

Shariati and Marx: A Critique of an "Islamic" Critique of Marxism

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Many have described Ali Shariati as the "ideologue" or the "architect" of the Iranian Revolution of 1979¹. He has been represented as both an intellectual, who from a radical Islamic viewpoint, offered a vigorous critique of Marxism and other "Western fallacies"², and as a reformationist Islamic writer who was simultaneously "influenced by Marxist social ideas"³.

There is little disagreement on Shariati's role in transforming and refining the ideological perspective of millions of the literate Iranian youth. Shariati provided his audience with a firm and rigorous ideological means, by re-interpreting Islam through "scientific" concepts employed by the modern social sciences, an interpretation which the traditional Islamic clergy were incapable of formulating.

Back in the late 1970s, when the University students in Tehran were involved in Islamic versus left debates, I observed how the rival "Islamic students" would rely almost totally on the teachings of the *mu'allim* معلم (or the teacher) to support their fierce discussions. At that time each ideological camp had its own organization, meetings, study groups, library, mountaineering trips, dress code and most importantly, a distinctive discourse. Both groups would compete avidly in their activities. However, at times they had to make an *ad hoc* tactical alliance, for instance during strike-planning, leafleteering and similar sensitive activities. Both groups had heroes too. We had our own heroes, and they had theirs. The men we praised were internationally known: Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Castro, Fanon, Che Guevara, Mao, and similar people. Their heroes were as diverse as ours, if not

more. They ranged from Al-Afghani, Iqbal Lahouri, Imam Musa Sadr to Janghali , the Rezaii brothers, Khomeini and Masoud Rajavi. For them, however, Shariati, was the greatest of heroes.

Shariati's seeming intellectual sophistication was intertwined with his radical political stand which would capture the spirit of his audience in those tense and repressive conditions in Iran. Such an intellectual sophistication reflected itself perhaps in the fact that not one serious critical assessment of his works has thus far appeared by Iranian intellectuals ⁴. On the other hand, Shariati's political stand was manifested in his massive popularity in the anti-monarchy revolution of 1979 when thousands of his lecture-tapes and pamphlets were circulated among the basically Islamic youth. His reputation travelled beyond Iran, and the bulk of his works were translated into English, Arabic, German, Malay and other languages. He was regarded as one of the most prominent contemporary Islamic thinkers.

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Ali Shariati was born in 1933 in a village located in the northern Khorasan where he completed his primary and secondary schools education ⁵. His mother was from a land-owning family, and his father, a well-known local Islamic thinker and teacher who introduced modern critical thinkers to his students. Shariati's father had formed a short-lived Movement of God-Worshipping Socialists, in which Ali was a member and through which he acquired his first critical Islamic education. During his college years in the Mashad Teachers' College, he studied Arabic, and translated in 1956 *Abu Zarr Ghafari: The God-Worshipping Socialist*, *خداپرست سوسیالیست*, the story of the famous companion of the Prophet, who was critical of the early Caliphs. Shariati continued his studies in Mashad University in the Arabic and French languages. In the meantime, he was involved, together with his father's group, in reviving the outlawed National Front, originally founded by the nationalist Prime Minister Mossadeq, in the late 1940s. For this activity, Shariati and his comrades spent eight months in prison.

He travelled in 1956 to Paris, then the capital of a major

colonial power, where he spent some several years. This move proved to be a watershed in Shariati's political activities and intellectual development. This period coincided with the intense anti-colonial struggles throughout the world. He began to study philology at the Sorbonne, became engaged in anti-imperialist and student politics, edited two anti-regime Persian journals and translated a few books by radical and Marxist as well as Orientalist writers including: Ouzagan, Che Guevara, Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, and Louis Massignon (a famous expert on Islamic mysticism), and developed a keen interest in Western Orientalism and radical Catholicism. He was also exposed to the ideas of French sociologists such as Raymond Aron, Roger Garaudy, Georges Politzer, and specially the eminent French dialectician, Georges Gurvitch.

In 1965, he returned to Iran where he was immediately put in jail for eight months for his political activities abroad. In the following years he spent five years in Mashad, teaching at the College of Literature, and most of the remainder of his life in Tehran where he began the most productive period of his political and intellectual life. From 1969 until 1972, he lectured at the Husseinieh Irshad, a modern Islamic center in northern Tehran. His lectures were either taped or published in several dozens of volumes, the most important of which being multi-volume *Islam Shinasi* (اسلام شناسی) (*Islamology*). They were circulated widely among Muslim youth.

The Husseinieh center was shut down in 1972 by the government on the grounds that it had become a breeding ground for the Mujahedin Khalq, a radical Muslim group which had launched armed struggle against the Shah's regime. Ervand Abrahamian, an Iranian historian, believes that the conservative clergy also played a part in stopping Shariati's lectures, since they feared that Shariati was not promoting Islam, but Western philosophies, especially Marxist sociology. After the closure of the Husseinieh center, Shariati was arrested, and charged with having connections with the Mujahedin. He was released from prison after eighteen months. Upon his release, a series of essays was published in the widely-circulated daily paper, *Kayhan* (کیهان).

The essays, entitled, *Insan, Islam va Marxism* انسان، اسلام و مارکسیسم (Man, Islam and Marxism), were attributed to Shariati. In 1977, he managed to leave the country. A month after arriving in England, he suspiciously died in London. At the time in Tehran, we, both the leftists and the Islamic groups, never doubted the involvement of SAVAK in his death, although the British authorities related his death to a massive heart-attack. Whatever the cause, SAVAK was to be blamed. His death, contrary to the hopes of those who disliked him increased his popularity, and made Shariati a virtual legend among his supporters.

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While there is little disagreement on Shariati's ideological and political role and popularity, the nature of his ideological and political stand, and his intellectual perspective have been a matter of debate. More precisely a confusion surrounds his "Islamic Marxism", his attempt to utilize certain modern Marxist concepts such as: "class exploitation", "class struggle", "classless society", "imperialism," etc. -- linking them with the teachings of the shiite leaders such as Imam Ali, Imam Hussein and Abu Zarr Ghafari (whom Shariati called the the first "God-worshipping socialist")⁶. In those tense days of the pre-revolutionary conjuncture, and against the background of the grand left-Islamic division , Shariati's ideas provided, on the one hand, the grounds for a possible discursive link between the two tendencies, and on the other, a deep confusion among us -- a confusion around what Shariati indeed stood for. Adding to this confusion was the appearance in 1977 of the pamphlet entitled : *Insan, Islam va Marxism* in which Shariati systematically dealt with Marxist principles. About ten years later I had a chance to read, in a less confused state of mind, an English version of the very same text under a new title *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, in a book-like collection by the same name, which was published by Mizan Press in Berkeley, California. Since this text is believed to represent Shariati's most intense discussion of Marxism an attempt will be made to deal with it in some detail.

In general, the text, which is a critique of the existing humanist philosophies including Marxism, draws upon a radical Islamic conception of man. On the whole the book consists of four major themes which will be discussed in turn.

First : The Western philosophies -- Western liberalism, Existentialism, and Marxism -- do possess an humanistic perspective. But their conception of humanism is materialistic.

According to the text, Western humanism rests firmly upon the mythological perspective of ancient Greece. In this perspective there exists a constant struggle between humanity and the gods who want to maintain man in darkness and ignorance. Here, man is praised and is given a high value in contrast to the gods. This humanism, therefore, establishes a distance between man and god. The text argues that all these great humanists --from Diderot and Voltaire to Feuerbach and Marx -- have indeed equated the Greek gods which are tyrannical and anti-human with the spiritual conceptions of God such as Ahurmazda, Rama, the Tao, the Messiah and Allah. Since these philosophers have wrongly generalized the Greek contradistinction of human versus God and spirituality, their humanism is earthly, un-heavenly and in a word materialistic. No wonder the communist societies are not much different from the bourgeois ones in their conception of man. In both, everything culminates in man; both disregard "the spiritual dimension of the human essence"⁷. Western humanism is considered atheist in another sense, for it considers man to possess, as his human nature, a moral conscience which determines his moral values and which acts as a substitute for God. The text contends that Western humanist philosophies which postulate a distance between man and God are ignorant of the Eastern religions such as Hinduism, Islam and sufism. These religions are based upon the *unity* (not distance) between God and man, thus their humanism is heavenly.

Second : Even though, the text goes on, we may concede that the Western humanist and intellectual currents may possess in their theories a liberating principle, in practice, they have lost this aspect of their reality. Take, for instance, Marxism which promised to liberate man from the inhumanity of capitalism. In

reality, it shared quite the same attitudes towards man as capitalism, i.e., adherence to mundane prosperity, materialism, consumerism, etc. On the other hand, religions such as Christianity, Islam and Taoism too declined from the liberating ideologies into the bureaucratic, power-hungry and materialistic church or clericalism, to mass formalities, taboos and superstitions. Similarly, the spirit of the Renaissance (which meant liberation of spirit, of science, and of the intellect) turned into capitalism, scientism and liberalism characterized by egoism, opportunism and consumption, and in which faith, ideas, love, the meaning of existence and man did not get attention.

Third : Since Marxism, unlike other Western ideologies, is a comprehensive ideology, dealing with economics, politics, ethics, history, philosophy, etc. , it is the strongest rival to Islam and must be dealt with thoroughly. The text, then, takes the major philosophical issues of Marxism to distinguish it from Islam. To begin with, like other Western humanist schools, the text claims that Marx's critique of religion is based upon the Greek humanist philosophy which sees opposition, rather than unity, between God and man. Islamic understanding, on the contrary, is derived from the conception of *tawhid* توحيد, unity. Religion, in Marx, goes beyond rationality and signifies the helplessness of man. Whereas we in Islam, the author asserts, believe that conceptions of heaven and hell are rational and scientific. On the other hand, Marx basing his argument on the conceptions of infra-structure and super-structure, views man as a part of the latter reducing him to the tools, considering religion, ethics, morality, man's virtues as determined by economic forces. Hence, man has no independent and noble reality -- an idea that Islam totally rejects. In quite the same fashion, the author charges Marx with not giving man any significant place in history. In Marxist theory, the text goes on, man is logically incapable since he is the creation of his environment. Historical changes are not the outcome of man's role, but of the contradiction between the forces and the relations of production. If that is the case, the text wonders, what about all these martyrs in history, upheavals and revolutions.

Finally, this Marxism which boasts to be the ruthless critique of capitalism has ended up sharing the same values with it. Both systems, capitalism and communism, are in practice

based upon "productivism", "mechanism", "techno-bureaucracy", "acquisitiveness", "economic competition" and "materialism". What is now being criticized as Stalinism is in fact a continuation of Leninism and eventually Marxism itself.

What distinguishes socialism from capitalism is that in the latter a (bourgeois) ruling class owns or controls the means of production, whereas in the former, the state takes control.

Fourth : Only Islam, the text contends, possesses true humanism. In Islam, humanism is a collection of the divine values in man that constitute his morals and religious cultural heritage. Drawing on the Islamic concept of *tawhid*, man is viewed as a contradictory being possessing the dual essence of clay and divine spirit, of dust and God, and the will to choose one over the other. It follows that, first, in Islam man has a nobility not on its own but only in relation to God; secondly, man has a destiny; thirdly, man has a choice. Possession of choice confers upon man a responsibility to elevate himself from being dust towards union with God (this is very similar to the Hegelian concept of absolute idea which evolves from nothingness to becoming everything). This responsibility or *mas'uliat* مسئولیت for Shariati is a highly critical concept as he tends to extend its implications from the realm of philosophy and theology to that of politics. Thus, he implicitly calls upon the Third World masses in general and the Muslims in particular, to elevate themselves from captivity to become the "regents of God on earth", to deliverance. (This approach is also similar to Marx's Hegelian metaphor of the development of class from being "in itself" to that "for itself").

Responsibility to liberate ourselves, meanwhile, implies self-reliance; more precisely it means cultural, political, and strategic self-reliance which in plain political language manifests the strategy of "neither East nor West", neither capitalism nor communism, but "return to self".

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Without doubt the text appears to exhibit a powerful critique, from an Islamic vantage point, of the Western humanist philosophies, in particular of Marxism. The text gives the impression that it has been written by an author who, while

deeply involved in his own indigenous intellectual traditions, seems to be well aware of the rival European intellectual currents. Back in the late 1970s in Tehran, the Husseinieh Center, an uncharacteristically modern "mosque" in an affluent northern part of Tehran (Gholhak) where Shariati delivered his lectures, would be overflowing with people, not just the radical Muslims, but also the leftists. At that time, we could not conceal our admiration for Shariati's knowledge of Marxism. Perhaps his seemingly profound critique, combined with his radical political stand, made Ali Shariati appear to be the most influential revolutionary thinker in recent Iranian history ⁸.

Marxism and Other Western Fallacies, however, contains some important methodological shortcomings combined with a serious misreading of Marx --the focal point of the text.

To begin with, if the idea of ideological self-reliance means "don't borrow ideologies from others" -- a stand shared by some contemporary "indigenizers of social sciences" who grant prominence to the regional nobility of ideas -- then we must say that Ali Shariati himself borrowed considerably from Western intellectual currents, from Hegel to Heidegger and Marx. As a matter of fact, there is nothing wrong with borrowing ideas and theories as long as, of course, they are relevant.

One major argument of the text against Marxism is related to the latter's conception of religion and man. We summarized Shariati's contention above. His critique in this regard appears to me to be methodologically problematic. First, as Shariati acknowledges, Marx's conception of religion was materialistic. According to Marx, certain socio-economic circumstances would shape the religious ideas, structures and their evolution (Marx indeed was quite critical of Feuerbach whose analysis of Christianity was theological and not social). But the text does not try to offer an argument to refute the validity of Marx's above mentioned theory.

Secondly, in his critique of religion, Marx generally refers to social implications or social principles of Christianity at the time when, as Ali Shariati would agree, the church's conservative role in relation to the subordinated classes was far from complex.

It is true, Marx's knowledge of religion was limited to Christianity and Judaism. He was not very familiar with the

Eastern religions: Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, etc. A tenable criticism of Marx should be based upon his limited knowledge of world religions. Indeed many of the critiques of Marx tend to generalize his conception of religion and then criticize him on this score. This kind of criticism is obviously an invalid one. In addition such a generalization is plainly functionalist and not Marxist, as Marx's methodology is founded upon the idea of contradiction.

Plekhanov and Lenin, however, were against religion. But what made them so, as the British historian V.G. Kiernan argues, was the existence "of a vast peasant population, steeped most deeply in Russia in religiosity of a peculiarly superstitious sort which had always been very much at the service of the tsars" ⁹.

Indeed, Marxists who adhere to historical materialism, such as E.P. Thompson, George Thomson, Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran ¹⁰ do not hesitate to acknowledge that every religious movement has both a progressive and reactionary trust. Thus, George Thomson as early as 1949 declares that "there are two Christs, one of the rulers, and one of the toilers" ¹¹. Certainly, Ali Shariati's categorization of Safavid shiite (the establishment shiite) and Alavid shiite (combatant and mass's shiite) is not so dissimilar to Thomson's view of Christianity.

Concretely, this is indeed reflected most vividly in the division of church in Latin America into a conservative Church and a radical one. It is because of understanding of such a contradiction, and of the dual character of religious movements that such Marxists as Klugmann in Britain, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy in the U.S.A. have now started a dialogue with progressive Christianity.

In dealing with Marx's notion of man and religion, the book concentrates its critique heavily on Marx's conception of infra-structure and super-structure. I find the text's interpretation of these concepts highly simplistic. The text almost exclusively draws on one of Marx's often quoted and short (some two pages) texts, namely, the Preface to the *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, in which Marx formulated, but by no means elaborated, his theory of historical materialism. Shariati appears to have failed to understand that all the elements of "super-structure" including religion, ethics, politics, culture,

morality, etc. are not so much *determined* as *conditioned* by the economic base of the mode of production, by the means of production. Thus, Shariati contends, religion, culture and humanity are supposedly reduced to tools. However, this does not seem to be what Marx states. A reading of Marx in his totality suggests that this "super-structure" is conditioned (not determined) by the economic base. Besides, this relationship between "super-structure" and "base" is by no means one way, but dialectical, that is, the ideas, religion, culture, etc. have diverse effects on the "economic base" too¹². Interestingly, the author does acknowledge in some parts of the text that Marx recognizes the role of ideology, awareness, and human ethics. However, failing to locate these in the general Marxist scheme, Shariati claims that Marx is inconsistent. The same argument holds true in relation to the role of man versus history, and I shall not elaborate on that.

Another methodological problem of the text is that throughout, Marx's ideas are considered to be identical with the "other Marxists", i.e., with the leaders of the "existing socialist societies". By viewing the existing socialist societies as the materialization of Marx's ideas, he totally ignores the rigorous critique that the Marxists themselves have levelled against the past and the present-day atrocities committed in the name of socialism and Marxism. Lumping together Marx, Stalin, and Khrushchev as the embodiment of Marxism is the equivalent of lumping Shariati with Ayatollah Fazlollah Nouri, Ayatollah Kashani (two prominent conservative clergy of the twentieth century) and Ayatollah Khomeini as the embodiment of Islam. If there is one Islam, so is there one "Marxism".

Indeed what the text describes as the human evils in the present "socialist countries" may, perhaps, be true. Technocracy, bureaucracy, productivism, "these evils of the human essence", characterize in fact both the capitalist and the "actually existing socialism". Nonetheless, it has to be stressed that, equating these two systems seems to be a gross simplification, if not ignorance.

It must be stated that the kinds of criticism briefly discussed above of Marxism -- namely, the one relating to concepts of "super-" and "infra-structure", the occurrence of revolutions, the role of man in history, the conception of man, the practice of

socialism, etc.-- are not new. The big names of Western academia, non-Marxist and Marxist alike such as Karl Popper, Ralph Dahrendorf, Daniel Bell, Herbert Marcuse, to mention only a few, have already settled accounts with Marx. What is original in Shariati's approach is his attempt to counterpose Islam as a comprehensive religion, philosophy and an intellectual current to Marxism. He attempts to offer an alternative Islamic conception of man defined and operational in an alternative Islamic society; that is, Islamic humanism conceives the nobility of man not in relation to himself, but in relation to God. This original contention, however, continues throughout the book to remain an assertion; it is not discussed, nor elaborated, nor substantiated.

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At the outset, we pointed out that Shariati was described by some authors as a writer who had been influenced by Marxist social ideas and as one upholding the sociological ideas of "Marx, the social scientist". On the other hand, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies* which appears to be the most systematic discussion of Marxism by Shariati, illustrates a clear distance between Ali Shariati and Marx. Where does Shariati stand, then? Does *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies* represent Shariati's view of Marxism? The fact is that much of this text is of dubious authenticity.

As Hamid Algar, the editor of the series, points out in the Preface to the book, back in 1977 when Shariati was released from his second imprisonment, one of his essays despite the author's disapproval appeared in an Iranian daily newspaper, *Kayhan*. The Shah's regime attempted to present Shariati as a collaborator with the authorities. That text later was reprinted in the form of a pamphlet by Muslim students abroad under the title *Man, Islam and Western Schools of Thought*. The present book is in fact a translation from this text which was then published by Mizan Press under the coordination of Hamid Algar, a British-born Muslim scholar who has devoted his press to publishing the works of prominent Islamic writers, especially the Iranian religious authorities including Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Mutahhari and Ali Shariati.

In the late 1970s in Iran, two main radical political trends appeared to raise their voice against the Shah's regime. First, the Islamic trend whose militant manifestations were exemplified in the organization of the Mujahedin Khalq; second, the Marxist counterpart identified with the organized activism of the Fedaeen Khalq. The regime attempted to prevent cooperation and alliance of any sort between the two tendencies. The conservative religious leaders meanwhile would not hesitate to dismiss such a possibility of alliance, denouncing the Marxists publicly. I can still remember the systematic attacks of Ayatollah Mutahhari, Ayatollah Mofatteh (both of the Husseinieh Center), and especially Mehdi Bazargan, the first Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic, against the "materialists" in the Oqba mosque in northern Tehran, Gholhak, in the autumn of 1977. But unlike those of the conservative clergy, the overall writings of the influential Ali Shariati would not advocate sectarianism by denouncing the Marxists as atheists or immoral. Indeed, he would praise the "revolutionary left" (*chap-i inqilab-i* جب انقلابی) who would "work for the benefit of the deprived people" ¹³. So, it is highly likely that what appeared in the Kayhan newspaper of which the present book is a translation, was a fabricated version of the original text.

As a matter of fact, I was able to read the original text in Persian in Tehran in 1977, and I find some considerable differences of tone and emphasis as well as some omissions between this book and the original text. For instance, the Persian text that I have read ends with this famous quotation from Marx by Shariati that "I am Marx, I am not a Marxist" referring to Marx's frustration with his contemporary "Marxists" who would distort his ideas. Such a statement does not appear in the present book.

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What then was Shariati's link to Marxism? Was he, in fact, a Marxist who disguised himself under the Islamic mantle? Shariati was certainly not a Marxist (although he did consider himself as a socialist), but he was surely influenced by Marxist social ideas. He borrowed from Marx such key concepts as "class struggle", "class exploitation", "classless society" (or *nizam-i*

tawhidi (نظام توحیدی), "historical determinism", "imperialism", "infra-structure", "super-structure", "surplus value", and "permanent revolution" applying them systematically in his critical works. As Ervand Abrahamian correctly observes Shariati's paradoxical attitude towards Marx originated from his identification of, not one, but three Marxes: first, the younger Marx, predominantly a philosopher, who was seen as an economic reductionist, atheist and strongly anti-religion; second, the mature Marx, mainly a social scientist, who discovered the laws of motion of societies, developed the theory of historical (not economic) determinism, and promoted the notion of "praxis" and revolutionary practice; and third, the older Marx, chiefly a politician, whom Shariati identified with other Marxist "politicians" such as Karl Kautsky, Engels and even Stalin, who, in his opinion, compromised the ideals of the oppressed masses in their daily political acts. Shariati rejected the first and the third Marxes, but was influenced by the second one ¹⁴.

Abrahamian's explanation would seem more plausible when one considered Shariati's two most recent works: *Jahatgiri-yi tabaqat-i Islam* جهتگیری طبقاتی اسلام (*The Class Bias of Islam*) and *Ommat va imamat* امت و امامت (*Community and Leadership*). In these works in which he deals with the politics and economics of Islam, Shariati systematically employs the above Marxist terms. Yet, at the same time, he seems to give different meanings to some of them. For instance, Shariati borrowed his theory of knowledge from Marxism but he ultimately moved toward phenomenology ¹⁵. His historical determinism is nothing but the will of God; his conception of class, influenced by Georges Gurvitch, a prominent French sociologist in the 1960s, was not economic classes formed by economic interests, but political classes forged by immaterial factors such as religious beliefs, symbols, traditions, customs, and cultural norms. With such a political conception of class, he contends that in the Third World, especially in Muslim countries, the only class capable of bringing about a profound change and providing leadership is not the proletariat but the intellectual class (*Rowshanfikran* روشنفکران). In addition, while he acknowledges that religions are part of the "super-structure" of societies, Shariati believes that shiism was uniquely different from the

others and that it alone could shape the economic basis of a society¹⁶.

Just as Shariati re-interpreted certain Marxist concepts, he also redefined some fundamental concepts of Islam. For him, the Biblical story of Cain and Abel is only a symbolization of class struggle in history between the oppressors/exploiters (Cain) and the oppressed/ exploited (Abel). *Intizar* انتظار (or anticipation of the re-emergence of the twelfth Imam) means not passively waiting for justice, rather an active involvement in struggle against injustices -- a struggle in which achieving the objective is a certainty. Shiism too is a subject of class struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed. The former turns it to a means of domination (the "Safavid Shiite"), and the latter to an ideology of liberation ("Alavid or red Shiite"). The *Ulamaa* علماء, or the clergy, should bear the heaviest responsibility vis à vis the development of oppressive Shiism. The clergy, by their simple-mindedness, fatalism, monopolistic control over the interpretation of Islam, kept true Islam from the masses, and finally by their alliance with the powerful, transformed Shiism from a revolutionary creed into a conservative ideology.

Also, according to Shariati, blasphemy (*kufur* كفر) is "never" applied to "those who deny the existence of God and soul", but to those who are unwilling to take "concrete" and objective action for the cause¹⁷. Because of such a conception of *kufur*, Shariati did not dismiss the Marxists, as did the clergy, on the grounds that they were philosophically materialists, atheists, amoral and *kuffar* كفار. Instead, he developed a sustained critique against the clergy and *fiqh* فقه, the Islamic jurisprudence. "Our mosques, the revolutionary left, and our [lower level] preachers (*wou'az* وعاظ)", he declared, "work for the benefit of the deprived people and are against the lavish and lush (*donyadaran* دنیا داران). But our *fuqaha* فقهاء who teach jurisprudence and give verdicts, are right-wingers, capitalists and conservative. In short, our *fiqh* works for capitalism"¹⁸.

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Shariati's paradoxical approach toward Marxism (for and against it) is by no means unique in the Third World. As a matter

of fact, it represents a typical tendency among the post-colonial radical intellectuals and anti-colonial political activists in the under-developed countries. His approach was shared by those with whom Shariati was either associated directly or intellectually. They ranged from Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, to Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Kenyatta, Ben Bella and others. In the post-war period, these elements embarked upon "alternative" politico-economic projects which were based upon a declared refutation of capitalism and emphasis on national and indigenous resources, values, and traditions. In practice, the "third-way" development strategy emerged as the development orientation of this new trend. This strategy was embodied in various kinds of "indigenous socialisms" including Arab, Baathist, African "socialisms" as well as the "non-capitalist path of development". Julius Nyerere of Tanzania argued in 1962:

The foundation, and the objective, of African socialism is the extended family...."ujamaa", then, or "familyhood" describes our socialism. It is opposed to capitalism, which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of the exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build a happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man. We, in Africa, have no more need of being "converted" to socialism than we have of being "taught" democracy. Both are rooted in our own past --in the traditional society which produced us. Modern African socialism can draw from its traditional heritage the recognition of "society" as an extension of the basic family unit¹⁹.

A similar line of argument was adopted by President Nasser of Egypt in his Socialist Charter (*Al-Mithaq الميثاق*) published in 1962, and the military officers in Peru who took over power following a coup in 1968.

This new ideological trend manifested itself, in the intellectual domain, in the tendency of "Third-Worldist populism" among the radical Third World intellectuals who sought to distance themselves from "orthodox Marxism" and rely on their own deep-rooted ideological heritage. Conceptually, "populism" has had different connotations. For instance, populist regimes are those which tend to adhere to a nationalistic ideology and

development policy, resting on the support of the popular classes (workers, peasants, and "the poor") as their social basis, while promoting a state capitalist economic policy within the framework of an authoritarian state. On the other hand, Gavin Kitching used the term to denote a development policy which offers an alternative to the "old orthodoxy", i.e. large-scale industrial development by giving precedence to small scale versus large scale production, agriculture versus industry, and rural versus urban development²⁰.

By "Third Worldist populism", here, I mean an analytical and ideological framework which represents a blend of nationalism, radicalism, anti-"dependencia", anti-industrialism, and somehow anti-capitalism. This perspective blames the general "underdevelopment" of the Third World nations wholly on the fact of their (economic, political and especially cultural) dependence on the Western countries. The radical intellectuals of the Third World in the post-war period seemed to cling to this ideological perspective, although they perhaps differed from each other in terms of the degree of their adherence to the defining elements, i.e. anti-industrialism, anti-capitalism, etc.

But what was the origin of this ideological tendency? Perhaps one source is the "dependency" paradigm which was originated chiefly by the Latin American economists such as Raul Prebisch in the 1940s and later developed and popularized by such economists as André Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, Ferdinando Cardoso and Theotonio Dos Santos in the 1960s and 1970s. The dependency theory provided a major critique of the dominant "modernization" theory which explained the underdevelopment of the Third World as a natural stage in their eventual evolution to a high stage of "mass consumption". It stressed that an organic relation with the advanced capitalist countries would accelerate this "take-off". The dependency theory, in contrast, attributed the underdevelopment of the Third World (the periphery) to its incorporation into the world capitalist system (the centre), through unequal exchange, colonialism and modern imperialism. However, in its analysis of the relations of domination between the centre and the periphery, the unit of analysis becomes "regions", "nations" and "countries", rather than social classes. Thus, in the dependency

paradigm, the Third World countries or nations are exploited/dominated by the advanced capitalist countries. The implication of this paradigm for the struggle against domination of the center is a strategy of national unity, i.e. the unity of all classes in a given Third World country including the workers, the peasants, the poor, the students, the old and new middle classes and the "national bourgeoisie". This strategy implies that the "national" classes, with different and often contradictory interests, should be united to form a national alliance against imperialism. However, within such an alliance, the political and economic interests of the subordinated classes are often compromised and sacrificed to the benefit of the dominant ones (e.g. workers are not to go on strike against their capitalist "allies", or intellectuals are not to criticize their national ruling parties, etc.). The influential dependency paradigm is partly responsible for the nationalism and Third Worldist populism of the radical intellectuals and the political leaders of the developing countries.

However, Third Worldist populism (i.e. a mixture of nationalism, anti-capitalism, anti-industrialism and an ambivalent attitude towards Marxism) of the radical Third World intellectuals was largely the product of the objective socio-economic conditions of their own societies. To begin with, most of these countries were ex-colonies. Capitalist colonialism had left a devastating impact on their social and economic fabric, distorting their indigenous culture, traditions and value systems. The onslaught of capitalist colonialism generated at least two tendencies: first, a backlash against capitalism as a socio-economic system as well as industrialism and Western technology²¹, and second, strong national unity against colonialism. Indeed the existence among the radical intellectuals of this mixture (of nationalism and anti-capitalism) characterizes their contradictory ideology. In this context, the concepts of class and class struggle were either overshadowed by those of "people", "nation", and "masses", or were redefined in order to fit in the project of the articulation of nationalism/anti-capitalism. Thus, Shariati came to define class not as an economic entity, but in the first place as a political one, with the intellectuals as the driving force of the society. And Julius Nyerere was convinced that the concept of "class struggle" does not apply to a society

(such as Tanzania) which is based upon the principle of *ujamaa* (or familyhood). In the latter, he argued, there exists a convergence rather than a conflict of interests between the members.

There was still a third factor which contributed to such a redefinition of social classes and thus the absence of a class politics among these intellectuals. These countries were still non-industrial. The industrial working class constituted only a small fraction of the population, whereas the transitory or the *déclassé* masses (the peasantry", "the poor", and the state employees) formed the large majority. On this background, "class politics" in general and Marxist socialism in particular were likely to be overwhelmed by populism and nationalist politics.

While modern imperialism and particular social conditions of the Third World turned the radical intellectuals in these countries to nationalism, anti-capitalism, and a sympathy with Marxist economic ideals, the pragmatic policies of the Stalinist USSR in the post-war period made those familiar with these policies weary of Marxism. These intellectuals resented the compromise of the Communist Parties with the ruling classes of the developing countries. In addition they were horrified by the invasion by the USSR of Hungary in 1956 and then Czechoslovakia in 1968, as well as by the Stalinist repression inside the Soviet Union. A segment of those intellectuals who remained unaware of these events became firm Marxists. They tended either to dismiss the Stalinist atrocities as bourgeois nonsense, or to justify them in various ways.

It is well-known that the political implication, in the Third World, of the global polarization of Western Imperialism versus Eastern Stalinist socialism was the formal emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. While the non-aligned position of certain political leaders in the Movement came under doubt later (as the exigencies of realpolitik forced them to enter into alliances of various sorts with this or that camp), the radical intellectuals continued to seek genuinely indigenous politics, economics, and ideology. Specially against the cultural imperialism of the West, they called for a "return to self", stressing national identity, indigenous value systems and the deep-rooted cultural heritage. In both Latin America and the

Middle East, religion, as a deep-rooted cultural form, was utilized as a means of political struggle, and in Africa, so were the pre-colonial cultural and organizational norms. However, while in Latin American countries, due to their relatively more advanced class structure, radical Catholicism and Liberation Theology operated side by side with class politics (e.g. Marxist socialism, Syndicalism, and Anarcho-Syndicalism), in the Middle East, because of its slow pace of modern class formation, the weight of the Islamic ideology has by far been heavier than secular class politics. In these countries, with the relative exception of Turkey and Morocco, the subordinated classes have not become "mature" enough to articulate and express their interests and aspirations through their own distinct language, concepts and institutions. To do so, they have had to "borrow" elements from the dominant cultural forms and institutions. Islam has become that cultural form. Thus like many of his Third World counterparts but quite unique in his own country, Ali Shariati (who was deeply weary of modern imperialism and aware of its cultural traits, who was socialized in the conditions of a global rivalry between the capitalist West and the "Marxist" East, and had evolved in an un-industrialized and semi-colonial native environment) resorted to religion (Islam) as an ideology and cultural value which, he thought, was deeply rooted among the Iranian masses. He blended Islam with the Western (mainly Marxist) sociological/political concepts launching his Islamic reformation as a path to the salvation of his nation.

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The reader might wonder about the point of dealing with issues raised in the book, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, if the authenticity of the text is in question. The reason is that the ideas, the discourse and the problematics utilized in this book and attributed to Shariati have now assumed value and relevance independent of their author. They have become, perhaps thanks to the repute of Ali Shariati, the cornerstone of a rigorous and modern Islamic critique of Marxism among the Iranian radical Muslim youth. After all, in those tense days of pre-revolutionary Iran, it was such texts (indeed the very same text under

discussion) that would nourish our rival Muslim group. The fact is that illusion, imagination, distortion, all these "un-real" and "un-authentic" entities possess a real existence and follow real, and at times, very serious implications. A critique of the "un-real" and "un-authentic" is, thus, in order.

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NOTES:

1 See for example Ervand Abrahamian "Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution", *Merip Reports* , no. 102 (1982); and Mangol Bayat, "Iran's Real Revolutionary Leader", *Christian Science Monitor*, May 24,1977.

2 See Hamid Algar, in A. Shariati, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies* , (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1982), preface.

3 M. Bayat, *ibid.*

4 The existing writings on Shariati tend to focus more on expounding his ideas than on systematic critical evaluation. In the late 1970s a pamphlet appeared in Tehran under a pseudonym Ali Akbar Akbari (possibly, he was Ihsan Tabari, the chief ideologue of the Iranian Communist Party) entitled *Bar' rasi-ye Chand Mas'ale-ye Ijtimaii* بررسی چند مسئله اجتماعی (An Evaluation of Some Social Issues). This work examines Shariati's critique of a mechanical type of Marxism, ignoring the more critical and sophisticated types of Marxism.

The works, in English, which discuss Shariati and his ideas include: Mangol Bayat, "Iran's Real Revolutionary Leader", *Christian Science Monitor*, May 24,1977; M. Abedi, "Ali Shariati: The Architect of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran", *Iranian Studies* , vol. xix, nos. 3-4, (1986); A. Sachedina, "Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution", in J. L. Esposito

(ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); E. Abrahamian, "Ali Shariati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution", in *Merip Reports*, no. 102, (1982); H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), pp. 53-59; S. Akhavi, "Islam, Politics and Society in the Thought of Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Taliqani and Ali Shariati", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Oct. 1988). By far the best discussion of Shariati is offered by Ervand Abrahamian, in *Radical Islam: Mujahedin of Iran*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), chapter 4.

5 These biographical notes have heavily drawn upon E. Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, chapter 4.

6 See Mehdi Abedi, op. cit., p. 230.

7 A. Shariati, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, p. 21.

8 The present ruling clergy in Iran, too, attempts to present Ali Shariati as the friend of the Islamic state. This is clear in view of the annual commemorations, exhibitions of his works, etc. At least one reason for this seems to be the fact that Ali Shariati is not at present alive, and thus cannot pose a threat to the legitimacy of the kind of Islam that the present ruling clergy in Iran subscribes to. Hamid Algar, in the Preface of the book attempts to bridge the gap of political stand and ideological orientation between Shariati and the ruling clergy. There seem to be numerous concrete facts that work against this effort. To begin with, all the leaders of Mujahedin Khalq who have waged a fierce battle against Ayatollah's regime have been the students of Shariati. In addition quite recently, the Bureau for the Diffusion of Shariati's Ideas (*Daftar-i Nashr-i Aghayed-i Shariati* دفتر نشر عقاید شریعتی), coordinated by Shariati's father, was shut down by the authorities. Finally Shariati's widow, according to Abrahamian (in *Radical Islam*), stated that if he were alive, he would certainly be in prison.

The earliest organizational expression of the rift between Shariati's orientation and that of the present ruling clergy reflected itself in the organization of the *Forqan* فرقان group. This group which adhered to "Shariati's Islam" (one aspect of which being anti-clericalism) embarked upon the assassination of the prominent conservative clergy including: Ayatollah Mutahhari

(the main intellectual rival of Shariati under the Shah), Ayatollah Mofatteh, and a failed attempt on the life of Hashemi Rafsanjani (the present President of the Islamic Republic). There is no evidence to support Professor Algar's claim that *Forqan* group was "under the command of persons owing their allegiance to the former regime" and to the U.S. (in *Shariati, Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, preface, p. 9). Almost all members of the group were from traditional lower middle class families, residing in Gholhak, a neighborhood in northern Tehran where the Husseinieh Center was located; the leader of the group who was killed by the Islamic regime, was the son of a grocery shop owner in the area where I used to go to school. Gholhak was famous for its concentration of Shariati-study-groups before the Revolution.

9 See Tom Bottomore et al., eds., *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 415.10 See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (London: Pelican Books, 1963 [1968]); George Thomson, *An Essay on Religion*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1949); and Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy in various issues of *Monthly Review*, an independent socialist magazine.

11 George Thomson, op. cit., p. 4.

12 Some Marxists such as E.P. Thompson in *The Poverty of Theory* (London: Merlin Press, 1979), and Raymond Williams in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso Press, 1980) argue that for Marx the "super-structure" and "base" are in reality one and the same phenomenon, and their separation is only metaphorical.

13 A. Shariati, *Jahatgiri-ye Tabaqati-e Islam* جهتگیری طبقاتی اسلام (*Class Bias of Islam*) (Tehran: 1359/1980), Collected Works, vol. 10, p. 16.

14 E. Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, chapter 4.

15 S. Akhavi, op. cit., p. 407.

16 E. Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, chapter 4.

17 From Shariati's *Lessons on Islamology* , as cited in E. Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 117.

18 A. Shariati, *Jahatgiri-ye Tabaqati-e Islam*, vol. 10, pp. 37-38.

19 J. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity: Uhuru na Umoja*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), cited in G. Kitching, *Development and Underdevelopment in Historical Perspective*, (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 64-65.

20 Gavin Kitching, op. cit.

21 In Iran, anti-dependencia and anti-industrialism generated a very strong and somehow reactionary backlash. Jalaal-i Aal-i Ahmad, a well-known radical intellectual, termed this overall (technological, economic, and specially cultural) dependency of the Third World nations on the West as "Westoxication" (*Gharbzadegi* غربزدگی). In a popular book, under the same title, he states: "Once [modern] machine established itself in the towns and the villages, no matter whether it is an engine-mill or a textile factory, it would lay off the labourers of the local industry, make the water-mills obsolete, the hand-loom redundant, destroying the production of carpets, rugs and felt..." (in *Gharbzadegi*, Tehran, p. 49). Aal-i Ahmad, once a Tudeh (Communist Party) member, advocated the revival of Shiism as the only ideology which would prevent the spread of "Westoxication".

It must be noted that populism spread also among the Iranian traditional Marxists. They too were nationalist, weary of large-scale and Western industrialism, being against not simply opulent and opulence but also against wealth *per se*. Some major Marxist leaders (such as Khosrow Gol-i Sorkhi, who was executed by the Shah for an alleged plot against the royal family in the mid-1970s) found in Islam certain revolutionary aspects that could be utilized for the benefit of socialism. For a useful introduction to these discussions see *Nazm-i Novin* نظم نوین, no. 7, special issue on "Islam and Marxism" (New York, 1985) (in Persian); and *Kankash* کنکاش (A Persian Journal of History and Politics), nos. 3-4, special issue on "The Intellectuals" (New York, 1988) (in Persian).