is not to deny the political impact of these discourses but the cultural impacts of these discourses have not been profound enough. This may explain why conservatives have been more successful with the masses through the traditional channels of communication such as mosque, Hosseiniye, and Maddahie-centers.

X) And the last point is that political Islam, which does not tolerate any alternative view as the "other", is treated with suspicion within the parameters of ultra-conservative Islamism. Although to treat the other in a suspicious fashion may be unavoidable in geopolitical contexts, extending this view to the public sphere could lead to suppression, oppressive policies, and intellectual stagnation.

These intellectuals have also some points of difference as follows:

I) Soroush and Kadiwar show more interest than Malekyan to the formation of civil society.

II) Malekyan proposes to replace religion with spirituality and insists on the synthesization of rationalized religion and spirituality. He denies any consistency between rationality and devotionism and believes that traditional religiosity is impossible in modern times.

To make the long story short, the intellectual claims of breaking the clerical monopoly of interpretation of religion and religious affairs belong to the second decade after Revolution when such figures as Soroush, Malekyan, and Kadiwar emerged on Iran's intellectual scene. After the Revolution, these religious intellectuals began to revise the fundamentals of the theoretical basis of the Islamic State by replace it with a democratic state. They devoted themselves to such issues as reconciling reason and faith through the insistence on the dynamicity of human understanding of religious texts, resisting religious state (based on jurisprudential authority), and the ecclesial authority, seeking social development through the promotion of rationality in the public sphere, introducing a new path to tranquility, critique, and revision of the relationship of modernity and tradition. In sum, their slogans during this period of the Iranian history have been "rationality", "civil society", "human rights", and "democracy".

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An Examination of Moderateness in the Qur'an Based on Immamiyah Theology

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Abstract

“Moderateness” is defined based on two various terms in Arabic, both of which refer to “being just” and “not exceeding the middle way”. It refers to the notion of putting all things at their rightful place so to provide harmony for both ends. Moderateness can be individually or publically practiced and if one follows the Moderate path, indeed they follow the Truth.

Two concepts of Moderateness are mentioned in Quran. First, some verses order or recommend Moderateness to the individuals, whereas some other verses lead to attitudes which show the society to be moderate. Moreover, it can be found as in five categories according to Imamiyah Teachings: 1) Domestic or personal-affairs; 2) Social behavior; 3) Financial affairs; 4) Political affairs; and 5) Ideological issues.

Imamiyah theology calls for Moderateness as pivotal issue in understanding other theological norms. Imamiyah examines all theological issues as compared to Ration, which is rooted in the Qur'an and Traditions. Therefore, to be moderate is purely theological and helps one understand theological concepts more effectively. One would deduce that Moderateness is firstly a sign of being part of the Islamic Nation, as the Moderate Nation; and secondly, it refers to many individual traits and social precepts for Muslims.

Keywords: Moderateness; Extremism; Quran

Introduction

The nature of Islam does not pledge to promote hostility or extremism. While the Quran orders to “*fight against those People of the Book who have no faith in God ...*” (Quran, 9:29), it also emphasizes that the Holy Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) was a messenger from Allah to spread “Mercy” in the world: “*We have not sent you except as a mercy to all the worlds.*” (Quran, 21:107). This essence of Mercy and Universality is well-presented throughout Quran and also well-defended in Narrations of Shiite Infallible Imams (A.S).

The pivotal theme in Quran is worshiping Allah, the One God, who is the only One who should be worshiped. The Quran declares that the only Truth is Allah Himself, and the human being is ordered to “*worship Him*” because “*This is the right path*” (Quran, 3:51; 19:36; 43:64). The expression “the Right Path” is repeated more than thirty times in Quran, most of the time being accompanied by a commandment of either to follow that or not to follow any other path. The Right Path is, therefore, a criterion to which Muslims should arrange their lives and that is why, as true Muslims, they ask Allah to guide them towards that “*Lord; guide us to the right path*” (Quran, 1:6). Any deviation from this Path would lead them astray, and true Muslims would ask Allah not to include them into “*those who are neither subject to Allah's anger nor those who have gone astray*”. (Quran, 1:6)

Putting extremism at one side, one finds moderateness standing on the other side as opposed to extremism. Moderateness is more of an approach or methodology than an abstract concept, and it can lead all other ethical issues. In other words, moderateness is not a motif that can be repeated in ones' lifestyle, but rather a theme which pervades it. It needs not to be followed as an example, since it cannot be an objective sample, but rather, it should be enforced as a practical rule in all aspects of life.

In the Quran, references to moderateness are twofold. First, there are certain verses or orders that suggest being moderate in distinct ways. Second, some verses recommend or lead to attitudes or perspectives which show the society how to be moderate. These indirect cases of mentioning moderateness or reference to attitudes finally bring up moderateness as a norm, mostly of an interpretive nature. Nevertheless, all these references have a theological background which can elaborate the ethical or social “Moderateness”.

In the meanwhile, Islam recommends many ethical orders in terms of personal affairs, like “*Walk modestly! And lower your voice!*” (Quran, 31:19). In

expenditures and when talking about charity, it orders in the form of a simile to be moderate: “*and do not keep your hand chained to your neck (when spending), nor open it completely, so that you will sit blamed and destitute.*” (Quran, 17:29) The Quran also blames those who waste and lavish: “... *eat and drink, and do not waste. He (=Allah) does not love the wasteful*”. (Quran, 7:31) In the form of social orders, it clarifies moderateness in trusting others, social relations; even in defense, it suggests moderateness: “... *if anyone aggresses against you, so aggress against him with the likeness of that which he has aggressed against you. Fear Allah, and know that Allah is with the cautious*”. (Quran, 2:194)

“Moderateness” is a crucial concept in modern terminology of Humanities and can be ratified within five elements: rationality, realism, expediency, holistic attitude, and gradual change. “Rationality” examines and prepares indispensable means and conditions to fulfil certain goals. It is blended with dialogue and negotiation. Rationality plays a pivotal role in “Realism”. Being realistic means recognition and understanding of real issues in order to solve and manage them. Managing problems in a realistic way necessitates that some “expediency” be taken into account. Meanwhile, recognizing expediency requires a “holistic attitude” towards any social concern. All of these features of “Moderateness” will be fulfilled through “gradual change”. The nature of “Moderateness”, as avoiding any extreme side, is ironically formed gradually.

Etymology and definition of “Moderateness”

The first step to elaborate the concept of Moderateness in the Quran is to determine its meanings and roots in Arabic and English, as this study touches the notion of Moderateness in Shiia Islam, or more specifically Imamiyah, and hence, its equivalent in English needs to be sought.

The lexical meaning of “moderateness” is “*avoidance of extremes of opinion, feeling, or personal conduct*”. “Moderateness” is the noun form for the adjective “moderate” and can be defined as “*being within reasonable limits; not excessive or extreme; not violent or subject to extremes; mild or calm; temperate*”. This adjective is the modern English form of Latin adjective “*moderatus*” (past participle of *moderari* meaning “*to restrain or to control*”).

“Moderate” comes as an adjective, a verb and a noun in English language. The adjective “moderate” originally refers to something related to “*weather and other physical conditions,*” and also figuratively to the Latin verb “*moderari*” which means “*to regulate, mitigate, restrain, temper, set a measure, or keep (something)*”

within measure". It is also related to "modus" which means "measure" or "keeping within due measure." The verb "to moderate" means "to abate excessiveness". Moreover, "moderate" as a noun refers to a person "who holds moderate opinions on controversial subjects" or a person "who holds or champions moderate views or opinions, especially in politics or religion". We can call something "moderate" when it is "of medium or average quantity or extent" or "of limited or average quality". A moderate idea is "opposed to radical or extreme views or measures, especially in politics or religion".

As the suffix "-ness" refers to "property, quality or state of being", "moderateness" can be considered synonymous with "balance, calmness, coolness, equanimity, fairness, forbearance, judiciousness, justice, justness, lenity, mildness, patience, reasonableness, sedateness, sobriety, steadiness, temperance and tolerance". It is also related to "control, discipline, self-control, self-discipline, asceticism, austerity, frugality and forbearance".

In Arabic, the term "moderateness" is equivalent to the word "I'tedal" (= اعتدال) or "Ightisad" (= اقتصاد). It can be used meaning "not expending excessively or too much" as in economics or financial situations. In this meaning, moderateness stands next to "a state of being economical". In Persian, the word refers to "mild weather, modest temper, not radical attitudes and a range of similar concepts". It denotes the middle way in quantity and quality, whether in expenditures or in climate. In behavioural and social sciences, "I'tedal" refers to "avoiding extremes of any kind".

The term "Moderateness" can be more elaborated through its counterpart, i.e. "Extremism". Extremism, of any kind and in any field, deals with the concept of "the more the better". (Liebman 1983, 75-86). In the realm of religion, those who are labelled with this motto believe that "the more they act in accordance with religious orders, the truer and purer their faith shall be". In fact, no one claims to be a Religious Extremist, but rather, they insist on being the true believers and followers of their faith. In other words, they consider "others" as apostates and heretics, the followers of Falsehood.¹

Theological Aspects

There is indeed a theological notion of "Moderateness" which stands opposite to Extremist and fundamental religious zeal. Extremists define their worldview as "a truth-seeking one" which cherishes ideas taken to be as worthy as the absolute Truth. All Extremist standpoints share some issues which can be summarized as

“having unquestioned certainty about their position, demonizing ‘Others’, i.e. those who disagree with them, and having a desire for a kind of ‘Holy War’ against ‘Others’”. (Lurie 2011) Ardent discussions and dogmatic zeal that flow in polemic debates are evident in Extremism.

Furthermore, Extremists tend to defend their passionate actions and ideology through their presumed dogma. A kind of rationality with a glamorous faithfulness might radiate through their ideas as they preach their way to be the only way towards the Truth. Being legitimized and supported by religious zeal, such characteristics of Extremism can be naively justified as true virtues.

Another form of “religious extremism” is Fundamentalism which can be differentiated by its concept of exceeding all the limits and relying exclusively on the Fundamental basis of religious attitude. According to fundamental theologies, the only path which ends in Truth is the pure and absolute way they preach and introduce. Although there is a slight difference between the two terms, Extremism and Fundamentalism are two sides of the same coin, which trades the normal and rational way of life with terror and inhumanity. Among Muslims, the new name for them is Salafi or Jihadi.

As being debated by Salafis and Wahhabis, Islamic rules should be followed by everyone and civil law and legislations must comply with Sharia. This attitude does not originate from a nuanced and authentic understanding of Islam as it is not a religion of compulsory worship or mandatory acting whatsoever. The Quran teaches that “*there is no compulsion in religion.*” (Quran: 2, 256) However, once one accepts Islam, they should obey all orders of Sharia given by Allah, as the word “Muslim” literary means the “one who surrenders to Allah”.

Islamic tradition contains the concept of “the Ansar” or the local tribes of Medina who supported Prophet Mohammed (p.b.u.h.) by welcoming his followers into their homes after Muslims’ Emigration (Hijra) from Mecca. They accepted Islam, shared their houses and possessions with the new-comers and formed the Muslim Nation or “Ummah”. At times of war and attacks of the non-Muslim tribes, they defended their city alongside other fellow citizens, the Meccan guests. They well defended Islamic state which Prophet Mohammed (p.b.u.h.) had established. The Extremist movements like Salafi-Jihadis preserve this concept and the practice of a local base in support of foreign fighters. (Zimmerman 2017, 6). Therefore, their ideology has the stance of forming a Unitarian government based on Sharia to fulfil Islam in the most complete and most flourished way.

Islam has never meant to be extreme from the beginning; on the contrary, it has always ordered people to live a moderate life economically, socially and religiously. (Quran, 31:19 and 17:29) Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) brought Islam with a famous confession “*Say there is no god but Allah so you shall be redeemed*”. This motto is in the form of a positive invitation: it gives the good news of redemption. In fact, it asks people to do something for their own wellness. In another verse as mentioned earlier, the Quran preaches the no-obligatory nature of Islam: “*There is no compulsion in religion*” (Quran, 2: 256). From this very confession motto Islam takes a moderate approach even in its invitation for potential converts. Nonetheless, the affirmation or invitation to Islam can be interpreted as a distinct segmentation between worshipping “the One God” and worshipping “more than one god”. It highlights the way to redemption as a way of worshipping “Allah”, the only God and not any other God.

Certain Quranic reasoning, directly or indirectly, supports the idea of moderateness. Such reasons, being exclusively taken from Quran, can be put into two categories of ethical and theological reasoning. The ethical reasoning touches upon the realm of individual or social orders which fall into the category of behaviours, politics, lifestyle and all social and psychological trends which one might follow in life. On the other hand, theological reasoning tries to focus on quintessential concepts related to a “supreme being”, and hence, examines ontological, eschatological and epistemological notions.

In Shiite theology and history, a tendency towards balancing the odds and moderating all sides in difficult situations have been always evident. Shiite theology is as old as Shiite history and has been relying on three sources of attaining knowledge, which can be categorized as Quran, Tradition and Ration. As soon as the idea of “Shiite” was introduced in terminology and political scene of early Islam, theological explanation and justification bloomed and took over the history of Shiite people. Key ideas of Shiism, which distinguish them from the mainstream Sunni sect, can be traced in the Quran, and it seems, notwithstanding, that Shiites have been well able to defend their theological points of view with reference to Quran.

The moderate viewpoint in Shiism is of an intrinsic nature as Shiite theology is pillared on Oneness of Allah’s attributes with His nature. This Oneness is projected as the obvious result of Oneness of Allah’s nature. Allah is One in nature and hence is his presence One. Independent existence of Allah requires Him to be purely away from any kind of description, beyond all attributes that we may count separately.

(Tabarsi 2002, 433). This attitude has been challenged by other Muslim sects, most significantly by Salafis. According to Salafi theology any attribute of God which has been mentioned in Quran should be taken into account as it is, not being questioned whatsoever. (Allahbedashti 2014). The result is elimination of role of Ration in the analysis and interpretation of Quran, Shiism follows the more moderate way of rational exegesis; whereas Salafism takes the rigorous attitude of not manipulating the exegesis by human Ration or conception.

“Moderateness” in Quran

In Islam, the term “Moderateness” is a method to incorporate all individual, ethical, social, and economic traits. Moderateness saves human being from going to either of the extremes and helps live a fortunate life. Imam Ali (A.S.) highlights the characteristic of the ignorant as “at either side of the extremes” (Nahj-al-Balaghah. Saying 70). The Quran introduces enormous cases related to Moderateness, and this proves the importance of the subject in Islam. In the Quran, you can find various derivations of the word which simply refer to a range of ideas including economy, social life, domestic life, etc.

Muslims: The Moderate Nation

Moderateness is a key behavioural principle for not hurting others or getting hurt by others. In social norms, moderateness can be sought as an innate and integral part of social life. The Quran directly indicates that Allah has made Muslims as the nation of Moderateness, “*We have made you (true Muslims) a moderate nation so that you could be an example for all people and the Prophet an example for you...; God is Compassionate and All-merciful.*” (Quran; 2:143)

Here, the context in which this verse occurs should be elaborated. The Holy Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) received his mission from Allah in Mecca in the year 610 A.D., and he publically invited people three years later in 613 A.D. In the year 622, he and his followers migrated from Mecca to Yathrib, which was later called Medina-al-Nabi (the City of the Prophet) or simply Medina.

From the outset, Muslims were ordered to pray towards Jerusalem and called it Qibla (meaning direction or something towards which one faces). In the second year of Hegira, i.e. almost fourteen years after the Holy Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) started his Mission, Allah ordered him to change his direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca; and verses 144-150 of Sura 2 indicate this event. In fact, verse 144 is a reaction to people who asked about this change in the direction of Qibla

(non-Muslims and maybe the Jews of Medina). The Quran calls those who ask why the Holy Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) changed his direction "the Fools", and then highlights the moderateness of Muslims in reacting to them. The verse refers to the Jews of Medina who lived with Muslims but mocked them for not having a genuine reference of prayer, as Jerusalem has been the holy place of the Jews for a long time. Noteworthy, the verse is not in imperative form. It is indicative and provokes the idea that Muslims, who followed certain rules and orders, are also moderate in their actions and reactions.

“Moderateness” in social life: Justice and Middle-Way

As mentioned before, there are two words in Arabic for Moderateness that are utterly related to “justice” and “being moderate”. Hence, wherever Moderateness is mentioned in Quran, there is either a relation to “justice” or “the middle way” in that verse. Being just in manner and judgement is highly valued in Islam. The Quran suggests that one should not spend excessively all their money but follow a moderate way in their expenditure. *“And do not keep your hand chained to your neck (when spending), nor open it completely, so that you will sit blamed and destitute.”* (Quran, 17:29) or *“[The worshipers of the Merciful are those] who in their spending are neither extravagant nor stingy but maintain moderation.”* (Quran, 25:67) Moreover, all social behaviour like speaking, walking and, even praying should be conducted moderately, *“Be moderate in your walking and your talking.”* (Quran, 31:19)

The Quran remarkably values and highlights the just behaviour *“And Allah strikes a parable. Two men, one is dumb and powerless, a burden to his master wherever he sends him he returns with no good. Is he equal with one who orders justice and follows the Straight Path?”* (Quran, 16:76)

Treating others justly is highly recommended in the Quran. Any party that is in a fragile and weak position is a mere subject of being treated in a just manner. *“God commands you to maintain justice with the orphans.”* (Quran, 4:127) Women should be also subject to just behaviour, *“If you fear that you cannot act justly towards the orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you; two, three, four of them. But if you fear that you cannot do justice, then one only, or, those you possess.”* (Quran, 4:3) Trading with others also requires being just. *“Give just weight and full measure, We never charge a soul with more than it can bear. When you speak, be just, even if it affects your own kinsmen.”* (Quran, 6:152)

Following the path of justice is considered the same as Truth; and thus, we are advised to be just and follow the Truth. In other words, being just and moderate,

and following the truth are intertwined: *“Among those whom We created there is a nation who guide with the truth and with it they are just.”* (Quran, 7:181)

Passing judgement among people is a serious issue that should be handled thoroughly. The person who is making the judgment should be aware of his weighty responsibility; nonetheless, the reward is being loved by Allah. *“If they come to you, judge between them or turn away from them. If you avoid them they cannot harm you in anything; but if you judge, judge between them with fairness. Allah loves the just.”* (Quran, 5:42) The Quran enjoins us to be just even if our loved ones are concerned: *“Believers! Be dutiful to Allah and bearers of just witness. Do not allow your hatred for other people to turn you away from justice. Deal justly; it is nearer to piety.”* (Quran, 5:8)

However, when a fight occurs between two groups of people, there might be the most volatile situation where one should make peace. This peace-making role should be done with justice. *“If two parties of believers fight, reform between them. If either of them is insolent against the other, fight the insolent one till they revert to the order of Allah. If they revert, reform between them with justice, and weigh with justice. Allah loves those who weigh with justice.”* (Quran, 9:49)

Imamiyah Theological interpretation of Moderateness

As “Moderateness” can be monitored on the social and individual level, with reference to the Quran its theological aspect lies in the fact that the cornerstone of society is to behave in a just manner. (Makarem Shirazi 2000, 1: 488-489) *“Allah orders justice, and good deeds, and giving to one's kindred. He forbids indecency, dishonour and insolence. He admonishes you in order that you take heed.”* (Quran, 16:90) This verse focuses on three significant orders. (Hashemi Rafsanjani 2000, 49). Apart from the moral issues ordered in this verse, a theological aspect is hidden as well. Tabatabaei believes that the most significant goal that Islam seeks in its doctrines is the wellness and correction of the public or Society. (Tabatabaei 2000, 478) He argues that human beings are individual and they act individually; however, they also live a social life by nature and their wellness relies on that of the society in which they live. He suggests that based on the lexical meaning of “Moderateness” and “Just”, to be just is exactly the same as being moderate, since when you are moderate you take the middle way and do not exceed any extreme, which definitely means to be just.

He mentions two sides of being just which is individual and social, and the above verse refers to the social one. He also points out to a fine point about why the order “to be just” is followed by the order “to be kind”. As “being just” means to be moderate in our actions and reactions, to be kind means to react to “the good” with “more good” and to “the bad” with “less bad”. (Tabatabaei 2000, 479)

The theological reference to this idea revokes the concept of following the middle way as Muslims are referred to as the “Moderate Nation”. (Quran; 2:143) They are summoned to be just and kind, caring about their relatives and do not trespass others.

Conclusion

“Moderateness” is a controversial term which can be considered as being just, taking the middle way and even following the path of Truth. It refers to the notion of putting all things at their rightful place so that both ends stand in equality and harmony. Moderateness can be individually or publically practiced, and if one follows the Moderate path, indeed she/he follows the Truth. Being moderate in social manner and lifestyle ensures the goodness of the individual or the society as the right path would not be trespassed.

Although some Muslims may interpret the terms “Just and Moderate” based on their lexical meanings and stress their denotative meaning, the Imamiyah interpret “Moderateness” basically with reference to the rational analysis of the individual and social aspects of the term.

In the Quran, references to moderateness are of two natures. First, there are certain verses or orders that recommend the individual to be moderate in distinct ways. Second, some verses order or lead to attitudes which show the society to be moderate. These indirect cases of mentioning moderateness or reference to attitudes, finally, bring up moderateness as a norm, mostly of an interpretive nature. Nevertheless, all these references have a theological background that can elaborate the ethical or social “Moderateness”.

Apart from the two mentioned natures or essences of “Moderateness” in the Quran, it can be found as in five categories according to the Imamiyah Teachings: 1) Domestic or personal-affairs; 2) Social behaviour; 3) Financial affairs; 4) Political affairs; and 5) Ideological issues. Such categories indicate the width and depth of this notion in the Imamiyah doctrine.

However, Imamiyah theology also calls for Moderateness as a pivotal issue in understanding other theological norms. The Imamiyah examines all theological issues as compared to Ration which is rooted in the Quran and Traditions. Therefore, to be moderate is purely theological, and helps one understand theological concepts more effectively.

To sum up, reviewing various verses of Quran referring to Moderateness and its derivatives, one would deduce that Moderateness is firstly a sign of being part of the Islamic Nation, as the Moderate Nation; and secondly, it refers to many individual traits and social conducts for Muslims.

Note

1. In this paper, “Extremism” is used as a general term to indicate “Religious Extremism”.

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The Crisis of the Human Sciences: *The Case of Kazakhstan*

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Abstract

A deep crisis of the economy of Kazakhstan resulted in significant reduction of the employees working in the field of science and tech industry. 0.1% of GDP allocated for science in 2016 does not promote any scientific endeavor. The more vivid these crises phenomena appear in Social sciences and Humanities. Social sciences and Humanities, however, do not value efficiency. As humanities do not produce profit, students and universities tend to neglect them. Therefore, there is less young inflow in science too. The state of affairs in the field is dreary. Firstly, rather small projects which do not communicate with each other and sometimes even ignore and contradict each other diminish consistency of the science. Variety of topics and tasks destroys solidity and efficiency. Secondly, social sciences focus on descriptive concepts and theories. We also need to make a conceptual apparatus of social science to be more universal to all social sciences and humanities. Moreover, science is managed by the bureaucrats who are not interested and even do not understand the content of the scientific projects they handle. International indexation rate is very low in Kazakhstani publications and represents low quality of research. Obsession of ministerial

bureaucrats with indexation makes a bad service for science causing fraudulent publications. Of course, there is no immediate solution, i.e. it is almost impossible to reduce crisis in several months or years. One of the main objectives of the society in the future is to change the approach to the system of education in general and to teaching science in particular. That is to develop methods which teach active learning, to teach to learn novelty. No one knows what kind of knowledge to be demanded in fifteen-twenty years. A good specialist is the one who is above just craft and is able to quickly switch to the new knowledge, innovation. These standards are to be born not in the Ministries but in the science itself, as a new paradigm is born, according to Thomas Kuhn.

Key Words: Social Sciences, Humanities, education, science, indexing, Kazakhstan, social initiatives.

The Crisis of the Human Sciences

The idea of economic crisis dominates in the modern society while not many think of the influence of crises in the Social Sciences on their lives. All over the world we read about economic crises, social crises, ethnic conflicts and crises, national conflicts and crises, crises in family life, crises of poverty, crises of exploitation, crises of homelessness, crises of governmental oppression, crises of man's inhumanity to man and so on. So, there is a trend in the world to worry the most about financial or political crises where fundamental crises are things happening to humanity. Moreover, more concerns have been rising about the declining status of the Human Sciences in the modern world. Marjorie Perloff refers to Robert Weisbuch, a distinguished professor of English at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation who refers to the state of affairs in the human sciences in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*:

Today's consensus about the state of the humanities—it's bad, it's getting worse, and no one is doing much about it— is supported by dismal facts. The percentage of undergraduates majoring in humanities fields has been halved over the past three decades. Financing for faculty research has decreased. As doctoral programs in the humanities proliferate irresponsibly, turning out more and more graduates who cannot find jobs, the waste of human talent becomes enormous, intolerable. We have lost the respect of our colleagues in other fields, as well as the attention of an intelligent public. The

action is elsewhere. No one's even angry with us now, just bored (Marjorie Perloff. In *Defense of Poetry. Put the literature back into literary studies*. February/March 2000 issue of *Boston Review*).

Although Kazakhstan has clear goals to build a competitive system of education and research, the problems of crises existing in the world did not get around it causing more deep contradictions in the society living on income from raw materials. People are motivated by wrong principles, causing the threat of lost moral values. Whereas both education and research have much in common with the tendencies taking place in the world, apart from that there exist some specific problems caused by the legacy of the Soviet state and the traditional mentality of people. The number of students majoring in social sciences and humanities does not decrease in contrast with the major world tendencies but the quality of graduates is very low because of the teaching methodology which is still based on lecturing and repeating. The percentage of postgraduate students also shows rise but the output of dissertations demonstrates low results. There is a gap between school and science so that young researchers are not able to produce any research independently both because of the lack of skills and lack of finance in the research institutions. The purpose of this paper is to define the problems and analyze the Kazakhstani situation in education and research in science in general and in social sciences in particular in order to determine some solutions.

Nowadays, we live in the world of materialism, where competition between people to get efficiency has reached its highest level, furthermore universities entered this race either. If your job, present or future, your actions are not paid well or do not bring the material opportunities or success the modern man would not do this. The same principles drive universities. If your criteria, as head of the university, are productivity, efficiency and consumer satisfaction, it makes perfect sense to withdraw funds and material support from the humanities. The students do not choose to study humanities for the same reason that it will not pay them well in the future. This works both ways in Kazakhstan where diploma is obtained just for the sake of diploma itself based on mentality of parents to do their best in helping their offspring to get access to higher education. Looking even further, we see that humanity has reached the state of anomie, the problem raised by Emile Durkheim back in late XIX century. Anomie in societies or individuals is a condition of instability resulting from a breakdown of standards and values or from a lack of purpose or ideals. That is what happening nowadays. Many scientists analyzing the causes of the current systemic crisis surprisingly come to the same conclusions, the essence of which is that many modern fundamental concepts about reality, about

consciousness, about man, about society and other processes today do not quite adequately reflect reality. What is meant here is that the modern world has changed so radically over the past few decades that it is quite natural that many old concepts have lost their explanatory potential and methodological consistency to a large extent. Understanding this fact today is becoming generally known.

In the well-known hierarchy of levels of scientific knowledge, "observation-description-analysis-systematization-generalization-forecasting-the discovery of laws-the creation of theories", social sciences in general have only sufficiently mastered the levels of observation and description. In analysis, systematization and generalization, they are still far from the level reached by the natural sciences. In forecasting, they are able to produce relatively reliable products only in narrow (sectoral and regional) frameworks and in short-term periods. At the two highest levels, they are, for the time being, helpless. By now the social sciences have not given a single accurate global long-term forecast, have not opened any macrosociological law of inevitable action, they have not created a single macro-theory that has stood the test of historical practice. Social Sciences continue to confirm long-term accusations in their address, according to which subjectivism in them not simply takes place, as in any other sciences, but is decisive. And, if in the natural sciences this is mainly the subjectivism of the researcher, then in the social sciences it is the subjectivism of the customer. Scientific research, whether in the natural, or in social disciplines, in the overwhelming majority of cases has a customer or sponsor. However, in the fundamental natural sciences it is an order for a base for subsequent research and results, in applied natural sciences - for a specific product. In the social sciences it is, for the most part, an order to meet expectations, to confirm submissions, to justify the planned actions of the customer.

Along with the theoretical and methodological crisis in the social sciences, the instrumental crisis is increasingly asserting itself. This is most clearly seen in applied sociology. Social sciences after the collapse of the USSR were in a much worse situation than the natural sciences. The problems that confronted science as a whole were financial, personnel and institutional but the social sciences had an additional burden - ideological. And, nevertheless, modern social science, sociology in particular, cannot be absolutely helpless and useless at all, at least because of the cruel market laws of today's world. Therefore, an unprecedented total theoretical and methodological revision has to begin. It is accompanied by unprecedented criticism of universalism and Euro centrism of social theories. It needs such a revision that creates a unique external factor, thanks to which, by pushing the already described internal factors, Kazakhstani social science can break out of the

framework of provincialism, local and functional limitations (Gurevich L.Ya., 2017)

Having adopted the definition of science formed in the depths of the exact sciences, the science of man was placed in an unpleasantly ambiguous situation: either it meets all the requirements of scientific character worked out in natural sciences (where physics more often than others serves as a model); or he has to confess in the lack of scientificity. If you follow the first path, numerous social, psychological and communicative phenomena of real life fall out of sight. If we follow the second path, then humanitarian knowledge is deprived of the much-desired halo of reliability, social awareness and prestige traditionally attributed to the exact sciences⁶. And only turning to the non-material world of consciousness, we begin to find weaknesses in it. Science demonstrates its powerlessness when it comes to human feelings. The model of the description of physical bodies unfortunately cannot describe human consciousness. In the humanities, the phenomenon that constitutes the object of research, that is, man in relation to the world and other people, possesses essentially the same consciousness as the researcher himself. Trying to become scientific, Humanities began to imitate the methods and theoretical approaches of the natural sciences, without critically assessing the impact that the conscious individual has on the scientific apparatus as an object of investigation (it is not necessary to confuse this problem with the problem of subjective analysis). (Gurevich L.Ya., 2017).

Humanities and Social Sciences are a special case for the development of society because they form a personality. They have nothing to do with profit-making activities. Humanities, however, does not value efficiency. As Humanities do not produce profits, students and universities tend to neglect it. The science of importance is the science of profit. Back in the fifties of the last century Charles Percy Snow, British novelist and scientist wrote about a gap formed between education in Natural sciences and Humanities. Moreover, he drew our attention to the formation of two cultures and two ways of thinking emerged from two kinds of education. Modern world has changed radically for the last few decades. Technologies are galloping forward but old concepts of social and human sciences sometimes are not able to describe and explain new phenomena. Problems of social sciences and humanities like genuine philosophical problems are rooted outside the science growing out of society itself:

Of course, what I am saying here has been said by philosophers before, at least by the real ones. The degeneration of philosophical

schools in its turn is the consequence of the mistaken belief that one can philosophize without having been compelled to philosophize by problems outside philosophy. . . . Genuine philosophical problems are always rooted outside philosophy and they die if these roots decay. These roots are easily forgotten by philosophers who "study" philosophy instead of being forced into philosophy by the pressure of non-philosophical problems (Taleb, Nassim 2007).

The current state of affairs in Kazakhstan repeats in many cases the state of affairs in this sphere in Russia although Kazakhstani reality is even worse. Most of the scientific works of Kazakhstani social scientists are a description of the context with the involvement of documentary, statistical and literary sources, together with traditional methods of collecting primary information. In the best case, it is an attempt of scientific information support for economic and political strategies. Practically, they do not contain any contribution to the theory, methodology, and instruments of the social science. Why all of this is happening? Why young people are no longer interested in the development of humanities? In our opinion, humanity schools and departments have turned out into collector of theories that have already been outdated before these theories are taught in the classrooms. It does not enhance students to register these courses. Students prefer subjects that are not associated with the past and obsolete knowledge, as the majority thinks. Normal science identified and elaborated on by Thomas Samuel Kuhn in "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" is the regular work of scientists theorizing, observing, and experimenting within a settled paradigm or explanatory framework. It is at this stage when science goes into the classrooms hence into the masses (society) making a liaison between science and education. This very liaison seems to be missing because of the situation in the science in Kazakhstan. The state of education directly depends on the state of science and vice versa, the development of education is the result of the development of science. The role and the status of Academy decreased correspondingly diminishing the place of the science in the society. Moreover, there is no National Academy of Sciences anymore, just Public Association "Republican Academy of Sciences". "Brain drain" is a well known phenomenon worldwide and it is very dangerous for the state of affairs in science in developing countries like Kazakhstan. Very little resources are invested in science despite the fact that expenditures for science have been increasing for the last decade. According to the Ministry of Finance report, the state budget of 2017 allocated 34.7 billion tenge which is a miserable 0.84 % of total budget expenses to finance research and innovative activity but there is unbearable misbalance of resources spent in favor of

natural sciences not humanities. Twenty two thousand scientists and technicians were cut in this field in 2016 (Zubov Andrey, 29.09. 2016).

The basic principle of education is in integrity of knowledge – knowledge of nature and society. We cannot just continuously study the natural phenomena, i.e. the world around us without understanding of who we are, without understanding of ourselves. Human being is the subject to constant changes; his behavior is unpredictable, which raises so many opportunities for the studies, which makes them so interesting and hopeful. In our opinion, each man needs to start to explore himself/herself, what drives him, what drives his mind, what makes us who we are and what makes us be individuals, only after that will he be able to understand what is around us. Society cannot survive without knowledge of the house it lives in, that means not knowing the external world. But this knowledge is useless if society cannot develop its behavior in accordance with the laws of the world and their cause and effect relations. Natural sciences would not survive on their own without the developments in the social sciences. The world today cannot be studied only through logical speculations.

One of the main objectives of the society in the future is to change the approach to the system of education in general and to teaching science in particular. That is to develop methods which teach active learning, to teach to learn novelty. New skills and new knowledge will be asked for in fifteen-twenty years. A good specialist is the one who is above just craft and is able to quickly switch to the new knowledge, innovation. These standards are to be temporary and should be born not in the Ministries but in the science itself, as a new paradigm is born, according to Thomas Kuhn because science and education are inextricably linked. Among five social initiatives of the President of Kazakhstan the third one is about education. Increasing the accessibility and quality of higher education and improving the living conditions of tertiary institution students are becoming a call of the day. Today, more than 530,000 young people study in the country's universities, of which almost 30% are on grants allocated by the state. In the academic year 2018-19 additional 20,000 grants are to be allocated to 54,000 grants annually (Yelyubayeva Aigul, 07.03.18). This will educate thousands of specialists who will be in demand in the new economy in conditions of the fourth industrial revolution. And because of the current economic situation most of the grants are given for technical specialties although it is a great investment into the future of education in general. Moreover, increase of the salaries of people working in the corresponding fields: social workers, teachers, doctors, sociologists will cause popularity of social work. Further, working places for graduates need to be increased to provide incentives for

students. In addition, teaching hours of such disciplines could be increased in the schools and universities. Another way to contribute in the improvement of people's values is to develop the average level of culture. Very interesting incentives are being introduced under the new state program "Spiritual Revival" based on the Address of the President of Kazakhstan "Looking to the Future: Modernizing the Public Consciousness". There are the sections "Homeland", "Modern Kazakhstani culture", "New humanitarian knowledge. 100 textbooks in the Kazakh language", "The transition of the present Kazakh alphabet to the Latin alphabet," "100 new faces" and "Sacral Geography". It will result in the revival of values, national traditional morality (Zhanuzakov Amir. 05.09.2017). But there is a long way between idea and its implementation especially taking into consideration the bureaucracy of the ministries and unreasonable distribution of budgets.

Our results are in general agreement with the studies done in the world about the state of Social Sciences and Humanities but there are some contradictory trends in science and education spheres in Kazakhstan. The number of students is increasing whereas the quality of knowledge decreases. Although the diversity of topics and tasks of scientific research is increasing by contrast its universality is diminishing. Social sciences focus on the objective explanatory concepts and theories resulting in the emergence of a large number of passive studies. It is obvious that there is a necessity to design new social models, new ways of social life. Further more mathematization of social knowledge and bureaucratization of science will play negative role in the development of Social Sciences and Humanities. Dramatic changes in human societies revoke human ideals being instrumental to the crises of culture and spiritual values which in its turn lead to the crisis in social sciences. Information era calls for new methods since the world is intelligible and information is transparent.

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Red Shariati vs. Black Shariati; *Comparing the Relevance of Ali Shariati for International and Iranian Sociologists*

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Abstract

In this article, I discuss the relevance and newfound relevance of Ali Shariati at the international level in the field of social science, particularly left-leaning and Islamic sociology and political sociology. Then, I will attempt to explain why on the other side of the spectrum, Iranian scholars, particularly certain section of critical sociologists, have developed a sense of fatigue towards Shariati and find his social thought irrelevant in the political, cultural and economic conditions and situation in Iran. Using a comparative approach, I identify five reasons to explain the difference between Shariati's relevance for Iranian and international sociologists: 1) language difference; his usage of literature in Persian and English translations of his works that are given a more coherent, systematic and logical structure and tone by translators and editors; 2) the lack of using comparative studies as research methods among Iranian sociologists and therefore being limited to re-visiting and critiquing his works; 3) Euro-centrism among Iranian sociologists; 4) the dominance of postcolonial theory among international sociologists focusing on the Global South; and 5) the critique of Islamization of knowledge in Iran.

Key Words: Ali Shariati, alternative sociology, the global south, Iran, comparative perspective.

Introduction: Ali Shariati, the Global South, and the Context of the Present

“Shariati writes romantic and superficial,” “Shariati was not a sociologist,” “Shariati’s writing is rhetorical,” “Shariati’s era ended with the 1979 Iranian revolution”; such notions have increasingly become accepted and common among Iranian sociologists, particularly critical sociologists, and, in general, a certain section of the Iranian academia. Does the work of Ali Shariati belong to the history of social thought in Iran, the Middle East, or the Muslim World? If Shariati’s era has come to an end, how is it that, translations of his works are widely read among international sociologists? Why is there a significant amount of academic work written about his ideas? And why has Ali Shariati as a thinker gained new popularity among social science communities, and his name is increasingly heard in conferences, workshops, and academic events, particularly those focusing on the Global South? I seek to assess and address these questions.

In this article, I discuss the relevance and newfound relevance of Ali Shariati at the international level in the field of social science, particularly left-leaning and Islamic sociology and political sociology. Then, I will attempt to explain why on the other side of the spectrum, Iranian scholars have developed a sense of fatigue towards Shariati and find his social thought irrelevant in the political, cultural and economic conditions and situation in Iran.

In doing so, my analysis is based on observation, using textual analysis, comparative approaches, as well as through interactions with academics and researchers who are undertaking research on Shariati or using him as a social theorist in their research. I identify five reasons for the difference between Shariati’s relevance for Iranian and international sociologists: 1) language difference; his usage of literature in Persian and English translations of his works that are given a more coherent, systematic and logical structure and tone by translators and editors; 2) the lack of using comparative studies as research methods among Iranian sociologists and therefore being limited to re-visiting and critiquing his works; 3) Euro-centrism among Iranian sociologists; 4) the dominance of postcolonial theory among international sociologists focusing on the Global South; and 5) the critique of Islamization of knowledge in Iran.

Finally, I argue that such difference of popularity and relevance itself is not necessarily worth discussing. Nevertheless, why such phenomenon occurs in the present social and political context is important. Failing to acknowledge so by

scholars and researchers – Iranian and international sociologists alike – especially reducing Shariati to the history of social thought by Iranian sociologists is dangerous and short-sighted.

In this article, I do not intend to perpetuate the dichotomy of Iranian sociology vs. international sociology that falls into the ideological narrative of Iran vs. the World. I however, intend to highlight a wide new significance of Shariati as a social thinker for Islamic left-leaning social thought that studies the Global South. Such significance, which is not happening in a vacuum and is entangled with the situation and conditions of the cultural and political economy of the world, is a question itself that needs to be researched on and written about by political sociologists, especially Iranians. For Iranians, Shariati was an ideologue of the 1979 Iranian revolution that constructed revolutionary ideals based on Islamic literature and an anti-imperialist interpretation of socialist discourses. Four decades after the birth of the Islamic Republic, considering its evolution, developments, and transitions, Shariati's interpretation of Marxism or his writings on Shi'ism, Islam, and justice have no relevance or implications for the socio-political situation of the Iranian society in the eyes of many Iranian sociologists. Therefore, if not dismissed as outdated, his theories are reduced to the history of the Islamic revolution, and history of social thought in Iran. The only exception is where his theories are deconstructed and reconstructed, to be used as the basis or justifications for the policies of the state of the Islamic Republic of Iran and also when deemed relevant and expedient in the context of present-day Iran.

On the other hand and on the international level, Shariati is not only read and talked about as a Muslim leftist thinker, but within the context of anti-imperialist revolutions of the 20th century and uprisings in the Middle East he is relevant and pivotal. For those who are interested in postcolonial theory and are aware of the critique of Euro-centrism and orientalism in social science, Shariati is that sociologist from the Global South who wrote about the socialist human in contrast to the capitalist human. He actively thought in an alternative paradigm. In the world of politics where progressive ideas receive a vast amount of attention, Shariati was the architect of and managed to contribute to the building of an Islamic worldview as an alternative idea. This worldview was based on Islamic values but at the same time compatible with modern social science. Hence, one could argue that Shariati established a form of analysis which is relevant and important in the contemporary context of ideas.

Overall, the relation between Shariati's and the Islamic Republic of Iran's anti-Western positions raises a contradiction, for Shariati is attractive for sociologists outside Iran who are in favor of a contextualization of anti-capitalist critique. At the same time, it is problematic for those in Iran who are critiquing the very same ideological relation that is associated to the State.

Making Sense of the Differences of Views and Relevance

Thus far, I have argued that there is a new relevance and popularity towards Ali Shariati among international sociologists with a focus on the Global South. On the other hand, I have highlighted that in Iran, the native country of Shariati, he is increasingly considered irrelevant or pseudo-sociologist by a significant number of critical sociologists and researchers. Among more recent scholars, one can name Eshan Naraghi who states that Shariati's approach is "sensational" and includes "historical deviance" (Etemad, 2009). Seyed Javad Tababaei, during his speeches has questioned whether Shariati was an intellectual and academic rather than an ideologist or populist (ISNA, 2013 & ASRIRAN, 2016).

As argued above, it is more important to explain why these views are not aligned rather than exploring the opinion of sociologists, on both sides, about Shariati's relevance or irrelevance, popularity or unpopularity. This is however not to dismiss the critique of Shariati's teachings, Marxism, and the ideology of the Iranian revolution (Abrahamian, 1993). Instead, I argue that if the discussed differences of views among Iranian and international sociologists are situated and compared in the cultural, political and economic context of the social sciences inside and outside Iran, five main reasons can be identified to explain them:

1. Language difference in original writing and English translation

The title of this article is inspired by Shariati's book, "Red Shi'ism vs. Black Shi'sm". In Persian, the book is called "*Tashayo' Alavi, Tashayo' Safavi*", or Alavid Shi'ism vs Safavid Shi'ism. One of the critiques raised against Shariati is that he was an ideologue who idealized his constructed non-historical interpretation of Shi'ism, and Islam in general. It went against the passive prejudice and oppressive interpretation of Shi'ism that dominated the popular view of Islam in the eyes of the Iranian people and was pushed by a significant segment of the clergy class. He connected the latter interpretation to the kind of Shi'ism used by the Safavid Empire to create a state religion for Iran in the 16th century. Using this comparison, Shariati is identified as contributing to the revival of Islam in the context of social politics and justice. However, for Iranian critical sociologists

today, such work is not seen as social science, but political activism or even in some cases pseudo-sociology. In this critique, sociologists refer to the sensational, rhetorical, and motivational language that Shariati used in his writing of this account of Shi'ism.

However, in a different context, interestingly Shariati's view of Shi'ism is presented in the community of Islamic social sciences, during conferences, and forums. Considering how Shi'a scholarship is already persecuted and seen only as the current political view of the State in Iran, Shariati's account is actually useful in situating Shi'ism in a much-needed historical context and is attractive for scholars and young researchers in favor of a more inclusive, relevant, and social Islam.

But how does the difference of languages in the original version (Persian) and English translation also contribute to this divergence? It is often believed that to fully understand a text, one needs to be able to read it in its original written language. It needs to be noted that Shariati comes from a background in Persian literature and therefore his writing carries that literal poetic feeling of romantic Persian literature.

For example, when he writes about the human catastrophe that the "pyramids of colonialism, despotism, exploitation, and stupefaction" have caused around the world, it poetically reads as it poetically reads as "*ahram e este'mar va estebdad va estesmar va estehmar*" (Shariati, 1980) in Persian. When he describes capitalism, he uses the wordplay "*salaase zar o zoor o tazvir*" (Shariati, 1980b) meaning "the triad of wealth, power, and pretentiousness". I argue, it is highly significant, that when one reads Shariati in English, which is often done in comprehensive, relatable language of contemporary social sciences the asserted critique of writing rhetorically, sensationally, and pseudo-scientifically does not come to one's mind. As it would seem, this point is in the matter of form and content.

2. The lack of using comparative studies as research methods among Iranian sociologists and therefore being limited to re-visiting and critiquing his works

When Iranian sociologists criticized their international colleagues of obsession and blindly turning to Shariati, many times the area of comparative studies remains unnoticed. In the context of revolutionary thinkers of the 20th century, the influences of social theorists on each other, as well as how they interpreted each other's works are important questions and issues. The comparisons between the West and the

Muslim world, as well as the idea of global connectedness are significant. All these questions and subject matters form an important part of comparative studies.

Hence, when sociologists in Iran neglect comparative approaches, not just in the case of Shariati but in general in the social sciences, it can be understood that when they encounter patriotic, nationalistic, and irrelevant books and articles on Shariati done by their counterparts, Shariati apologists, and disciples, their only reaction is to deem those dangerous and dismiss them as being not good writing.

3. Euro-centrism among Iranian sociologists

By presenting this point, I do not mean at all to argue that Iranian sociologists are Westernized and Westoxicated (Al Ahmad, 2012) as many of their critiques in particular derive from the field of the Islamic social sciences in Iran. However, I would argue that the dominated Euro-centric mentality of Iranian sociologists does not allow them to use Shariati as a theorist for their research. Therefore, when Shariati is only the subject of their studies and research is done on him in the same way and within the same discourse and context, it leads to the discussed fatigue and reluctance towards writings about him. Because of this mentality, Iranian sociologists fail to engage in active theory-building and act in limiting the work done on Shariati to the history of social thought and similar fields which are not important for sociologists.

Whereas, international sociologists who are aware of the critique of Euro-centrism and Orientalism are keen on finding alternative thinkers from the Global South and that is exactly the path that leads them to Shariati, Ibn Khaldun, Farabi, Said Nursi and similar figures from the Muslim world. For example, one can mention the work of Seyed Javad Miri and Dustin J Byrd on Shariati and the future of social theory (2017), Seyed Farid Alatas's theory-building on applying Ibn Khaldun in sociological research (2013, 2017), or Lutfi Sunar's Eurocentrism at the Margins (2016).

4. The domination of postcolonial theory among international sociologists focusing on the Global South.

The fourth point I am raising is a political one. There is a significant international rightwing shift that is taking place. Centrist and liberal ideologies are failing in many countries, and there is a great amount of anti-Islam and anti-left rhetoric that are being used to construct and support rightwing socio-political discourses. It is natural that sociologists focusing on the Global South that are already dominated by postcolonial theory are turning to theorists from the Global South that are both left-

leaning and pro-Islam. When it comes to Iran, notwithstanding the fact there is a much-needed critique of the anti-Western nature of the Islamic Republic, it can be understood for those sociologists to turn to thinkers such as Shariati and Jalal Al Ahmad (2012). The perception and coverage of Shariati will occur unevenly, unless Iranian sociologists acknowledged the new relevance of Shariati in the sociopolitical context of the present and start engaging in alternative theory-building, as well as revisiting, developing, deconstructing and re-constructing the already existing non-Eurocentric and non-orientalist thinkers.

5. *The critique of Islamization of knowledge in Iran*

Finally, one must note that there is an established and ongoing process of Islamization of knowledge in Iran that is promoted in the academia by a certain section of the institution of education within the Iranian state. This process is a response against the idea that modern social science is the carrier of western and secular values in post-revolutionary Iran (Mohaddesi, 2018). The process of Islamization of Social Science (*Islamisasi olum e ensani*) that was developed and promoted by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution in Iran was actually drawn from the themes of Islamization of Knowledge discussed by scholars such as Murteza Mutahari, Mehdi Golshani, and Ali Shariati himself (Shamsaei, 2012), but also reconstructed through diverse transitions, contradictions, transformation during different eras of Islamic Republic. Such approach that Mohaddesi (2018) has called “the Trouble of Islamization of Sociology in Iran” today is particularly enforced on social scientists associated with the critical school and cultural studies. Unlike the international tendency to move against the current and search for alternative sociology and sociologists, in Iran scholars that are censored, excluded, and depowered by the top-down project of Islamization of knowledge have developed a sense of hysteria against what is associated with Islamic social science, of which Shariati has been linked to and become a key part, and Islamic theology. For them, resisting Shariati is resisting backwardness and academic oppression.

Conclusion

A question that I have been increasingly hearing, is Iranian sociologists asking international researchers who are interested in Shariati during conferences, academic events, and forums, “why, why are you reading Shariati?” The main purpose of writing this article stems from what this question represents - unawareness, ignorance, and unwillingness to connect to the international academic community and therefore getting out of context and becoming irrelevant.

A phenomenon, a new phenomenon I would say, is happening in front of our eyes. As Iranian sociologists, we live in the global world with all its connectedness and effects on our social life as individuals, academics, and societies. It is therefore necessary to critique, study and take part in the way Ali Shariati is being read and written about. And it is imperative to understand how his theories are contributing to shaping and reshaping the Global South, and the wider world, in the context of sociology and political sociology.

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Asbab al-Nuzul and Irfan A. Khan

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*Neither considerations of occasions of revelations nor commentaries of earlier people will be permitted to block the further growth of Quranic understanding
(Irfan Khan)¹*

Abstract

Irfan A. Khan (d. 2018) believes the use of asbab al-nuzul (occasions of the revelation) is not only a mistaken methodology to understand the Quran but it is “most fatal to receiving any illumination or guidance from the Quran.” His solution is to understand the Quran as if it were revealed to the current readers just now in their socio-historic circumstance primarily for them for the first time. Khan believes that the Quran and Sunnah/hadith (deeds and written speech of the Prophet) are the two main sources of guidance for Muslims. For Khan the Sunnah/hadith is the Prophet’s guidance to solve the practical demands of God’s commands in the Prophet’s socio-historic circumstance. Since that socio-historic circumstance does not exist, therefore Sunnah/hadith has no legislative value for the generations to follow him. The paper will explain Khan’s position, ‘ulama’s (religious scholars) critique of his proposal, authenticity of the asbab al-nuzul material, and a case study of surah al-Kauthar (108) as a concrete example to understand the Quran with and without the help of asbab al-nuzul material and how its use impacts interpretation.

Keywords: asbab al-nuzul, occasions of revelation, hadith, interpretation, exegeses, understanding.

Introduction

Irfan A. Khan (d. 2018)² is a scholar of the Quran and modern Western philosophy. He seems to present a dynamic Quranic hermeneutic theory and methodology that has potential to answer most of Quranic interpretive problems faced by Muslims today. He belongs to the Farahi school of Quranic interpretation that gives utmost importance to literary contextual interpretation of the Quran. It considers the Quran a highly thematically coherent book. Khan's opening caption in the above informs two obstacles that block the growth of Quranic understanding: use of *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of revelation) and Quranic commentaries of Muslim exegetes. According to him, the obstacles result in the stagnation of Islamic thought. This paper will consider only *asbab al-nuzul* and their negative or positive impact on Quranic understanding based on Khan's analysis. It will skip the obstacles caused by the use of Muslim exegetical works in understanding the Quran for another paper. Challenges to Khan's proposal may mostly come from *'ulama* (religious scholars), who believe to correctly understanding the Quran requires the knowledge and use of *asbab al-nuzul* genre. Therefore, we will use their critique to Khan's proposal. The paper will evaluate the authenticity of *asbab al-nuzul* material through Andrew Rippin's (d. 2016) seminal paper, "The Exegetical Genre 'asbab al-nuzul:' A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey." Finally, the paper will explore *surah al-Kauthar* (108) as a concrete example to demonstrate how Quranic thought becomes stagnant with the use of *asbab al-nuzul*.

Khan's Position on Asbab al-Nuzul

When Khan states, "considerations of occasions of revelations" will not "be permitted to block the further growth of Quranic understanding," he points to "a very strange, mistaken approach" that blocks the growth of Quranic thought. According to this approach, Khan believes that some Muslims insist "understanding the Quranic *ayat* [verses, sing. *ayah*] in the light of the situation which these *ayat* first addressed," i.e. as understood by the Prophet and his Companions. According to Khan, they believe "there is something wrong in studying these *ayat* as addressing us directly in our present situation" (Khan, 2005. 28). Khan spells out the mistaken approach as follows: "1) first find out what situation was prevailing when an *ayah* or a set of *ayahs* was actually revealed, 2) then understand the *ayah* or *ayahs* in that perspective, 3) once you have, what is according to them the only correct understanding of this part of the Quran, you may relate it to your own situation and, indirectly, derive what would be the Quranic guidance for you"

(Khan, 2005. 28). In order to understand the circumstances in which an *ayah* or a set of *ayat* were revealed, the current readers are required to know and use *asbab al-nuzul* materials.

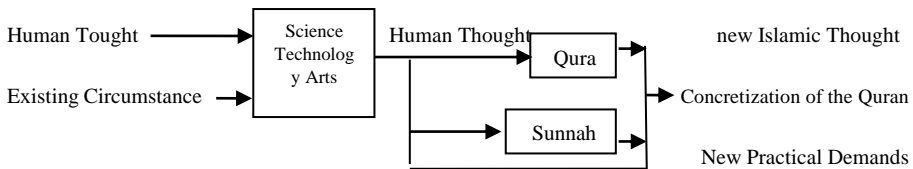
The above methodology creates two problems for Khan: 1) the Quran becomes an indirect source of guidance for all generations except the first generation, 2) it makes the Text static. Regarding the first problem, Khan believes that the Quran is a primary guidance for each new generation till the Day of Judgment (Khan, 1987. 40). For him when we make the knowledge of *asbab al-nuzul* a necessary condition to understand the Quran, it implies that the Quran is primary guidance only for the first readers and secondary or indirect guidance for all other generations. He drives his rationale to consider the Quran as a primary source of guidance for all generations to come from the Quran. According to him, God “has a two-fold relationship with His world: He creates as well as guides (20:50; 87:1-3)” (Khan, 2005. 7). Further, the divine activity of creation and guidance take place continuously (Q 29:55). Implying, that every moment is a new created moment that requires new and fresh guidance. Khan’s Quranic study informs that God has taken upon Himself to guide all of His creations including the humankind.³ The paper agrees with Khan to believe that only God is responsible to provide fresh guidance to the humankind. However, we may wonder how God accomplishes this task in the post-prophetic period in which we live as the Prophet Muhammad is the last prophet and no new prophet will come after him (Q 33: 40). In the absence of a new prophet, Muslims are left only with the Quran as a divine text and the *Sunnah/hadith* of the Prophet as human acts or words to get guidance from. Khan’s solution is to understand the Quran as if it were revealed just now for us in our *current* socio-historical context as a *primary* source of guidance, just as the Prophet understood the Quran in his socio-historic situation. Does this mean that the problems faced by the Prophet and his solutions have no value or relevance to the current readers? Khan believes they are valuable for the current readers also in the sense as the stories of the earlier prophets were beneficial to the Prophet and his Companions. Meaning, for the current readers of the Quran, the Prophet’s and his Companions’ stories are one additional source of stories available to them and the future generation of Muslims (Khan, 2005. 29). In the following we will discuss the nature and relationship between the Quran and the *Sunnah* to get guidance from them as Khan sees it. For Khan the two sources of guidance require two different methodologies of understating them. If the difference in methodologies is comprehended, it eliminates the need to understand the Quran through *asbab al-*

nuzul material which Khan considers a road block in correctly understanding the Quran.

For Khan the Quran is the Divine Text while the *Sunnah* implements divine commands by fulfilling the practical demands of the revelation in the Prophet's *particular socio-historic situation* (Khan, 2005, 8,10, 12). In other words, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet emerges when the Quran is concretized in the Prophet's socio-historic context. In Khan's view the Text has immense possibilities of meaning being the word of God and the *Sunnah* is one meaning free of any mistake concretized in the Prophet's socio-historic situation. For Khan the concretization of the Quran is a continuous process and each successive generation concretizes the Quran in its socio-historic context that may be unique to them but never free of mistakes and thus always subject to change. When Khan sees the *Sunnah* as the fulfillment of the practical demands of the Text, then he does not consider the Prophet's commands as legislation for all other generations except his own. He sees the practical demands in the Prophet's concretization of the Quran "quite independent of the Book." As a matter of fact, Khan categorically states that seeing the Prophet fulfilling the practical demands in his circumstance as legislation for coming generations is a mistake (Khan, 2005. 10-11).⁴ For example, God commands "so whosoever observes the month, should fast during it (Q 2:185)." The Quran does not tell how to determine the start and end of the month of fasting. In the Prophet's historic circumstance, the most accurate way of finding the beginning and end of a month was to sight the birth of a new moon. Therefore, the Prophet announced to observe the birth of new moon and establish the start and end of the fasting month. Khan says that we shall follow the *Sunnah*, i.e. look for the most accurate way of determining the birth of the moon in our socio-historic context. For us the most accurate way of finding birth of the new moon is astronomical calculation. Therefore, we should use it to announce the beginning and end of the month of fasting. According to him, "Only if the *Ummah* and its scholars keep this point before themselves, will they be able to face the great challenges in their way due to possible radical changes in human situations with the advancement of science and technology" (Khan, 2005. 14).

The above point is made by Khan in a different way in his article, "Authenticity and Development of Islamic Thought." By authenticity he means that Islamic thought should be according to the Quran and *Sunnah*, and by development he means growth in which something from the old remains but something new emerges. Khan asks: "What is the dynamic element in Islamic thought" (Khan, 1987. 31)? Interestingly, he finds human thought the dynamic element of Islamic

thought. For him Islamic thought emerges when the human thought filters through the revelation. While this filtering puts a break on the “unrestricted progressive movement of [human] thought,” it is also a source of immense possibilities of the development of Islamic thought when we read the Quran in *our* socio-historic context. Khan believes the source of all human thought is *sam‘-başar-fuad’ad* (hearing, seeing, thinking/intuiting) (Khan, 1987. 32). All development in human thought happens due to the use of *sam‘-başar-fuad’ad* as we progress in physical sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Thus, continuous increase in humankind’s knowledge and constantly changing socio-historic circumstance make the human thought dynamic. When we apply our more developed *sam‘-başar-fuad’ad* due to the development of human thought and in new situations on the Quran, according to Khan, we get new inspiration and guidance from it. This self-reinforcing development in human thought and Islamic thought continues infinitum and we understand the Book better and better as time passes. As far as the *Sunnah* is concerned, when we try to concretize the Quran in our socio-historic circumstance, the *Sunnah* comes to our help and provides guidance as to how we can meet the practical demands of the divine commands in our socio-historic circumstance. Thus, for Khan to gain guidance from the Quran we understand it in our socio-historic circumstance afresh, and to get guidance from the *Sunnah* we understand it in the socio-historic context of the Prophet and learn from it how we should meet the practical demands of God’s commands in our changed socio-historic circumstance. The above understanding can be schematically depicted as follows:⁵



According to Khan, when we read the Quran as a secondary source of guidance for all generations to come after the Prophet, we have to use analogical reasoning to develop solutions from the same or similar first situations. This blocks the growth of Islamic thought as an understanding fixed in time always remains the basis of all future understandings. Further, the first situations cannot cover all coming situations as there may arise entirely new situations that could not have been previously conceived. Khan believes it is logical to face such entirely new situations never conceived before due to humankind’s experiences and continuously increasing new

knowledge through scientific and technological developments. The end result is that “justice cannot be done to all situations that have been deprived of being direct addressees of the Text” (Khan, 1987. 41).

Finally, to understand the first situations *asbab al-nuzul* narratives become a source of preconceived opinions even before the reading of the Text starts. For him to seek guidance from the Quran it is necessary that “no preconceived opinions should direct (or in any way manipulate with) our understanding of it,” as it is “most fatal to receiving any illumination or guidance from the Quran” (Khan, 1987. 38). The sources of opinion can be of others, readers’ own “innovations” or “from some narrow perspectives.” Khan sees *asbab al-nuzul* as others’ opinions or narrow perspectives. It is so as *asbab al-nuzul* data is not reliable according to Muslim’s own critique of the sources. In the later part of the paper we will look into the issue of *asbab al-nuzul* data’s integrity. For Khan, studying the Quran through *asbab al-nuzul* materials’ glasses is decremental for correct Quranic understanding for another reason. He differentiates between “developing within one’s own self an ever growing capacity to understand the Book and understanding the Book in the light of some preconceived opinions” or perspectives. He does not want someone’s pre-packaged understanding of the Quran that is spoon fed to the reader. To him the Quran is a communication between reader and God, a continuous dialog between them. This happens when the reader keeps on developing personal relationship with the Book and through it with God. Therefore, “*Having a particular understanding, and developing a capacity to have such understanding are two very different states of affairs*” (Khan, 1987. 38). Let us now review potential traditionalists’ concerns and critique of Khan’s position about understanding the Quran using *asbab al-nuzul* methodology.

‘Ulama ’s or Traditionalist Position

Traditionalists may be sympathetic to some of Khan’s conceptions like reading the Quran as if it were just revealed for the reader, but for them the most difficult aspect of his proposal is to accept Khan’s concept of *Sunnah*, especially when he does not consider *Sunnah* the source of equal legislation as the Quran. Khan does not reject *Sunnah* so he cannot be included in the Quranist groups who reject *Sunnah* of the Prophet. His concern is that the Quran and *Sunnah* cannot be placed in parallel such that the *Sunnah/hadith* becomes judge over the Quran instead of vice-versa. Further, he considers two different methodologies to get guidance from them. With this

cautionary note let us consider traditionalist's view of the *Sunnah* as a critique to Khan's proposal.

Hafiz Anas Nazar in his PhD dissertation, "Hameeduddin Farahi *awr Jamhur kay uşul al-tafsir: A Research and Comparative Study*, [Hameeduddin Farahi and Majority '*ulama's uşul al-tafsir*]" (Nazar, 2010), presents traditionalist's view in great detail with reference to fully documented traditional sources. We can therefore use his dissertation to present traditionalist's views about understanding the Quran, and in particular the relationship between the Quran and *Sunnah/hadith* of the Prophet. In his dissertation, Nazar critiques Farahi's methodology of understanding the Quran. His critique also applies to Khan, as Khan follows Farahi school's methodology of understanding the Quran. The difference between Farahi and Khan is that Farahi considers *hadith* to understand the Quran only if a particular *hadith* supports Quranic position. Khan, on the other hand, totally overlooks *hadith* when understanding the Quran. Secondly, since *asbab al-nuzul* is part of *hadith* literature, therefore the critique of *hadith* literature can also be considered a critique of *asbab al-nuzul* genre. In his critique, Nazar points out that the Quran and *Sunnah* are primary and *equal* sources of legislation according to the '*ulama* of the *Ummah* (Nazar, 2010. 384). It is so as the Quran is *Wahy-e-Matlu* (revelation from God to the Prophet in God's words) and the *Sunnah/hadith* is *Wahy-e-Ghair Matlu* (revelation from God as an idea expressed in the Prophet's words). According to him, since both are from the same source, therefore rejecting one means rejecting the other. Both must be believed, acted upon, and used to gain guidance from the Quran (Nazar, 2010. 384). This conception of *Sunnah/hadith* is unacceptable to Khan as we noted in the above. Khan accepts that there were communications between God and the Prophet besides Quranic revelations and that some of them were reported to us through *hadith* literature. However, he believes "the texts of these reports do not have the status of Divine Words" (Khan, 2005, 34). To call these extra Quranic communications "revelation" is a definitional matter. If some people want to call this communication "revelation" is not problematic for Khan as long as it is understood they do not have equal status. Let us review in the following if traditional concept of *Sunnah/hadith* can be justified by the historical development of the concept of *Sunnah/hadith*.

Historical Developments in the Concept of Sunnah/hadith

Let us review the development history of the *Sunnah/hadith* through the eyes of an eminent scholar, Fazul Rahman (d. 1988). He is a historian of the Muslim tradition

among other things. He researched the historical development of the concept of *Sunnah/hadith* in great detail in a series of articles from March, 1962 to June, 1963 in the journal, *Islamic Studies*, published by the Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan. His seminal work, *Islamic Methodology in History*, is mostly based on those articles (Rahman, 1995. v). In this study, Rahman considers the *Sunnah* a “behavioral concept.” As a behavioral concept it is “not just a law of behavior (as law of natural objects) but a normative moral law” (Rahman, 1995. 1). Further, for the prophetic *Sunnah*, “the element of normativeness must be prior” to the practice of the community, i.e. the practice of community over long term does not become *Sunnah* unless from the beginning of the Prophet’s prophet-hood his Companions considered his deeds and words normative. Rahman informs that the idea of *Sunnah* in the sense of “exemplary conduct” existed in Arabia before the Prophet, but it was considered neither normative nor in the sense of following it. According to Rahman, after the death of the Prophet up to about the third quarter of the second Muslim century, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet was considered normative but *not intrinsically something to be followed*. However, when someone decided to fulfill a *sunnah* (exemplary conduct) the sense of fulfillment came into being both in the pre-prophetic Arabia and through about the third quarter of the second Muslim century, according to Rahman.

Rahman claims that the Prophetic *Sunnah* was normative but not intrinsically something to be followed up to the third quarter of the second Muslim century can be demonstrated by “numerous” examples in the early Muslims sources. For example, “Abu Yusuf [d. 181/798] admonishes Harun al-Rashid [d. 809] (see his *Kitab al-Khiraj*, the chapter on Sadaqat) asking the Caliph ‘to introduce (as distinguished from ‘to follow’) some good sunnahs’” (Rahman, 1995. 2-3). In the same passage, Abu Yusuf quotes a *hadith*: “‘whoever introduces a good sunnah will be rewarded ... and whoever introduces a bad sunnah ... etc.’ Meaning a bad *sunnah* can be introduced” but the meaning of following it is not included in the concept of *sunnah* as no one establishes a bad *sunnah* expecting it to be followed. Further, “From the concept of normative or exemplary conduct” emerges the concept of a standard of “correctness” or “straightness.” For example, Rahman points out the Arabic idiom, “*sananal-tariq*” means “the path straight ahead,” or “the path with no deviations.” According to Rahman, the implication of normative conduct as standard of “correctness” or “straightness” does not lead to the “prevalent view that in its *primary* sense (my emphasis) sunnah means ‘the trodden path’ is not supported by any unique evidence.” Though Rahman acknowledges logically and secondarily “a straight path without deviations implies that the path is

already chalked out which it cannot be unless it has been already trodden.” Hence, *Sunnah* in its meaning can imply a trodden path, but it does not automatically mean that it must be followed. Rahman explains another shade of meaning from the term *Sunnah* as “mean between extremes.” Since from a “straight path without deviations to the right or to the left also gives the meaning of ‘mean between extremes’ or the ‘middle way’” (Rahman, 1995. 3-4). Again, the concept of “the middle way” can be attributed to *Sunnah* but it also does not require automatically following it. Rahman provides many more examples to make this point. The next development in the concept of *Sunnah* emerged with a new sense of *Sunnah* having legislative value in the Muslim history. Let us consider it in the following.

Rahman’s analysis shows that in the early post-prophetic era, i.e. the end of the third quarter of the second Muslim century, the concept of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet remained “an exemplary [‘authoritative’ or ‘normative’] precedent” with no legal binding of following it or giving it a legislative value. By the time of Malik B. Anas (d. 179 A.H.), it became “an agreed practice” of the “Companion or a subsequent authority although it is not divorced by the general concept of the prophetic *Sunnah*” (Rahman, 1995. 14). By the general concept of the prophetic *Sunnah*, at a theoretical level, Rahman means an “umbrella concept, rather than filled with an absolutely specific content.” At the practical level, the *Sunnah* as a behavioral term implied that “since no two cases, in particular, are ever exactly identical in their situational setting – moral, psychological and material – *Sunnah* must, of necessity, allow of interpretation and adoption” (Rahman, 1995. 12). Rahman notes that there is “abundant historical evidence” to demonstrate this understanding. This “Living *Sunnah*” or “Ideal *Sunnah*,” i.e. “a pointer in a direction rather than an exactly planned laid-out series of rules” was the result of rational “personal free thought” activity called “Ra’y” or “personal considered opinion” that produced an immense wealth of legal, religious, or moral ideas during the first century and a half approximately” (Rahman, 1995. 14-5). The instrument that generated the Living *Sunnah* was *Sunnah-Ijtihad-Ijma*‘complex, (*Ijtihad*: personal mental effort, *Ijma*‘: consensus). This means when a new problem emerged, first the Ideal *Sunnah* was looked at then the Ideal *Sunnah* (“under the direction, of the spirit (not the absolute letter) in which the Prophet acted in a given historical situation”) was interpreted through *Ijtihad* or *Qiyas* (analogical reasoning) that was firmed over time through the process of *Ijma*” (Rahman, 1995. 15). According to Rahman, the *Sunnah* in this sense allowed second century “aphorism: The *Sunnah* decides upon the Quran; the Quran does not decide upon the *Sunnah*” (Rahman, 1995. 19). Without Rahman’s sense of the *Sunnah*, Rahman considers the

second century aphorism not only “shocking” but “blasphemous.” Due to the democratic nature of the process, *Ijma’* was never absolute. The voices of difference remained with the general acceptability of the dominant opinion agreed upon by the community over time. The downside of this process was that “the product of this activity became rather chaotic, i.e. the ‘*Sunnah*’ of different regions – Hijaz, Iraq, Egypt, etc. became divergent on almost every issue” (Rahman, 1995. 15). This situation required stability and uniformity that was achieved through a different sense of the *Sunnah* which worked well to address the existing instability but it turned the *Sunnah* into a static rule-based *Sunnah* through the *ḥadīth* movement led by Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi’i (d. 204/820). The instrument of change was achieved when the *Sunnah-Ijtihad-Ijma’* complex changed into *Sunnah-Ijma’-Ijtihad*. The *Ijma’-Ijtihad* pair “instead of being a process and something forward-looking – coming at the end of free *Ijtihad*” having to accomplish in future became “something static and backward looking (Rahman, 1995. 24). Secondly, the *Sunnah* no longer remained “a general directive but [became] as something absolutely literal and specific and whose only vehicle is the transmission of *ḥadīth*” (Rahman, 1995. 23). The *Sunnah* of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be on him), in particular, the first four *Chaliphs* also required the same “something absolutely literal and specific” with *ḥadīth* only its vehicle of transmission at this stage. Hence, when the concept of the *Sunnah* and *Ijma’* became fixed, *Ijtihad* generated from them was static and with no space for disagreement. From the above historical analysis, Rahman’s position comes close to Khan’s position. Both consider the *Sunnah* as a normative and directional concept with the exception that Khan does not want to use it in understanding the Quran but accepts it to provide guidance about the practical demands of God’s commands when the Quran is concretized in the current and future generations in their socio-historic circumstances. The traditionalists on the other hand, according to Rahman’s analysis, hold a concept of *Sunnah* which developed in the fourth decade of second Muslim century. Thus, Nazar as a representative of the traditional Muslim position about the Quran and *Sunnah* being primary and equal sources of legislation is a concept almost two hundred years Muslim century’s position (Nazar, 2010. 384).

Rahman’s above analysis shows that by the time of al-Shafi’i there was a need to achieve stability and uniformity in legal decisions. This was accomplished by changing *Sunnah-Ijtihad-Ijma’* complex to *Sunnah-Ijma’-Ijtihad* complex. The methodology worked and it controlled geographic variations in legal decisions. However, one must realize that it was achieved by finite prone to mistake actors and hence can never be taken as permanent or sacred. The unintended consequence of

the change was to make the concept of the *Sunnah* static from dynamic “Living *Sunnah*.” Khan believes that due to a totally new situation that the Muslims face today after the advent of modernity, development of physical and social sciences, Muslims need to return to the original conception of “Living *Sunnah*” as practiced by the *salaf* (Caliphs and early generation of scholars). One may ask would reverting back to the original understanding of the *Sunnah* will once again open the door of instability and chaos in legal decisions as it did the first time? Khan in his corpus has generally restricted himself to problems and solutions in understanding the Quran and seldom spoke about legal issues. However, he is very clear in his conception that the Prophet’s fulfilling the practical demands of the divine revelation in his historic situation cannot be considered having legal value for the coming generations. As a matter of fact, he proposes that this principle should also apply to all past *Shari’ah* solutions (Khan, 2005. 11). It can be argued that chaos in legal decisions will not exist in our time as we live in the political boundaries of nation-states. There would be uniformity of legal derivation within one nation-state, though there may be variations in legal opinions from one nation-state to another. The inter nation-state legal diversity in opinions can be seen as a blessing in disguise, because after some time it may become clear which nation-state’s legal judgement about a legal matter is the best and other nation-states may also adopt it if they so desire. A final note to close this discussion is that Rahman presented his research on the historical development of the concept of the *Sunnah* in 1962. His research results made some people upset at that time but no one since then has proven him wrong. Khan would agree to some of Rahman’s conclusions regarding the nature and purposes of the Living *Sunnah*. This Living *Sunnah* is not only authentic but it is also progressive. It may open the gates for using reason within an Islamic framework. Let us now turn our attention to another dimension of *asbab al-nuzul* genre, the authenticity of this material that traditionalists want us to depend upon to understand the Quran and which Khan considers a mistaken methodology.

Authenticity of asbab al-nuzul Literature

Andrew Rippin⁶ provides an extensive bibliographical and terminological survey of the exegetical genre *asbab al-nuzul* works written in Arabic by Muslims (Rippin, 1985. 1-15). Rippin critically evaluates the historical value of the sources starting from Ibn ‘Abbas (d. 68/687) up to ‘Attiya Allah ibn ‘Atiya al-Ujhuri (d. 1190/1776). He believes that sources beyond the twelfth/eighteenth century onwards have no independent value as they are “culled” from the classical sources.

Rippin's survey concludes that only four texts are valuable that contribute to *asbab al-nuzul* genre from the classical sources as of today.⁷ Among the four texts 'Ali ibn Ahmad Allah al-Wahidi (d. 430/1038) is the earliest who contributes the most.⁸ Therefore, we will only detail his work. Al-Wahidi's book, *Kitab asbab al-nuzul al-Qur'an*, contains *asbab* for various verses in the eighty-three *surahs* of the Qur'an. Among the individual *asbab*, the reports "are in the form of *hadith* reports, with full *isnad*," going back to a companion of the Prophet or an early authority (Rippin, 1985. 5). The sources of the *hadith* reports are by Bukhari (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875), and al- Hakim (d. 404/1014). According to Rippin, "Frequently one encounters a truncated *isnad*, the report simply being ascribed to Mujahid (d. 104/722), Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 150/767), al-Kalbi (d. 146/763) or the like" (Rippin, 1985. 5). Finally, "At other times, absolutely no ascription is given to a *sabab* report." Yousef Waleed Meri,⁹ a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, agrees with Rippin's findings. However, he goes further. Meri in the English translation of al-Wahidi's *Asbab* book's introduction quotes al-Wahidi that if an occasion was transmitted without "narration and transmission from those who have witnessed the revelation and were aware of the occasions," such people may face hell fire (Meri, 2008. viii). Meri exclaims, "It is therefore remarkable and surprising to discover that al-Wahidi did not always heed his own warning." Not only some occasions from him are "pure guess work" but the "book is replete with expressions such as: "'Qala al-Mufassirun' [the commentators of the Quran said], 'Qala Ahlu al-'Ilm' [the scholars said], 'Qala al-Suddi' [al-Suddi said] and 'Qala al-Kalbi' [al-Kalbi said]" (Meri, 2008. viii). Meri considers these expressions "personal opinion rather than transmission." According to Meri, "Al-Wahidi was never recognized as a scholar of *hadith*, but his lack of expertise in this field is clearly manifest in his book *Asbab al-Nuzul*. This is indeed the main and most serious drawback of the book" (Meri, 2008. x). Despite all these flaws, Meri still considers his *Asbab al-Nuzul* "an invaluable piece of scholarship" from a historical point of view as it remains the first extant source of *asbab al-nuzul* genre that collects the *asbab* in one single volume.

Rippin's research on the development of this genre is also important to understand the authenticity of the *asbab al-nuzul* genre. His study "indicates a late rise in the use of the term" (Rippin, 1985. 14). His first observation is that the terms like "'and the *sabab* of that verse being revealed was' or 'that was the *sabab* of that verse'" is not found in early exegetical works, e.g. in the exegesis of Mujahid (d. 104/722), Muqatil (d. 150/767), Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 161/778), or early *sira* works of Ibn Ishaq (d. 151/768), al-Waqidi (d. 207/823), or in the *Kitab al-tafsir* sections

of *ḥadīth* collections of *Bukhari* or *Muslim* (Rippin, 1985. 14). This is remarkable. Why is it that these relatively early sources do not use *asbab* literature? Rippin determines, "The actual term *sabab* seems to begin to make its appearance in the *tafsir* of al-Tabari (d. 310/922) and the *naskh* work of al-Nahhas (d. 338/950)" (Rippin, 1985. 14). In these works the term seems to be in its evolution to the eventual technical term of *sabab*: "the transmission of the *sabab* of the revelation of a *sura* or verse and the time, place and so forth of its revelation."¹⁰ For example, al-Tabari in his "discussion of the banishment of the word *ra'ina* in Q. 2:104" uses *sabab* in the sense of "the prohibition of the word" and not as "the reason (*sabab*) for the revelation of the verse" which according to Rippin is "later technical sense of the term" (Rippin, 1985. 14) literature. Rippin finds many "other instances of this same kind of semi-technical-but not-quite usage ... throughout the *tafsir*." According to Rippin, "It is only with al-Jassas (d. 370/981) that the term *sabab* would appear to be used with any regularity and to win its fully technical sense and phraseology in introducing reports about the revelation of the Quran" (Rippin, 1985. 15). Rippin concludes: "it was perhaps only a century earlier [than al-Wahidi, i.e. after around 368 A.H.] that the term *sabab* became fixed" and "marked out" (Rippin, 1985. 15). It can be argued that technical sense of different terms in general takes time for their development. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that the term *sabab* got fixed after about three hundred seventy years. The problem in this case is that even the concept of *sabab* is not found in early exegetical works or in the *ḥadīth* collections of *Bukhari* or *Muslim*.

It is also interesting that al-Wahidi's understanding or description of *asbab* is still challenged. According to Meri, "Muslim scholars, especially in the last three centuries" have been "more critical in their assessment of the usefulness and importance of the occasions of revelation."¹¹ For example, the latest understanding that has emerged over this period and to which Khan also scribes is that *sabab* occasions "the revelation of this part of the Book at that time," instead of "any situation, which the Prophet or his people faced, occasioned any part of the Divine Book" (Khan, 2005. 29). While these scholars have questioned and modified this genre's understanding, Khan is unique who totally rejects *asbab al-nuzul* for understanding the Quran.

It is for the above reasons, (unreliable *sabab* materials, late sources, and late development of the genre), that Khan objects judging something that is firm and authentic, i.e. the Quran, with something uncertain, i.e. *asbab al-nuzul* literature. He considers it a great injustice to the Quran to read it through the eyes of *asbab al-nuzul* literature (Khan, 1987. x). Further, he sees using *asbab al-nuzul* to understand

the Quran, mixing divine words with the human words. When Khan reads the Text, he finds himself in the divine world of the Text that he wants to understand through the divine words only. After gaining insights, inspirations, and guidance by the reading, he brings them down to the human world. He looks to the human Prophet how he concretized the insights in his socio-historic circumstance for guidance. This differentiation and separation of the divine world and human world is an important contribution of Khan's hermeneutics and a major reason to avoid *asbab al-nuzul* literature to understand the Quran.

Asbab al-Nuzul: A Case Study in the Light of Surah al-Kauthar

Let us explore the case of *surah al-Kauthar* when understood with and without *asbab al-nuzul* genre to realize Khan's concerns concretely. The choice of *al-Kauthar* is pertinent due to its short length and some of its terms that beg clarification through *asbab al-nuzul* literature. In the case study, we will examine key issues in the *surah* by four scholars, Ibn Kathir (d. 1373), Farahi (1930), Maududi (d. 1979), and Muhammad Asad (d. 1992). The four scholars represent important aspects of *asbab al-nuzul* literature use. Three key issues in the *surah* are taken as representative of subjects requiring the use of *asbab al-nuzul* literature: where the *surah* was revealed, how *al-Kauthar* and *abtar* are understood, and what guidance current readers can get from the exegeses of the four scholars. After this review we will take up Khan's understanding of the *surah* for the same issues without the use of *asbab al-nuzul* literature.

Ibn Kathir considers this *surah* Meccan and Medinan (Kathir, 606). He explains the *surah* through *hadith* literature and uses only authentic *hadiths* in his explanations. Ibn Kathir narrates two authentic *hadiths* – one *hadith* tells the *surah* is Meccan and the other tells the *surah* is Medinan.¹² The obvious contradiction does not bother him nor does he try to reconcile it. What seems to matter to him is that if a *hadith* is authentic, it should be narrated and explained with respect to the *surah* or *ayah* under study. The result is utter confusion in terms of what to believe as contradictory explanations may be present side by side, as is the case with the place of the revelation of *surah al-Kauthar*. Farahi believes the *surah* was revealed during Medinan period at the occasion of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah but considers the *surah* Meccan (Farahi, 1991. 456). His rationale is that '*ulama*' agree when a *surah* is revealed after *hijrah* but close to Mecca then the *surah* is considered Meccan. Hudaibiyyah is close to Mecca and hence the *surah* is Meccan. For Maududi, the *surah* is Meccan but for a different reason (Maududi, 1989. 488-89).¹³

He narrates Anas bin Malik's two *ḥadiths* that are considered authentic and which Ibn Kathir also explained. One *ḥadith* calls the *surah* Meccan and the other Medinan. However, Maududi's project is to remove any contradictions in understanding the Quran. He resolves the contradiction by stating that Anas's *ḥadith* which calls the *surah* Medinan must be a misunderstanding on Anas' part. According to Maududi, the *ḥadith* does not tell the subject of discussion between the Prophet and his Companions when Anas arrived. Therefore, when the Prophet said that *surah al-Kauthar* was revealed to him just now, the Prophet meant that he remembered the *surah* for the occasion at hand as it perfectly applied to the issues at hand (Maududi, 1989. 488-89). Since Anas only heard the Prophet say the *surah* was just revealed to him, he could not have understood the real purpose of the Prophet saying that. Therefore, Maududi concludes the *surah* cannot be Medinan. Finally, Asad mentions the period of revelation of the *surah* "uncertain" and does not refer to any *asbab al-nuzul* material about the *surah* in his translation and explanation (Asad, 1984. 980). Let us continue our review of the four scholars about other issues in the *surah* in relation to *asbab al-nuzul* literature.

Ibn Kathir translates *al-Kauthar* as *hawuz* (pond), a canal in the heaven, and "a lot more [good]" given to the Prophet." Among the many goods, *Kauthar* as a pond is also included (Kathir, 5668). For Farahi, *al-Kauthar* is the *Ka'ba* which is the source of all blessing for the Prophet and his *Ummah*. He sees the *surah* as the fulfillment of Abraham's prayer, Q 2: 126-27, in favor of the Prophet and his *Ummah*. The second *ayah* of the *surah* is a clue for Farahi that *al-Kauthar* is *Ka'ba* as the *ayah* speaks about prayer and *naḥar* (animal sacrifice) that are performed near *Ka'ba*. Since he sees the *surah* revealed at the occasion of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, therefore he also considers it was the Prophet's command to slaughter the animals to indicate 'umrah (pilgrimage) would not be performed that year (Farahi, 1991. 454). Maududi considers *al-Kauthar* the good of every kind in this world and in the hereafter. He lists all the goods given to the Prophet as noted in *ḥadith* literature on the meaning of *Kauthar* including *hawuz* and the heavenly canal. However, Maududi finds an additional good not mentioned by the other scholars: "The good of system of life based on easily understandable principles that are according to human reason and nature. These principles are concise and universal and have the power to spread all over the world forever and ever" (Maududi, 1989. 492). For Asad *Kauthar* is "all that is good in an abstract, spiritual sense, like revelation, knowledge, wisdom, the doing of good works, and dignity in this world and in the hereafter" given to the Prophet (Asad, 1984. 980). Further, through the Prophet the good is given to "every believing man and women" (Asad,

1984. 980). For him the highest good is the “*ability* to acquire knowledge, to do good works, to be kind towards all living beings, and thus to attain inner peace and dignity” (Asad, 1984. 980). However, we do not find any mention of “the canal Kawthar” or “pond” on the earth in Asad’s explanation.

Ibn Kathir considers *abtar* as one or all of the following persons: 1) Al-‘As bin Wa’il who hated the Prophet because the Prophet came with “guidance, truth, clear proof and manifest light.” Such people are “the most cut off, meanest, lowliest” persons who would be forgotten, 2) The *surah* was revealed for ‘Uqbah bin Abi Mu‘ayt, Ka‘b bin Al-Ashraf, “a group of the disbelievers of the Quraysh,” and Abu Lahab (Kathir, 5670-671); Farahi considers *abtar* the demise of Quraysh - good news of coming victory for the Muslims; Maududi takes it to mean “a person from whom all hope is gone and no good is expected to come,” also *abtar* are all persons pointed by different *hadiths* as noted by Ibn Kathir above; for Asad, “it is he that is cut off,” i.e. one who hates the Prophet and hence is “cut off” from “all that is good” (Asad, 1984. 980). Asad seems to imply we can find *abtar* persons among us today and its meaning is not limited to the Prophet’s era. In the case of *abtar*, all exegetes agree on the meaning of *abtar* as a person, though the identity of this person is different for each exegete.

What do our scholars say about getting guidance from this *surah*? None of the scholars talk about guidance or even a lesson learned from the *surah*. Ibn Kathir lists contradictory aspects with no clarification what the reader should believe after reading the *surah*. Maududi quotes largest number of *hadiths* and points to a clear understanding of the *surah*. He shows us how the Prophet and his Companions would have understood the *surah*. Leaving the current reader with no guidance that could be used in his socio-historical circumstance. Asad also explains the whole *surah* as the Prophet would have understood it, though in a shorter narrative. The result is that today’s readers when try to understand the *surah* through our four scholars, all of them come out knowing some historical information but no guidance. Khan would consider it a big loss as generally most believers read scripture to get guidance from it and live their lives accordingly. Let us now turn to Khan about the above issues and see how he understands them in the following.

Khan understands the *surah* in five steps. Each step leads to deeper meaning and guidance. In the first step he looks at the Arabic text of the *surah* in one visual field.¹⁴ This allows him to view the Arabic text without any pollution of human words. Interestingly, he does not mention if the *surah* was Meccan or Medinan. The reason is Khan does not want to consider even this small human addition to the

word of God.¹⁵ Further, determining the *surah* as Meccan or Medinan blocks to understand the *surah* as a fresh new revelation just revealed for the reader in his/her socio-historic context. In the second step Khan translates each word independent of the *ayah*'s or the *surah*'s literary context. This step would have been unnecessary if all his readers were Arabic speakers. The word by word translation helps to some extent break the language barrier for non-Arabic readers. Khan in his methodology of understanding the *surah* emphasizes to reflect on the *surah*. His word by word translation provides the opportunity to non-Arab listeners or readers to reflect on the translated words, though knowing the reflection will be at a lower level than reflecting on the *surah* in Arabic. His word by word translation of the words of the *surah* is: *innaa* ("Verily We"), *a'taina* ("We have given"), *ka* ("you"), *al-Kauthar* ("al-Kawthar"). *Fa* (therefore), *salli* (pray), *li* (for), *Rabbi* (Lord), *ka* (your), *wa* (and) *anhar* (sacrifice). *Inna* ("Verily"), *shanika* ("one who hates you") *huwa* ("is the one (who) is"), *alabtar* (lopped off). For all three *ayahs*, the word by word translation seems to have general meanings of the Arabic words in English. In this step, Khan does not clarify who "you" is and what is "*al-Kauthar*" in the first *ayah*; *nahar* is translated as "sacrifice" instead "to cut the throat (of an animal), slaughter, butcher [or] kill (an animal)" in the second *ayah* (Wehr, 1979. 1111); and "abtar" is translated as "this person who hates you" but we do not know the identity of the person yet. In the third step, Khan sees the meaning of each *ayah* in the *surah* independent of other *ayahs*, as for him an *ayah* is the smallest unit of meaning/sign in the Quran.¹⁶ The *ayah* conscious translation is: "1). Verily, We have given you (O Prophet) *al-Kawthar* (The Abundance of Good). 2). Therefore, pray (offer *ṣalah*) to your Lord and sacrifice. 3). Surely, one who hates you is the one that is lopped off" (Khan, 2013. 173). At the *ayah* level we find out "you" is the Prophet and *al-Kauthar* is "the abundance of Good." Other elements still remain unknown. The fourth step consists of *ayahs* and the *surah* hermeneutical circle.¹⁷ According to Khan, "the *surah* makes its point in three stages: **"A. [Ayah 1] Proclamation from the Divine Authority**, the Prophet is given *al-Kauthar* which is something whose blessing will keep on increasing. The something is identified as the Quran whose blessings will keep on increasing as its understanding will grow with increasing human knowledge and there will be increasing peace, justice and happiness; **"B. [Ayah 2] ... the Recipient should, therefore, do:** i) make *ṣalah* ..., ii) make sacrifice ...;" **"C. [Ayah 3] ... the Recipient of Kauthar not to worry"** as the opposition to the Quranic Movement "will wither away." In this step we see Khan's interpretation of *Kauthar* as the Quran. The good news is that the movement which was started with the reading of the Quran will succeed. In the fifth step Khan

understand the *surah* in the hermeneutical circles of adjacent *surahs* and the Quran as a whole. According to him, the “previous *surah* pointed that false religiosity is doomed.” This *surah* shows what the true religiosity is (prayer and sacrifice). If the believing community continues to reflect on the Quran in their increasing abilities to understand due to advances in human knowledge in their changing situation, the Quranic guidance will bring more and more peace and justice in the human world. **“Therefore, it is required that the Quranic Community maintains a living relation with the Divine Words.”** We may note that Khan’s above exposition does not require the historical information from *asbab al-nuzul* or any other source. He seems to read the *surah* in his present circumstance with a clear message and a program of action: the individual Muslim and the community as a whole has the instrument that can change their destiny if they do their job of worshipping God and making sacrifice (e.g. of time, money, etc.), God will take care of their enemies. Their enemies will lose in the end. Therefore, believers should do their work of reading and understanding the Quran and developing personal relationship with God. However, worship only is not enough, sacrifice is also required of them. If we compare our scholars’ understandings and Khan’s, we see they look back to the past with no guidance for today or future, whereas Khan refers to the past but only through the word of the Quran to understand what Quran wants to tell us what it told the Prophet, then understands the *surah* in the present with a concrete agenda of what believers should do in their present circumstance.

Conclusion

From Rippin’s study and Meri’s discourse it is clear that *asbab al-nuzul* material is not reliable. Further, *asbab al-nuzul* in its technical sense understood as a cause that brought down certain revelations is a late development. In addition, over the last three hundred years this genre is critically reviewed and its importance or use is challenged by Muslims scholars. Khan has questioned the very basis of *Sunnah/hadith* as having legislative value and its use to understand the Quran. Khan’s view is supported by Farahi who wants to understand the Text in its literary context and not from external sources, unless they support the text’s position. Rahman’s analysis showed that the concept of *Sunnah* changed after about one and three quarters Muslim centuries. During these centuries, *Sunnah* had no legislative value. It was only a normative behavioral concept and did not require following it. Rahman’s study in his book, *Islamic Methodology in History*, was published in 1962. Since then it is not challenged by anyone. Khan’s proposal not to use *asbab*

al-nuzul to understand the Quran asks the readers to consider divine revelation a communication with God directly and afresh to get illumination, insight, and guidance for the existential problems they face in their socio-historical situation. This is possible when the divine words are read without mixing them with human words or having pre-conceived ideas through human historical understandings. He asks of his readers to look to the human prophet to get guidance how the Prophet concretized divine words in his socio-historic circumstance. As far as ‘*ulama*’s critique of Khan’s ideas is concerned, one may conclude that it does not apply to Khan as their rules to understand the Quran are based on the foundation raised by al-Shafi’i’s reform. It may have been necessary for the problems al-Shafi’i faced in his socio-historic circumstance but it cannot be made a permanent understanding or change for the rest of Muslim generations to come. We can therefore conclude Khan has a strong case how the Quran and *Sunnah* are two sources of Islamic guidance and how they require two different methodologies to get guidance from them. Finally, the study of *surah* al-Kauthar case study shows how the use of *asbab al-nuzul* becomes a hinderance in understanding the word of God on its own terms. It is therefore, the paper recommends that the *asbab al-nuzul* genre should be remove from the Ulum al Quran category to get fresh guidance from the Quran.

Note

1. Irfan A. Khan, “Authenticity and Development of Islamic Thought,” *International Journal of Islamic and Arabic Studies* 4, no. 2 (1987): 38.
2. For details of Khan’s biography, theory and methodology of Qur’anic hermeneutic, please see “An Introduction to the Qur’anic Hermeneutic of Irfan A. Khan,” *Islamic Studies*, 56, no. 1-2 (2017), and my PhD dissertation, “Understanding and Qur’anic Revelation: The Dynamic Hermeneutic of Irfan A. Khan,” Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, (2016).
3. See Q 36:37-40, 87:2-5, 16:68-69, 23:14, 32:9.
4. Khan proposes the same solution for *Shari’ah* (Khan, 2005. 11).
5. The schematic is my depiction.
6. Non-Muslim western scholars’ mechanical research, non-ideological but data driven, as a result of their historical analysis of Muslim sources can be freely used in research by Muslim believers. For example, Andrew Rippin’s paper on the

bibliographical and terminological survey of *asbab al-nuzul* is one such case. Therefore, it is extensively used in the paper for the historical value of *asbab al-nuzul* data.

7. The other three sources are: 1) al-‘Iraqi (d. 567/1171), *Asbab al-nuzul wa qishaṣ al-furqaniyya*; 2) Berlin 3578 (pseudo al-Ja‘bari (d. 732/1333); 3) al-Suyuti [d. 911/1505], *Lubab al-nuqul fī asbab al-nuzul*.
8. Among the four, al-Suyuti’s *Lubab al-nuqul* is also important. However, Yousef Waleed Meri says, the work “might be considered a slight improvement on the classical contribution of al-Waḥidi.” Hence, it is not mentioned in the paper. Also, al-Suyuti comes about four centuries after al-Waḥidi.
9. Meri taught at Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU), Qatar. He is a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development and faculty associate (non-resident) at the Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations in Merrimack College, North Andover, MA, USA.
10. Hajji Khalif, *Kashf al-zunun ‘an asamiy al-kutub wa’l-funun*, as quoted by Rippin in “The exegetical Genre “asbab al-nuzul.” A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey,” 1.
11. Meri mentions various such scholars and their understanding of the use of this genre. For example, Shah Waliullah al-Dahlawi (d. 1176/1762), Hameeduddin Farahi (d. 1930), Amin Ahsan Islahi. (d. 1997), and Muhammad al-Tahir ibn ‘Ashur (d. 1973).
12. Both *ḥadiths* are by Anas bin Malik. In the first *ḥadith*, Anas informs that the Prophet was among us and he dozed off. After that he smiled. When asked why he smiled, the Prophet said that *surah al-Kauthar* was just revealed to him. Since Anas never lived in Mecca, based on this *ḥadith* the surah is considered Medinan. The second *ḥadith* by the same Anas informs that the Prophet observed the canal al-Kauthar during *M’raj* which took place in Mecca.
13. All English translations of *Tafhim* are mine.
14. Certainly, it is not possible for longer *surahs*. However, in such *surahs* he tried to look at the smaller units of the *surah* as one unity with its Arabic text.
15. The determination of a *surah*’s place of revelation (Meccan or Medinan) is by the human beings and not God. This is agreed by all in the Muslim tradition.
16. Please see details of this process in my dissertation: , “Understanding and Qur’anic Revelation: The Dynamic Hermeneutic of Irfan A. Khan.”

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