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Propaganda after Prophecy: The Politics of Truth in Contemporary Iran, 1941-2009

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in Political Science

by

Naveed Mansoori

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

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Professor Anthony R. Pagden, Chair

This dissertation examines employments of propaganda and engagement with the politics of truth in contemporary Iran, 1941-2009. It asks if deliberation is an adequate concept for theorizing communication during a crisis of legitimacy. It situates the appearance of propaganda as a predominant mode of communication in the context of a narrative of decline that gained currency in the 1940s: within this narrative, modernity was perceived as indicating the culmination of the end of the prophetic tradition and accompanied legitimation crises during which the totality of social and historical reality was questioned. The concept that gained currency in contemporary intellectual history to name the condition of being after prophecy was a conception of purgatory that was derived from the received history of Islamic philosophy, namely, the *barzakh*, the condition of the soul dreaming in its sleep. Thus, to be after prophecy was conceptualized as being between the state of sleep and waking life or, rather, a state between the darkness of ignorance and

the enlightenment of understanding. By examining the history above, I offer an historically inflected theorization of propaganda, in which I argue that propaganda, in this context, was employed as a mode of communication that restored faith in the world and enacted it anew such that propaganda was a conceptually prior activity to practical deliberation.

The dissertation of Naveed Mansoori is approved.

Davide Panagia

Giulia Sissa

James L. Gelvin

Anthony R. Pagden, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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For Shirin, Iraj, and Mojdeh

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Chronology

1**804-1813:** Russo-Persian War.

October 24, 1813: Treaty of Gulistan.

1826-1828: Second Russo-Persian War.

February 10, 1828: Treaty of Turkmenchay.

1851: Dar Al-Fanun, Iran's first modern university, established.

1851: Amir Kabir launches *Ruzname-ye Vaqaye-ye Itifaqiye*, the first official newspaper.

1863: Nassar al-Din Shah introduces the first censorship law.

1890: Persian Tobacco Protest.

September 29, 1890: Ahmad Kasravi born.

1901: D'Arcy Concession.

September 24, 1902: Ruhollah Khomeini born.

February 17, 1903: Sadeq Hedayat born.

1905: Constitutional Revolution of Iran begins.

1906: Muzaffar al-Din signs the constitution.

1908: The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) is established

1910: Ahmad Fardid born.

1913: Germany establishes a telegraph connection between Noen and Esfehan.

June 1920: Communist Party of Iran established.

1921: Reza Khan's coup d'etat against the Qajar State.

December 2, 1923: Jalal Al-e Ahmad born.

1924: Iran purchases a wireless telegraph from the Soviet Union.

1925: Reza Khan becomes Shah, beginning Pahlavi Dynasty.

1928: The Pahlavi State introduces a short-wave radio frequency.

November 23, 1933: Ali Shariati born.

1934: Taqi Arani launches the journal *Donya*.

1937: The Pahlavi State extends radio frequencies.

1938: Reza Shah arrests fifty-three members of the Communist Party.

1939: Reza Shah passes a law standardizing Iranian music.

1940: Radio Iran is established.

August 1941: The UK and the USSR force Reza Shah to abdicate.

September 1941: Formation of the Tudeh Communist Party of Iran.

October 1941: Hedayat publishes *Blind Owl* in Tehran.

1945: Seyyed Hussein Boroujerdi recognized as Grand Ayatollah and source of emulation.

December 16, 1945: Abdolkarim Soroush born.

1946: The First Iranian Writer's Congress is held in the Iranian-Soviet Culture House in Tehran.

November 1945-December 1946: Short-lived Azarbaijan People's Government.

March 1946: Kasravi assassinated.

January-December 1946: Short-lived Republic of Mahabad.

April 9, 1951: Hedayat commits suicide.

April 28, 1951: Muhammad Mussadeq appointed Prime Minister of Iran.

May 1, 1951: Mussadeq nationalizes the AIOC.

1953: The UK and the US engineer a coup against Mussadeq.

1961: Al-e Ahmad publishes the first edition of *Gharbzadegi* or *Westoxification*.

March 30, 1961: Ayatollah Boroujerdi dies.

1963: Muhammad Reza initiates the Revolution of the Shah and the People or the White Revolution.

June 5-6, 1963: Riots and protests in Qom in opposition to the White Revolution.

1963: Al-e Ahmad revises *Gharbzadegi* after the June 1963 riots and protests.

November 4, 1964: Khomeini exiled.

1966: Shah establishes a state-run television station.

1967: Iranian student demonstrators in DC protest the Shah's visit to the White House.

1967: The High Council of the Arts states its intention of promoting "cultural authenticity."

1967: Construction of the Husseynie Ershad is completed.

1968: Shariati delivers his lecture, "Return to Self-ing" at the University of Jandishapur.

1968: Shariati begins lecturing at the Husseynie Ershad.

September 9, 1969: Al-e Ahmad dies.

October 1969: NIRT broadcasts international news to Iran from an earth station.

1971: The Pahlavi State establishes National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT).

February 8, 1971: Siahkal uprising, marking the beginning of guerilla warfare.

October 12-16, 1971: Muhammad Reza celebrates 2,500-year anniversary of the Persian Empire.

1971: The Pahlavi State begins using torture to extract confessions from dissidents.

1973: The SAVAK shutters the doors of the Husseynie Ershad.

1975: The Pahlavi State allegedly stops using torture to force confessions.

June 18, 1977: Shariati dies in Southampton, England.

November 1977: Iranian student demonstrators protest the Shah's visit to the White House.

September 5, 1978: Black Friday. Security forces kill roughly eighty-five protesters in Jaleh Square.

August 19, 1978: The Cinema Rex fire.

December 1978: The Pahlavi State enforces a nationwide curfew.

November 4, 1979: Security forces kill three students at the University of Tehran.

February 1, 1979: Khomeini returns to Tehran from exile.

March 8, 1979: Thousands of women protest Khomeini's decree on compulsory veiling.

March 1979: Kurdish rebellion.

April 1, 1979: The Islamic Republic of Iran is formally established.

November 4, 1979: Beginning of the Iran Hostage Crisis.

January 25, 1980: The first presidential election held in the Islamic Republic.

June 12, 1980: Khomeini establishes the Cultural Revolution Headquarters.

July/August 1980: The Islamic Republic censors non-Islamic radio and television programming.

September 22, 1980: Beginning of the Iran-Iraq War.

January 20, 1981: End of the Hostage Crisis.

July 19, 1988: Beginning of state-sponsored executions of political dissidents.

February 14, 1989: Khomeini issues *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie.

August 20, 1989: Iran-Iraq War ends.

June 3, 1989: Khomeini dies.

June 4, 1989: Ayatollah Khamenei elected to replace Khomeini as the Supreme Leader.

January 1993: Mohammad-Javad Larijani sends an e-mail to the University of Vienna.

May 1993: Satellite television displayed at the Sixth International Book Exhibition.

July 1994: Parliament drafts legislation banning satellite television.

August 16, 1994: Fardid dies.

May 23, 1997: Mahmoud Khatami is elected to the presidency on a platform of "reform."

July 1999: Mass demonstrations protesting Khamenei mobilized by university students.

September 7, 2001: Salman Jariri publishes the first Persian-language weblog.

2004: The judiciary begins engaging in cyberwarfare against Internet-users in Iran.

August 3, 2005: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad elected to the presidency.

June 12, 2009: Mass demonstrations protesting the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

June 20, 2009: A para-military soldier murders Neda-Agha Soltan.

GLOSSARY

Allah-u Akbar: God is Great. The phrase became the resounding cry of the 1979 Revolution. It referred to a higher source of authority that rendered the authority of the Pahlavi State illegitimate. It was chanted again in 2009, during the demonstrations contesting the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, referring to the 1979 Revolution as an on-going and unresolved event.

Barzakh: Purgatory. Though in the Qur'an, *barzakh* refers to the time between death and the final judgment, in the history of Islamic philosophy, it referred to the condition of the soul dreaming in its sleep, alienated from an enlightened state where prophetic revelation takes place. After the 1940s, *barzakh* gained currency in intellectual culture to name the crisis of modernity.

Estebdad: Arbitrary rule. In the late nineteenth century, *estebdad* referred to the Shahs abuses of power, and was articulated on the premise that they were not the legitimate prophets of the times. The concept thus referred to an anarchy of both political and epistemic authority, opening space for intellectuals to stake a claim on the terrain of authority as the prophets of the times.

Fatwa: The *marja-e taqlid* or source of emulation has the authority, by virtue of being a representative of the Twelfth Imam, to issue binding legal opinions or *fatwas* on matters of Islamic law. Ayatollah Khomeini famously issued a *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie in 1989.

Fitnah: Strife or sedition.

Gharbzadegi: Westoxification, Westitis, West-stricken-ness, or Occidentosis. Innovated by Ahmad Fardid and popularized by Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *gharbzadegi* sought to describe the colonization of Iranian culture by the West, in the absence of direct colonial intervention. Following the 1979 Revolution, the ***gharbzadeh*** or west-stricken was an object of suspicion.

Imam: The *imams* enjoyed divine attributes, are thought to have had divine knowledge, and were for that reason authorized to guide the *ummah* or community of believers. In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini was anointed the Imam Khomeini, as a representative of the Imam Mahdi or the Twelfth Imam, whose return will ostensibly usher in the redemption of Islam.

Jahanbini: Vision of the world, a translation of the German *Weltanschauung*.

Javad: A colloquialism that refers to individuals who lack taste and are uncultured.

Mellat: Nation.

Munavvaralfekr: Up until the 1940s, this Arabic term, literally "enlightened mind," referred to "intellectuals." After the 1940s, it was formally replaced by the Persian term ***rawshanfekr*.**

Resalat: Message.

Shahid: The witness or the martyr.

Tabligh: Propaganda. The concept gained currency in the 1940s when a coterie of Shi'a Muslim intellectual elite partook in a war of position against Marxist-Leninists to gain adherents. They conceived propaganda as prophecy by other means, identifying the Prophet Muhammad as the first propagandist. Propaganda was a mode of communication that enacted imagined worlds.

Tajaddod: Modernization or innovation.

Tawhid: The fundamental pillar of Islam, *tawhid* refers to the monotheistic order of things, the oneness of God, and being qua being.

Ummat: The community of believers.

Vatan: The homeland. For example, *vatan-i Iranian* translates to the Iranian homeland.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

That I follow disciplinary conventions and professional norms by signing off on this dissertation with my name alone should not be taken as tacit admission of an underlying belief I hold that the work is mine. I am responsible for the conclusions I have drawn but not for its raw material, the congealed labor of living, breathing, moving beings, nor for the discursive community that I write for, nor for the community of friends, broadly put, that has sustained and inspired me.

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VITA

Naveed Mansoori graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz in June 2010 with a B.A in Politics. He received highest honors in the major. In 2011, he matriculated into the Department of Political Science at University of California, Los Angeles. He was a campus steward of the UC Graduate Student Union at UCLA in 2015 and a head steward in 2016. To complete his dissertation, he was awarded the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Fellowship for Excellence in Persian Studies from the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute for academic years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. He has served as a peer reviewer for the academic journals *Politics & Gender* and *Comparative Islamic Studies*. He is currently a co-editor of the "Iran" section of the e-zine *Jadaliyya*.

I've had a dream that someone will come
I've dreamt of a red star
And my eyelids keep fluttering
And my shoes remain paired in anticipation
And
I may go blind
If I'm lying
I've dreamt of that red star
When I wasn't asleep
Someone is coming
Someone is coming
Someone else
Someone better

Forugh Farrokhzad, "Someone Who Is Not Like Anyone," 1966

Introduction

Propaganda after Prophecy: The Politics of Truth in Contemporary Iran, 1941-2009

This dissertation examines employments of propaganda and engagement with the politics of truth in contemporary Iran, 1941-2009. It asks if deliberation is an adequate concept for theorizing communication during a crisis of legitimacy. It situates the appearance of propaganda as a predominant mode of communication in the context of a narrative of decline that gained currency in the 1940s: within this narrative, modernity was perceived as indicating the culmination of the end of the prophetic tradition and accompanied legitimation crises during which the totality of social and historical reality was questioned. The concept that gained currency in contemporary intellectual history to name the condition of being after prophecy was a conception of purgatory that was derived from the received history of Islamic philosophy, namely, the *barzakh*, the condition of the soul dreaming in its sleep. Thus, to be after prophecy was conceptualized as being between the state of sleep and waking life or, rather, a state between the darkness of ignorance and the enlightenment of understanding. By examining the history above, I offer an historically inflected theorization of propaganda, in which I argue that propaganda, in this context, was

employed as a mode of communication that restored faith in the world and enacted it anew such that propaganda was a conceptually prior activity to practical deliberation about common interest.

There is a conventional narrative that centers practices of deliberation as the ideal means of resolving differences between individuals who have contesting notions of the good life: were individuals first to agree to norms, customs, and conventions that ensure an orderly life within the state, then, if they come to disagree about the method, if not the objective, of governance, they would ultimately return to order and stability by resolving their differences in a game of giving and asking for reasons. However, theorists of deliberation have been well-aware that the efficacy of practical deliberation rests upon ideal conditions. For example, in critical engagement with Jurgen Habermas, Seyla Benhabib observed that "[n]o matter how intrinsic argument may be to speech, certainly neither the *ability* or the *willingness* to engage in discourses is always, everywhere, and for each individual at hand."[1] In *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas proposed that with practical deliberation, the "*common* interest [is] ascertained *without deception*."[2] Unwilling to interpret Habermas' claim as an invocation of Jean Jacque-Rousseau's concept of the general will, Benhabib suggested that discourses are "moral-transformatory processes" within which there is "the real transformation of certain interests…."[3] Thus, Benhabib acknowledged that prior to practical deliberation, its conditions would first have to be enacted.

In light of decades of research in which propaganda has been conceived as a political technology of deception and domination, Jason Stanley has recently differentiated between "undermining propaganda" and "civic rhetoric:" the latter is "a species of propaganda that

[1] Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 319.

[2] Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 108.

[3] Benhabib, 314.

"[appeals] to the emotions to *increase* reasonableness."[4] Yet, for civic rhetoric to increase the reasonableness of society writ large, civic rhetoricians would have to operate within a rational-critical public that they expand by way of the virtuous employment of propaganda. In the absence of a mutually-agreed upon consensus about standards of reasonability and in the absence of a context in which functional institutional procedures are in place to that end, it becomes difficult to determine the difference between "undermining propaganda" and "civic rhetoric" since the foundation of reasonableness – what counts as reason altogether – is open to contestation. Taking a cue from Michael Warner, I conceptualize propaganda as "poetic world-making," shifting the frame of evaluation away from the stark contrast of propaganda to "civic rhetoric."[5] In a crisis of legitimacy, propaganda does not necessarily add or subtract reasonableness; rather, it constitutes what Nancy Fraser has described as "subaltern counterpublics," or "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinate social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs."[6]

This introduction will serve to provide the reader the general historical and theoretical backdrop for the dissertation that follows by explaining the transformations that inaugurated the "modern" history of Iran and how the subsequent periodization of its "contemporary" history figures into its modernity. In so doing, it provides footing to more clearly understand the relevance of this history with respect to the overarching question of if and whether deliberation is an adequate concept for theorizing communication during a crisis of legitimacy. Overall, what I demonstrate is that, in this context, propaganda was a conceptually prior activity to practical deliberation; as

[4] Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 111.

[5] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2002), 114.

[6] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* (1990), 67.

such, in the introduction below, I insist upon holding the empty signifier "Iran" open to questioning without begging the question of a social reality that is its referent and that pre-determines the significance of the content of the raw material of historical inquiry. Since I incorporate radical contingency into historically inflected theorization, I depart from methods of comparative theorizing that rely upon the pre-constituted social reality of areas of study, considering, rather, the dynamic relationship between what Farah Godrej has described as processes of "self-dislocation" and "self-relocation" internal to modern Iranian political thought.[7]

I. Encountering Modernity

Sites and sources of veridiction proliferated in modern Iran, organized and produced by intellectuals within subaltern counterpublics. In the early nineteenth century, imperial Russia waged war against Iran, then ruled by the Shahs of the Qajar Dynasty, who eventually conceded to sign two treaties that codified their territorial losses; in response to its relatively disempowered place in regional geo-politics and an overarching notion of its place in history as behind and below, the Qajar Shahs sent university students to Europe to become educated in the sciences of statecraft, who returned with their newfound knowledge, trucking along with them as well modern empiricism more generally and meta-narratives of national progress specifically. Farzin Vahdat claims that in the face of "the onslaught of modernity," subjectivity and universality, the two "pillars" of modernity, constituted the terms of debate among intellectuals, in continuity with the received narrative that the beginning of modernity ushered in the end of metaphysics and the death of god.[8] Jamshid Behnam notes, however, that, "[f]rom the nineteenth century onward, Iranian and

[7] See Farah Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought: Method, Practice, Discipline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[8] Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 27.

Turk authors and intellectuals used the term 'modernization' (*tajaddod*) to mean 'renewal,'" specifying that intellectuals, when calling for *tajaddod*, were calling for "change and innovation."[9]

In 1906, in response to the excesses of arbitrary rule by the Qajar State, a Constitutional Revolution unfolded with the aim and objective of establishing constitutional checks and balances on the Shahs. The pro-constitutionalists attempted to replace "arbitrary rule" or *estebdad* with "a form of government that would be compatible with Islamic recommendations of justice, consultation, and consensus," on the one hand; while, on the other hand, de-centering traditional concern with religious law or *shari'a* in favor of conceptions of popular sovereignty and justice.[10] The 1906 Constitutional Revolution is often periodized as inaugurating the history of *modern* Iran. The modern therein was not merely inaugurated by way of Europeanization or Westernization, concretely, in the form of the entry of Iran into the folds of the history of the Enlightenment; neither, however, was it an alternative modernity untouched by the Enlightenment and its afterlives. The discursive production of the Iranian homeland and generalized assertions about its non-contemporaneity in direct contrast to the apparent contemporaneity of the Western world was in large part a response to *tajaddod*; however, Iranian intellectuals also reckoned with the contemporaneity of its own present with the non-contemporaneity of its traditions, whereby, in its contemporary history, the crisis of modernity became an object of self-critical inquiry.[11]

It does not suffice to "compare" Iran to the West as if each geo-spatial unit were originally distinct after which intercultural "dialogue" would engender a "fusion of horizons." "Iran" has

[9] Jamshid Behnam, "Iranian Society, Modernity, and Globalization," in *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity* ed. Ramin Jahanbegloo (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2004), 9.

[10] Ali Gheissari, "Iran's Dialectic of Enlightenment: Notes on Constitutional Experience and Conflicting Narratives of Modernity," in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906* ed. Ali M. Ansari (London: Gingko Library, 2016), 37.

[11] Milad Odabaei, "Shrinking Borders and Expanding Vocabularies: Translation and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906," in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906: Narratives of Enlightenment* ed. Ali M. Ansari (London: Gingko Library, 2016), 113.

been an ever-shifting point-of-reference with conceptions of its formal unity in open-ended crisis, across myriad registers of the organization of its political body from cartographic maps that depict its place in the terrestrial order of things to reflections upon its ordinary or exceptional place beneath the sky. In addition, it has been, as Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi has observed, a place where "heterotopic experiences" have lent themselves to "the formation of the ethos of modernity."[12] For that reason, the points-of-departure of the history below are not initially grounds of comparison; by insisting, throughout, upon the conceptual priority of propaganda, I demonstrate, instead, contesting acts of building and dwelling that reckoned with the reception of an alienated and estranged condition, as an apocalyptic, world-ending state of groundlessness and homelessness. To beg the organization of the political body in crises of legitimacy as a question prior to analysis and critique would be to overlook how crisis and critique unfold, unresolved and in tension, in the service of a grounded disposition that enactments of the "comparative" mode often presuppose.

The contemporary history of Iran is a productive conceptual terrain to theorize propaganda in a crisis of legitimacy since its social reality has been repeatedly called into question in decades past, extending from its historical and geographical borders and boundaries, through to conceptions of the voice of the people, images of reality, and the destiny of each individual. In the past two decades, there has been a wave of scholarship on the ideological foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the cultural and intellectual histories embedded within, and the latent nativist and nationalist prejudices that have been, if not a consequence of, at the least a mediating condition of the exclusionary policies and practices of the current state. In *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*, Mehrzad Boroujerdi claimed that from its encounter with modernity in the mid- to

[12] Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 3.

late-nineteenth century, the people of Iran were victim to "the tormented triumph of nativism."[13] In a protracted struggle against a centralized state and against instruments of colonial domination, Iranian intellectuals strategically inverted Orientalist characterizations of "native" Iranian history and culture as a tactical means of self-relocation against forces of domination, specifically by way of counterdiscourses that laid the constitutive ground of self-identity more broadly.

Coinciding with the tormented triumph of nativism was the configuration of what Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet describes as "frontier fictions," who has documented how intellectuals were compelled to modify their conceptions of Iran in the face of gains and losses of territory.[14] However, Iranian intellectuals were not only reacting to geo-political events that were beyond their control. They were also re-imagining in novel – and often "nativist" and "nationalist" – ways how Iran fits into global world order, responding to the broader existential question of why Iran ought to exist at all. The intellectual's quest to discover a reason for why they have the authority to tell the truth was intimately related to the quest to discover a reason for why Iran ought to have a place in the world. Both quests were centered around questions concerning the relationship of truth and method, unfolding with respect to a legitimation crisis engendered by modernity, when and where there was not merely a decline of trust in institutions, but, more pervasively, a loss of faith in the world. Both quests to discover the ultimate conditions of intelligibility were also nostalgic ones. Thus, by examining intellectual history, I am not examining authors as if they provide a window into the soul of Iran and as if they are representatives, but rather read them as privileged sites where a crisis concerning the truth and reality of Iran and Iranians was made legible, audible, or visible.

[13] See Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

[14] See Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

II. Freedom Dreams

Narratives of decline abound in scholarship on modern Iranian intellectual history that pivot around 1906. In continuity with Boroujerdi's narrative of the "tormented triumph of nativism," Ali Mirsepassi attributes the source of decline to militant reaction to the "democratic Enlightenment" of the Constitutional Revolution by intellectuals who had been influenced by the "radical Counter-Enlightenment" and an attendant "nativist reaction to modernity that is in many ways similar to early twentieth-century populist reactions to modern democracy in Europe."[15] Similarly, Ali Ansari claims that in the "age of extremes" in the 1940s and after following the "Iranian Enlightenment," "a deeply unhappy (political) consciousness" pervaded Iran, identifying its epitome with "the life, writings, and subsequent suicide of the novelist Sadeq Hedayat."[16] In a departure from the narratives of decline above, I argue, as I will explain further below, that in the 1940s, Iranian intellectuals discovered a resource to re-imagine the history and geography of Iran, in direct contrast to ethno-racial conceptions of its history and geography propagated by Reza Shah Pahlavi, who had overthrown the Qajar Dynasty, and thereafter initiated a project to nationalize and modernize Iran while allying himself with the nativist reactionaries of the Second World War.

In 1941, Reza Shah was forced to abdicate the throne to his son Muhammad Reza by the USSR and the UK, both of which feared that the Shah was maneuvering to forge an alliance with Germany. Two events coincided in 1941 that begin the history I examine, with respect to which I depart from the narratives of decline I elaborated upon above. First, in 1939, the Martinician poet Aime Cesaire who coined the term *negritude* and Suzanne Cesaire returned to the then-French colony Martinique from Paris to launch the journal *Tropique*. In a 1941 issue, Suzanne Cesaire

[15] Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.

[16] Ali Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 113.

invited her readers to embrace "the domain of the strange, the marvelous and the fantastic, a domain scorned by people of certain inclinations."[17] Suzanne Cesaire alluded to the 1924 "Manifesto of Surrealism," in which Andre Breton spoke of "the *hate of the marvelous* which rages in certain men," who he put on trial for their naïve realism, believing, instead, "in the future resolution of these two states, dreams and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*."[18] In 1941, Hedayat published *Buf-i Kur* or *Blind Owl*, in which he depicted the condition of dreaming as the condition of being in the world.

The coeval publication of *Tropique* and *Buf-i Kur* places intellectual culture in Tehran in the 1940s and thereafter squarely within the global history of what Robin D. G. Kelley has described, in an homage to Martin Luther King Jr., as "freedom dreams."[19] Hedayat excavated from the archive of Islamic history the concept of the *barzakh* or "purgatory," with respect to a diagnosis of the human condition as a state between sleep and waking life. The condition of purgatory to which the concept of the *barzakh* referred and that *Blind Owl* made hauntingly legible was a condition that was after prophecy, insofar as, following the end of the prophetic tradition, ostensibly ordinary minds were now blinded from apprehending the truth. Following the publication of *Blind Owl* in 1941, the concept of the *barzakh* proliferated such that, in the decades that followed, intellectuals employed the concept to diagnose the alienation of Iranians, in the face of the onslaught of modernity, as a dream, conceiving the future as a moment of awakening. The concept of the *barzakh* dovetailed with the conception of modernity as a time of change and

[17] Cited in Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 170.

[18] Andre Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 14.

[19] See Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*.

innovation. In turn, the *barzakh* rendered visible the crisis of modernity and of the arche and telos of *tajaddod*, by way of a conception of social reality as a waking life that could be dreamt anew.

In the 1940s in Tehran as well, the concept of propaganda or *tabligh* proliferated, crucially in the literary publications of a coterie of Shi'a Muslim elite who identified the Prophet Muhammad as the first propagandist, locating themselves in the state of being *after* prophecy, and thus speaking to the condition of purgatory between sleep and waking life. In the decades after, intellectual elite employed propaganda as a mode of communication to restore faith in the world and enact it anew and theorized propaganda with respect to the *barzakh*, the condition of the soul dreaming in its sleep. Threaded through conceptions of what *tabligh* could do given what the *barzakh* made possible was the materiality of the media of truth-telling, the political technologies that enacted dreamscapes. The dreamscapes enacted by employments of propaganda were not merely discursive, with respect to which the language and legibility of truth-tellers was the terrain policed by censors. With the proliferation of the aural terrains of radio and cassette, the audio-visual terrains of film and television, and most recently, the digital terrains of the Internet, propaganda enacted spaces constituted through different organizations of the human sensorium, such that different organs were centered therein as the medium between sleep and waking life.

The contemporary history of Iran unfolded in the aftermath of the Second World War and in the midst of the global context of the Cold War, when, as Susan Buck-Morss describes it, "mass dreamworlds" were compatible with the most "terrifying assemblages."[20] The historian Melissa Feinberg observes that in the meanwhile, "[on] either side of the East-West divide, government officials and their populations used the concept of 'truth' (or 'lies') to indicate their conviction in

[20] Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 276.

their own rightness and to give their view of the world the weight of a fact or a moral absolute."[21] In 1953, the United Kingdom and the United States engineered a coup against the democratically-elected Prime Minister Muhamad Mussadeq. 1953 figures in collective memory as a wound. Situating the contemporary history of Iran within the context of the Third World, Vijay Prashad observes that Iranian intellectuals participated in imagining mass dreamworlds as well since, after 1953, "[t]he nation had to be imagined as well as thought through politically, economically, and culturally" with "[s]tories of humiliation and hope, poems of despair and revolution…."[22] Following the coup, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi obliterated the constitutional checks-and-balances on the monarchy and waged war against the Marxist-Leninist opposition to his rule, carving out a space for Shi'a Muslims to carry the baton of critical resistance to his authority.

The beginning of the contemporary history of propaganda in Iran preceded, moreover, what Jose Casanova observed as the "'deprivatization' of religion in the modern world," including but not limited to the emergence of Islam as a "public religion" in the Middle East.[23] Following the 1979 Revolution in Iran, within which mass demonstrations culminated with the overthrow of the Pahlavi Dynasty and the unpredictable establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran thereafter, "religion," Casanova explained, "showed its Janus face, as the carrier not only of exclusive, particularist, and primordial identities but also of inclusive, universalist, and transcending ones."[24] The anthropologist Talal Asad noted, however, in response to Casanova's presupposition that the public sphere could remain untouched by religious content, that "[when] religion becomes an

[21] Melissa Feinberg, *Curtain of Lies: The Battle over Truth in Stalinist Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xi.

[22] Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 78.

[23] Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.

[24] Casanova, 4.

integral part of modern politics, it is not indifferent to debates about how the economy should run, or which scientific projects should be publicly funded, or what the broader aims of the national education system should be;" and moreover, that the decline of the significance of religious belief does not provide insight into its social significance "given the entry of religion into political debates issuing in effective policies, and the passionate commitments these debate engender…."[25] Likewise, the de-privatization of Islam carried with it the publicity of newly imagined worlds.

III. Imagined Worlds

The publicity of imagined worlds did not take place by way of an immediate relationship between intellectual elite and the audiences to which they addressed themselves. They were produced, circulated, consumed and reproduced in mediascapes that were conditioned by unequal relations of power. In response to Charles Taylor, who claimed, like Casanova, that "the nature of the modern state" ascertains "the inescapability of secularism" because of "the shift from hierarchical, mediated-access societies to horizontal, direct-access societies" and a "modern social imaginary" that is premised upon "common action in secular time,"[26] Asad observed that "the media are not simply the means through which individuals simultaneously imagine their national community; they *mediate* that imagination, construct the sensibilities that underpin it."[27] Stated more crudely, secularism is a project, as is the attendant conception of social reality and the members that dwell within it as one and the same world. In addition to the "homogenous time of state bureaucracies and market dealings…there are other temporalities – immediate and mediated,

[25] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 182.

[26] Charles Taylor, "Modes of Secularism," in *Secularism and its Critics* ed. Rajeev Bhargava (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 40-41.

[27] Asad, 4-5.

reversible and nonreversible – by which individuals in a heterogenous society live and by which therefore their political responses are shaped."[28] The public spheres I examine were not mere extensions of a pre-constituted political body. They made apparent the radical contingency of social reality "as is" and the possibility of worlds that could still yet be, for better and for worse.

Though the importation and uptake of different political technologies unfolded diachronically, and which, in the dissertation that follows, is periodized chronologically in time, in each period when and where a particular political technology emerged as the predominant medium of truth-telling, the dreamscapes that they enacted were synchronically entangled in space. Anabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi have noted, in a reflection on "small media" or "technologies for political survival" in modern Iran, that "at certain moments, and more and more with the spread of certain technologies, control is impossible, even within the most repressive, security-oriented states."[29] In addition, however, to the crucial logistical capacities of political technologies to open up to both self and other public spheres of dissent, the mediascapes that they enacted were also indexed to the questions concerning the constitution of Iran more broadly to which intellectuals participating in those spheres responded. In other words, new communication technologies were not merely crude instruments that political actors held in their hands to extend themselves in space; they also brought into the order of aesthetics conceptual languages that became the material substratum of self-reflexive critical inquiry, and specifically, in the history of propaganda below, as technologies of mediation between sleep and waking life.

In response to the medium theorist Marshal McLuhan's disappointed speculation that communication technologies would eventually draw the world together into a "global village,"

[28] Asad, 5.

[29] Anabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali -Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 26.

Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark have recently observed McLuhan's unstated pre-conception of a "light theory of media" – within which electric light was "a medium without a message" or the medium of media – whereby "light, presence, immediacy, truth, and the divine become commingled in a single revelation."[30] With the dispersion of discourse about the *barzakh*, the purgatorial condition of being that was suspended between the state of sleep and the state of waking life, there entered into circulation in intellectual culture in Iran an alternative light theory of media, in which the message was mediated in a state that was after prophecy or that was, in other words, thoroughly *in medias res*, neither as a revelation of the truth nor as the presence of the truth in the form its negative. Preoccupied with the absence of a point-of-departure and a place of return that is one and the same, and in the midst of a crisis of legitimacy that entailed a loss of faith in the world as it really is, intellectuals employed propaganda as a mode of communication that enacted imagined worlds that were independent of the state's representation of Iran.

IV. Chapter Outline

In each chapter, I provide an historical overview of the uptake and reception of specific political technologies and the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction or truth-telling therein; follow by demonstrating how the particular enactments of truth-telling were reconstituted by representative intellectuals; attend to an exemplary intellectual whose thinking was mediated by the predominant political technology of that time, who was preoccupied with the problem that *barzakh* posed for a resolute understanding of Iran, and who was a witness to the materialization of imagined worlds in public spheres; and conclude by drawing upon the conceptual languages of those intellectuals to theorize different employments of what I conceive as propaganda from below. Overall, I argue that propaganda in this context was a conceptually prior activity to

[30] Alexander R. Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and Mckenzie Wark, "Introduction: Execrable Media," in *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 14.

deliberation insofar as it was employed to enact the worlds that practical deliberation begged as a question. However, I extend upon that initial insight to examine the propagandizing of the imagined community, the voice of the people, images of reality, and the destiny of individuals in four distinct periods in the contemporary history of Iran from 1941 to 2009, each of which were exemplary instances in which propagandizing was conceptually prior to practical deliberation.

Chapter 1, "A Loss of Faith in the World: Propaganda, Print Culture, and Dreams of a Unified Iran, 1941-1953," traces the form of legitimation crises in contemporary Iran to the late nineteenth century, amidst the project of modernization or *tajaddod*, when the Qajar Shahs were no longer able to legitimate their authority to guide and to govern the nation in the wake of a tradition in which they presented themselves as the prophets of the times. The "arbitrary rule" or *estebdad* of the Shahs was symptomatic of an anarchy of epistemic authority, whereby the primary contestants of the legitimacy of the modern state were intellectuals who claimed the authority to guide and to govern on the premise that they knew the truth and could see it. There was, in the meanwhile, a proliferation of sites and sources of veridiction in print culture, within which newspapers and novels appeared as mediums of truth-telling about the reality of Iran. The nationalist historian Ahmad Kasravi entered public debate about the reality of Iran herein, claiming that the greatest threat to the integrity of the nation-state was the dissemination of lies about its history and geography in the form of fictional depictions of its past and present by novelists and mystics who denied the possibility, in his estimation, of the objective reality of the nation-state.

In 1941, after the UK and USSR forced Reza Shah to abdicate the throne, Sadeq Hedayat published *Buf-i Kur* or *Blind Owl* in Tehran, in which the legitimation crisis, conceived as a loss of faith in the world, was rendered legible in its depiction of the world and its inhabitants as if they were constituted within the purgatory of the *barzakh* or the condition of being after prophecy.

Blind Owl called into question the authority of the prophets of the times generally and intellectuals specifically like the historian Kasravi who claimed that he knew the history and geography of Iran as it really is. In the 1940s, Shi'a Muslim intellectual elite propagandized depictions of the history and geography of Iran in a way that was unaligned with the Pahlavi State's project of nationalizing Iranians in accordance with an ethno-racial conception of their identity. I examine the newspapers that they published from 1941 to 1953 with the conceptual language of the *barzakh* that Hedayat had made legible and attend to how propagandists conceptualized and employed *tabligh* or propaganda as prophecy by other means. I argue that their efforts to propagandize the history and geography of Iran as a part of a trans-national community of believers or the *ummat* was conceptually prior to practical deliberation about the interests of Iranians who lived within Iran.

Chapter II, "Things Unheard: Popular Silence and the Popular Voice in Revolutionary Iran, 1953-1979," traces discourse about the authentic culture of Iranians in the 1960s and 1970s to the Pahlavi State's concerted effort to nationalize Iranian music in the early- to mid-twentieth century, the importation and uptake of radio and cassette, and the dispersion of the genre of the anthem to orchestrate audiences to move in formation. The problem that the anthem was attempting to resolve was the unthinkability of the heart of the people or, in other words, the inaudibility of their universal silence towards the monarchy. The unthinkability and inaudibility of the general will would become especially critical after 1953, when the UK and the US engineered a coup against the democratically elected Prime Minister Muhammad Mussadeq, ending the golden age of print examined in Chapter I, and instated in his place Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who was prior to then a figurehead. In 1961, the literary critic, essayist, and short story writer Jalal Al-e Ahmad published *Gharbzadegi* or *Westoxification* in which he diagnosed the present as the age of the

barzakh, claiming that the state media had filled the eyes, ears, and minds of Iranians. In 1963, he revised his essay, suggesting that Iranians could potentially share silences independent of the state.

Beginning in 1968, Ali Shariati, the so-called "ideologue" of the 1979 Revolution who popularized an interpretation of Shi'a Islam as a political ideology of permanent insurrection, posited the ideal terrain of universal silence as an ultimate though inaudible source of legitimacy in a generative response to the problem posed by the concept of the *barzakh*, and consequently questioned the legitimacy of the prophets of the times who claimed the capacity to hear the silence of the people. Shariati bore witness to the appearance of an audience around a shared relationship to their own silence and thereby the restoration of the idea of the people interrupted in 1953, thus conceiving a moment in which a new silence was collectively propagandized from below. In the 1970s, when the Pahlavi State tortured its opposition to extract from them confessions that its modernizing project was successful, there was presupposed the reality of a collective conscience, or, in other words, of a silence that individuals shared in and that indicated their tacit consent. By applying the perceptual politics of sound that Shariati had formulated in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, I argue that the rooftop chant, "God is Great," the resounding cry of the 1979 Revolution, enacted a collectivity that appeared around its own unthinkability and inaudibility.

Chapter III, "Revelations of the Impossible: Visions of the World and Images of Reality in Post-Revolutionary Iran, 1979-1989," traces discourse about the ideal vision of the world to the Pahlavi State's efforts to regulate the society of the spectacle in the 1960s and 1970s and its efforts to disseminate images of social reality to a local and global viewership in audio-visual space. Though the Pahlavi State had a monopoly on televisual broadcasts, cinema became a mediascape by and through which unflattering images of social reality in Iran were disseminated as well as melodramas of self-sacrifice by unhappy individuals oriented by way of visions of a better world.

In the 1970s, arsonists who diagnosed cinema halls as sites and sources from which mendacious images of the world were being mass produced, circulated, and consumed, destroyed them, prefiguring profound schisms in post-revolutionary Iran concerning the potential propagandizing function and capacity of subject-formation of audio-visual political technologies more generally. For example, the Ayatollah Khomeini, who returned to Tehran in February 1979 after fifteen years of exile to spearhead the Islamic Republic as an Imam, celebrated the potential of television to dispel the lies that the Pahlavi State had propagandized with national radio and to accurately represent the history of the 1979 Revolution since the revolutionaries had acted spectacularly.

The irresolvable problem that the ideologues of the Islamic Republic confronted was that state was founded upon its unthinkability and inaudibility and thus was an impossible state, constituted upon a vision of the world founded upon the "greatness of God." In the early 1980s, the Islamic Republic initiated the Cultural Revolution, its objective the Islamicization of universities, during which the Islamic-Heideggerian Ahmad Fardid delivered televised lectures in which he offered theological and philosophical reasoning for Khomeini's claim to power by virtue of his status as the revelation of the impossible, in direct contrast to Khomeini's insistence that he derived his authority from the general will, and as a resolution to the crisis of the *barzakh*, which, he claimed, had plagued Iranians prior to 1979. Fardid's failure to resolve the problem of the impossible state illustrates that the Islamic Republic, internal to conservative justifications of it, was constituted upon a vision of the world that lent itself to an ever-present crisis of legitimacy. By examining propaganda that sought to dictate the meaning of images of the reality of the Iran-Iraq War, I argue that the *shahid* or martyr who ostensibly gave their life for an impossible vision of the world rendered visible, as propaganda embodied, the impossibility of the Islamic Republic.

Chapter IV, "Centers of Attention: Individuality, Immediacy, and Networked Intimacy in Post-Reformist Iran, 1989-2009," traces discourse about self-centered individuality after 1979 to debates within the Islamic Republic about the scattered attention of Iranians, in response to the importation and uptake of satellite television in the 1990s that raised as an undisputable fact the phenomenon that Iranians were not beholden to state-run radio and television. Relatedly, there was widespread awareness among Iranians that, in the wake of the 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, Iranians had been scattered from the territorial homeland, and were increasingly speaking of themselves as part of a diasporic community. Thus, the proliferation of discourse about the scattered attention of Iranians within Iran was interwoven with proliferation of discourse about the scattered subjectivity of Iranians, such that diaspora was the rule, and not the exception, of being Iranian, both within Iran and outside of it. In the 1990s, the philosopher Abdolkarim Soroush, who was critical of Fardid, excavated from the history of Islamic philosophy a neo-rationalist school-of-thought to reconcile Islam and democracy by anointing the individual, instead of the Ayatollah, as the prophet of the times and thus as authorized to determine the destination of their being in the world, prefiguring deliberation about the nexus of the attention, subjectivity, and destiny of Iran.

In the early 2000s, debate about the relationship between the attention, subjectivity, and destiny of individual Iranians was reconstituted within the Persian-language blogosphere, a terrain that transformed intellectual culture by providing an outlet for non-elite individuals to participate in intellectual debate. The globality of the breadth and scope of the blogosphere enacted a mediascape within which Iranians could communicate and establish otherwise improbable relationships, propagating self-centered accounts of their own experiences and thereby engaging in consciousness raising. The Sun Lady, the first woman to blog in the Persian language, illuminated a limit to Soroush's conception of individuals as revelations of the same, taking it upon

herself to propagate the embodied difference of being a woman in the Islamic Republic. The Sun Lady and her fellow interlocutors engaged in debate more generally, moreover, about if and why Iranians, in consuming what they saw as vulgar mass media, were out of touch, posing a relationship between publics of collective attention and affective bonds of networked intimacy. *Propaganda after Prophecy* concludes by arguing that collective attention to viral footage of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan in digital space during the 2009 Green Revolution enacted conditions for affective bonds of networked intimacy mediated by the immediacy of their open-ended destiny.

In each chapter, I demonstrate that propaganda in the contemporary history of Iran has been a conceptually prior activity to practical deliberation about the common interests of Iranians by examining the mediations of propaganda about the imagined community, the voice of the people, images of their reality, and their self-centered individuality. I locate the history of theorizing about propaganda and its employments therein within a narrative of decline that entered circulation in the 1940s within which the inauguration of Iranian modernity was conceived as the culmination of the end of the prophetic tradition when dreaming was perceived as the condition of being in the world, between the ignorance of sleep and the enlightenment of life awakened to the truth. During crises of legitimacy when and where there was not only a decline of trust in institutions but a pervasive loss of faith in the world, propaganda was employed as prophecy by other means and specifically as a mode of communication with the capacity to adequately respond to crises of faith in the reality of the world, to restore faith in it, and to enact it anew, for better and for worse. The criminalization of *tabligh* in the Islamic Republic in the decade since 2009 has perhaps been a response to a return to self-fulfilling prophecy beyond propaganda about the end of history.

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Chapter I

A Loss of Faith in the World

Propaganda, Print Culture, and Dreams of a Unified Iran, 1941-1953

In his 1892 *Persia and the Persian Question,* the Conservative British statesmen Lord Curzon identified a source of common interest between "Englishmen" and "the Persian people," by virtue of the commonality of their shared historical, geographical, and biological lineage:

> It ought not to be difficult to interest Englishmen in the Persian people. They have the same lineage as ourselves. Three thousand years ago their forefathers left the uplands of that mysterious Aryan home from which our ancestral stock had already gone forth, and the locality of which is still a frequent, if also the most futile battlefield of science. They were the first of the Indo-European family to embrace a purely monotheistic faith.[31]

The myth that the Persian people were an Aryan people, an influential byproduct of the research and publications of German Orientalists, was not only accepted and circulated by European Orientalists who were, for myriad reasons, in search of the roots of their identity. Many Iranian state officials and intellectuals readily welcomed the Aryan myth, in part as a response to the discontents of a homeland fractured along the fault lines of difference, sowing the germs of ethno-nationalism that Reza Shah Pahlavi would harvest in the 1930s as he maneuvered to cultivate an alliance with Germany. In 1935, Reza Shah formally requested that delegates of the League of Nations cease referring to the homeland as "Persia," replacing it instead with "Iran," the land of the Aryans. Conceptions of the historical and geographical horizons and borders of *Vatan-i Iranian* or the Iranian homeland were indexed to the common interests of Iranians and other peoples, and appeared, at the outset of modern Iranian history, as an open-ended terrain of contestation.

The issue that state officials and intellectuals reflected upon, beginning at the end of the nineteenth century yet persisting in the decades to follow, was what Nancy Fraser has described as "the scales of justice," in reference to the intertwined dynamics between "the moral balance in

[31] G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (London: Frank Cass, 1966 [1892[), 5-6. Cited in Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 14.

which an impartial judge weighs the relative merits of conflicting claims" and "the geographer's metric for representing spatial relationships."[32] The former scale concerns the substance of justice, the latter its framing, both of which, generally and in Iran specifically, were shaped and informed by the state-centric Westphalian framing of justice. In light of theories of justice like that of John Rawls' which presuppose "normal justice," where there is an absence of "public dissent from, and disobedience to, its constitutive assumptions," Fraser raises as a question how the scales of justice might be reconceived in "abnormal" times, in which "disputants often lack any shared understanding of what the authors of justice claims should look like" and where "those who argue about justice…share no view of the agency of redress, as some envision new transnational or cosmopolitan institutions, while others restrict their appeals to territorial states."[33] In the early twentieth century and after, and amidst a crisis of legitimacy, state officials and intellectuals reckoned with the abnormality of a new time engendered by the crisis of modernity.

In this chapter, I ask if the territorial nation-state is an adequate scale to theorize the ground of common interest during a crisis of legitimacy, and argue, by way of an historically inflected theorization of propaganda about the imagined community, that propaganda enacted the spatial relationships that the conceptions of the subject of justice begged as a question. In so doing, I pose a relationship between "imaginative geographies" and "imagined communities," considering both terms with attention to the discursive production of conceptions of land and life, the ways in which inscriptions of land lend to delimited accounts of life's worth and how the preponderance of life with respect to its objectification lends to the disintegration of the land. The Marxist geographer David Harvey worries, in an engagement with Martha Nussbaum's question about the relationship

[32] Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 1.

[33] Fraser, 49.

of geography and cosmopolitanism[34], that the failure to understand the world will be consequence of the priority of "a relational dream-world of narcissistic transcendentalism."[35] In contrast to Harvey, the postmodern geographer Edward Soja placed emphasis on the contingency of spatial relationships, captured with the concept of the "third space" that generates the potential and possibility of the absolute reorganization of the terrestrial order of things.[36] Carving out a third way, I demonstrate the configuration of relational dream-worlds of self-reflexive transcendentalism and thereby the enactments of imagined worlds independent of the state's inscription of land and life.

The terrain of contestation over the social and historical reality of Iran hinged around apparent truths about the reality of Iran. The embattled who engaged on that terrain questioned the relationship between truth and reality in a more general moment of public meditation on the meaning of the life and land of Iran. In direct opposition to Reza Shah's propagandizing that blood and soil originally unified the subject of nationhood, propagandists questioned the relation of necessity between history, geography, and nationhood. Cristina Beltran has examined the limitations of conceiving political subjects as unified and homogeneous in what she refers to as "the trouble with unity."[37] Scholars of modern Iran have engaged a locally-informed problematic by noting the reverse discourse of Orientalism or Orientalism in reverse and the dissemination of

[34] See Martha Nussbuam, *For Love of Country?* ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

[35] David Harvey, *Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 283.

[36] See Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

[37] See Cristina Beltran, *The Trouble with Unity: Latina Politics and the Creation of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

"nativist" conceptions of political unity.[38] In theorizing propaganda within a legitimation crisis, I reconceive the discourse of nativism as a process of self-relocation, in which faith in the world was restored and its geo-spatial borders boundaries enacted anew. I thus attend to the proliferation of discourse about the subject of nationhood herein by remembering the original contamination of the third space of poetic world-making and the apparent material terrain of the prose of the world.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Reza Shah and the Pahlavi State heavily censored the public spheres of letters that had flourished during the 1906 Constitutional Revolution. When the Shah was forced to abdicate the throne in 1941, Iran experienced a twelve-year interregnum period, during which time political parties flourished as did a nascent literary culture in what is sometimes described as the "golden age of print." In the 1940s, a coterie of Shi'a Muslim intellectuals began to reflect directly upon *tabligh* or propaganda and employed it. In their newspaper publications, they identified their present-day as an abnormal time and reflected, subsequently, on the relationship between geography, the subject of truth and nationhood, and thus the subject of justice. Crucially, in 1941, Hedayat published *Blind Owl*, in which he recovered the Islamic conception of purgatory or the *barzakh*, a "third space" and a dreamworld between sleep and waking life, depicting the state of being in the world as the condition of the soul dreaming in its sleep. In a context in which intellectuals derived their authority from the claim that they were awake, *Blind Owl* challenged the authority of the prophets of the times while also freeing their imaginations.

Thus, I ask a related question in posing a relationship between *tabligh* and the *barzakh*: specifically, were the dreamworlds of propagandists lies? Instead of attending to that question by evaluating the content of their histories, I attend to propagandizing of a form of space and time

[38] See Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iran Intellectuals and the West: The Tortured Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996) and Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

from which history emerges that was not beholden to the naturalization of the secular time of national historiography. The coterie of Shi'a Muslim propagandists in the 1940s wrote as if they were reviving and re-enacting prophecy, responding to what Walter Benjamin had observed not long prior as the loss of "the ability to exchange experiences."[39] In the process of deliberation, the possibility of communicable experience is at issue and is compounded in an abnormal time and during a legitimation crisis. Like the storyteller, the prophets had "possessed an authority" by "[borrowing] from the miraculous;" yet, in light of a "new form of communication" in newspapers, when readers demanded "prompt verifiability" by the transmission of "information," the art of storytelling declined.[40] In the decades prior, literary and historical criticism converged around the question of whether the narratives of the time past of the subject of nationhood were valid; and that question was inflected through debate over the distinction between history and fiction whereby the former was conceived as a production of truth and the latter a dissemination of lies.

Prior to examining the publications of religious propagandists, the historical and theoretical backdrop of their propagandizing will first need to be established: how were legitimacy, authority, and truth configured in modern Iranian history and how was that problematized in a time of crisis?; when and how did the loss of faith in the world appear in thinking about the subject of nationhood and how was the fictiveness and historicity of its spatial and temporal constitution questioned?; and when and how was the legitimation crisis rendered legible, conceptualized, and responded to? In what follows, I address each of the above questions to establish, first, that at stake in the legitimation crisis was a dispersion of sources and sites of veridiction and thus of subjects of truth; second, that the legitimation crisis was reconstituted in literary and historical criticism about

[39] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000* ed. Dorothy J. Hale (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 262.

[40] Benjamin, 365.

fictions and histories of the subject of nationhood, its temporal horizons and its spatial boundaries; and third, that in the 1940s, there entered into circulation in literary and intellectual culture a narrative of modernity that conceived it as the culmination of the end of the prophetic tradition. Only after I have done so do I examine and theorize the publications of religious propagandists.

The logic of the argument in this chapter is threaded through the history I examine. I argue that propaganda emerged as the rule and not the exception of political activity in contemporary Iran; by consequence, I claim that conceptions of the space and substance of justice were poetic world-makings. I first theorize the relationship between the legitimation crisis and truth-telling in contemporary Iran by examining the emergence of a newspaper and intellectual culture in the late nineteenth century and contestation over the establishment of sources and sites of veridiction. Second, I demonstrate a direct relationship between the crisis of veridiction in literary criticism about the distinction between prose and poetry and history and fiction by reconstructing a debate between the historian Ahmad Kasravi and the avant-garde litterateur Sadeq Hedayat. Third, I claim that with the publication of Hedayat's modernist novel *Blind Owl*, a narrative of decline in which modernity signaled the culmination of the end of the prophetic tradition entered circulation in Iran and theorize the relationship between propaganda and nationhood through an explication of the novel. I conclude by arguing that religious propagandists in the 1940s enacted poetic depictions of the space and time of the subject of nationhood in the absence of the space and time that the concept of deliberation begs as a question to show that propaganda was a conceptually prior activity.

I. Truth-Telling in a Time of Crisis

The institution of journalism in modern Iran emerged coincidentally with and in response to a widespread decline in confidence in the authority of the centralized state to govern the nation. The late Qajar Shahs and Reza Shah Pahlavi censored newspaper publications that were critical of

the state because they were perceived as challenging the monopoly of the state and of official and unofficial newspaper outlets aligned with its interests on the source and site of veridiction or of truth-telling; and insofar as the centralized state derived its authority to govern on the grounds that it knew the truth, presupposed in the criticism of its policies and practices by literary intellectuals was an implicit claim that the individual who was holding the pen was potentially authorized to govern. By extension, even in the absence of criticism of its policies and practices, literary intellectuals who claimed to understand more than the centralized state were responded to as vocal critics of it. I argue that the proliferation of newspaper and intellectual culture at the outset of Iran's modernity was indexed to the legitimation crisis that undermined the authority of truth-tellers and was indicative of the dispersion of sources and sites of veridiction and thus of subject formation.

The significance of the relationship between legitimacy, authority, and truth in modern Iran is its continuity and discontinuity with the history of arbitrary rule or *estebdad* that preceded it. The Iranian state has not "[enjoyed] legitimacy comparable to states in Europe" because it has been independent of social classes.[41] In contrast to the history of monarchy in Europe, Shahs did not claim a "divine right" to rule that was invoked by the law; instead, they possessed "God's grace" (*Farrah-e Izadi*) and ruled in the form the "The Shadow of Almighty" and "The Center of the Universe."[42] To legitimize arbitrary rule, Qur'anic verse was invoked that stated that believers ought to "obey God, the Prophet [Muhammad], and the holders of authority among you."[43] The concept of the "Just Ruler" was the measure of whether a king was a legitimate authority.[44] In the

[41] Homa Katouzian, *Iranian History and Politics: The Dialectics of State and Society* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 59.

[42] Katouzian, 59-60.

[43] Katouzian 60.

[44] Katouzian, 62.

late nineteenth century, the answer to the question of who "the holders of authority" were was increasingly who in Iran had a claim to knowing the truth of reality and the legitimacy of the centralized state became dependent thereafter upon subjects who knew the reality of the state.

In 1851, Amir Kabir launched *Ruzname-ye Vaqaye'-ye Itififaqiye*, the first official newspaper in Tehran, one of its aims "that it should explain and verify the actions of the government in such a way that rumours and unfounded assumptions might be obviated."[45] Amir Kabir also founded Dar al-Fanun, Iran's first modern university where he housed his printing press. The centralized state conceived the press and the university as having a pedagogical function. In 1863, Nasar al-Din Shah introduced the first law in modern Iran that authorized the censorship of print if and when published material harmed infants or transgressed religious law.[46] It is not clear how infants would be harmed by a newspaper given that they cannot read. However, the first censorship law centered the minds of the youth as a terrain of contestation for the formation of faithful subjects. Insofar as the "infant" indicated that subjects are made, the school and the press operated in tandem to produce subjects who, if informed about the facts of reality, would recognize the legitimacy of the state. Thus, the Qajar state posed the problem of legitimacy around the formation of subjects and implied that at stake in subject formation was the truth of reality.

Though constitutionally a monarchy, the Qajar state did not lay claim to having authority solely by appealing to the two-millennia-year old tradition of monarchical rule; it now also presented as authorized to govern because of its claim to rational authority as a technocratic state. Insofar as its legitimacy was dependent upon rational subjects who understood its reasons, a new class of technocratically disposed rational authorities appeared, identifying as the *munavvar al-*

[45] Peter Avery, "Printing, the Press, and Literature in Modern Iran," in *The Cambridge History of Iran* vol. 7 (Cambirdge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 823.

[46] Avery, 829.

fekr-an or the "intellectuals," who were invested in importing new ideas from Europe to Iran.[47] From 1906 to 1911, the *munavvar al-fekr-an* actively participated in public debate in a lively newspaper culture during what is now referred to as *doran-e mashrute* or the Constitutional Period, when, after widespread demonstrations against the Qajar state's concessions to foreign powers, constitutional checks-and-balances were successfully codified to counter-act its excesses of power. From 1837 to 1906, roughly 91 newspapers were published in Iran; in the first year of the Constitutional Period alone, 99 newspapers were published.[48] Intellectuals drew from the same wellspring of authority as the technocratic state and newspapers enacted unsanctioned sites of veridiction that questioned official accounts of the truth of reality.

The mind of the "infant" that was the site of contestation of subject formation in law was paradigmatic of the contested relationship between intellectual development and historical progress. If people were not formed correctly as subjects, nothing short of the future of Iran was at stake. On August 10, 1905, in an issue of *Tarbiyat* (*Discipline*), the publisher of the newspaper claimed a direct relationship between knowledge of the present and speculation about the future:

> Imagine that we, the people of Iran, are not men of action, that we put aside deeds and spend our dear lives talking. Is there any harm if we become correctly informed of all the realities and the intricacies of worldly matters and…find out where things lead to? [For example] how have those who have gotten somewhere realized their aim…, and [of] those nations and peoples that have stagnated and declined, why have some stood still and others wanted?[49]

The publisher of *Tarbiyat* proposed that if informed about the historical present, the "people of Iran" could potentially attain the ability to see the future or to "find out where things lead to," and

[47] Negin Nabavi, "Introduction," in *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran: A Critical Survey* ed. Negin Nabavi (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 4.

[48] Negin Nabavi, "Readership, the Press and the Public Sphere in the First Constitutional Era," in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution: Popular Politics, Cultural Transformations and Transnational Connections* ed. H. E. Chehabi and Vanessa Martin (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2010), 213.

[49] Nabavi, "Readership, the Press and the Public Sphere in the First Constitutional Era," 215.

made that claim by analogizing the relationship of the aims and ends of the individual with that of nations. In addition, then, to the Qajar state's concern with the formation of rational subjects that were cultivated to have the intellectual capacity to recognize rational authority, *Tarbiyat* questioned the relationship between the formation of subjects and the historical progress of Iran.

The *munavvar al-fekr-an* wrote as if they had successfully achieved complete intellectual development and that they wrote from a position that was situated at the end of historical progress. As the apparent subjects of truth, they claimed to have an objective grasp of reality. In 1907, constitutionalists drafted Article 20 of the Supplementary Fundamental Law, dictating that "[a]ll publications, except heretical books and matters hurtful to the perspicuous religion [of Islam] are free, and are exempt from censorship."[50] Heretical books and matters hurtful to Islam were mendacious books. Publishers and writers presented as "objective" and "truthful" reporters.[51] Therefore, they suggested a relationship of equivalence between the true, the objective, and the sacred regardless of whether the content of the material was explicitly concerned with matters Islamic and judgment about whether content was Islamic hinged around the status of its reality. The apparent relativity of what counted as objective and truthful material was indexed to the legitimation crisis that had opened claims to rational authority to contestation. The *munavvar al-fekr* was constituted upon the crisis of rational authority that plagued Iran and the dispersion of ostensibly mendacious and veridical content was a mere symptom of a far deeper problem.

The technocratic state failed to usher the nation into a secular age in which the immanence of reality was lived as if it were the natural domain of the same. In July 1907, the newspaper *Habl al-Matin* stated that newspapers should be written with "the pen of truth" and that the press "ought

[50] Pardis Minuchehr, "Writing in Tehran: The First Freedom of Press Law," in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution: Popular Politics, Cultural Transformations and Transnational Connections*, 226.

[51] Minuchehr, 227.

to reflect the truth."[52] While newspaper writers and publishers claimed that they were attempting to "awaken" the people of Iran to the immanence of reality, they were enacting different subjects of truth.[53] In the 1920s and 1930s, the fractured terrain of rational authority showed its face in the political economy of print when books were sold as industrially produced commodities, instead of as artisanal works of art. First, no longer valuable because of their singularity, the "aura" of mass-produced and mass-consumed books diminished.[54] Second, by the mid-twentieth century, instead of a national reading public, there were "multiple reading publics, each increasingly defined not only by its reading tastes, but also by its distinct social, cultural, and political outlooks."[55] In respect to the former, books were not perceived as manifestations of a single source of truth-telling; in respect to the latter, the multiplicity of reading publics reflected multiple sites of truth-telling.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Marxist-Leninists, the foremost secular critics of the Pahlavi state, began a long history of struggle that was aimed at educating the youth to produce subjects of truth by mobilizing on the contested terrain of sources and sites of veridiction in literary and intellectual culture. In 1934, Taqi Arani, who ascended to the leadership of the Communist Party of Iran after receiving a doctorate in chemistry from the Berlin Institute of Technology, launched the journal *Donya* (*World*), in the wake of Reza Khan's 1921 military coup that overthrew the Qajar Dynasty. Arani explained on the front page of the first issue that the journal's "historical role" was to "[guide] the youth on the road to truth" who had become caught in the "crises and contradictions" of Europe and their own "traditions," which he described as obstacles to their historical progress.[56]

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[52] Minuchehr, 228.

[53] Nabavi, "Readership, the Press and the Public Sphere in the First Constitutional Era," 215.

[54] Afshin Marashi, "Print Culture and its Publics," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 47 (2015), 92.

[55] Marashi, 103.

[56] Taqi Arani, "*Donya*," *Donya*, January 21, 1934, 1.

In the face of a legitimation crisis, the truth of the state and the truth of the subject were severed; and in the pages of *Donya*, Arani and other Marxist-Leninists were attempting to forge new subjects of truth from below as a means of producing a new state from within the old state.

In 1938, Reza Shah Pahlavi arrested Arani and fifty-two members of the Communist Party. Mindful of the history of legitimacy and of the legitimation crisis in the decades preceding the Pahlavi state's rule, the Shah's aggressive suppression of the fifty-three and censorship of *Donya* was a late attempt to gain a monopoly on the source and site of veridiction and to counter-act their tactical maneuvering on the terrain of the intellect to create subjects of truth and a new state. In the 1940s, after the UK and the USSR forced the Shah to abdicate the throne in favor of his son Muhammad Reza, the Iranian Academy coined the term *rawshanfekr* (lit. enlightened mind) as a replacement for the Arabic *munavvar al-fekr*.[57] In contrast to the *munavvar al-fek-an*, the *rawshafekr-an* were invested in transforming social and historical reality.[58] The *rawshanfekr-an* conceived of themselves as part an "intellectual element" (*'onsor-e rowshakfekr-an*), a self-perception that rested upon the idea that they occupied an exceptional position in respect to society. The "intellectual element" was organized around differing ideas of the truth of the subject and made legible in print culture the potential for the possibility of other states and thus other worlds.

The legitimation crisis beginning in late nineteenth century Iran radically de-centralized the arbitrary rule of the monarchy and the claim of the king on the source and site of veridiction. The importation and uptake of the press and subsequent emergence of a newspaper culture enacted the material conditions of possibility for the rapid dispersion of the plurality of its sites and sources. Literary intellectuals were not merely writing truth to power in a reactive posturing of resistance.

[57] Boroujerdi, 22.

[58] Nabavi, "Introduction," 4.

They were not contributing to a field of public opinion in an indirect conversation with the state and neither were they engaging in civic rhetoric with the objective of increasing reasonableness. They were organizing spaces from which they could enact new subjects of truth altogether with little to no care or concern if state officials and representatives were reading their publications. The legitimation crisis was thus a ferment of opportunity to imagine other states and other worlds. The Pahlavi state under the helm of Reza Shah engaged in a concerted effort to nationalize Iran on the terrain of history with an ethno-racial conception of the Iranian national subject. The attendant question in circulation in literary culture therein was what the real history of Iran was.

In this section, I have provided the historical and theoretical backdrop of the legitimation crisis in contemporary Iran, arguing that what was at stake was the potential for different subjects of truth and of the emergence of unsanctioned political and literary spaces. I now will consider when the subject of nationhood became an object of historical and literary criticism. The subject of nationhood was conceived as a specific variation on the truth of the subject: whereas in *Donya*, Arani enlisted his readers into a history of truth that accorded with a Marxist-Leninist narrative, there was a proliferation of discourse about the truth of the social and historical reality of Iranians. To what land were they subject and to what conception of collective life were they obliged? In other words, the truth of the subject was reconstituted as its spatial or geographical and temporal or historical constitution; at the end of self-discovery, the Iranian would find itself at one with the homeland. Generally, intellectuals asked about the meaning of the land and life of Iran, conceived as a spiritual evaluation of the matters of fact of its social and historical reality. Specifically, they asked if fictional depictions of Iran's past were lies in contrast to the truth found in its histories.

II. Between History and Fiction

The late Qajar Shahs innovated the concept of the Iranian homeland or *vatan-i Iranian* and collapsed the material or territorial and spiritual or historical constitution of Iranians. Before the nineteenth century, *vatan* referred more generally to a person's home or habitus, on the one hand, and to the ultimate if not pre-determined destination of the soul, on the other hand.[59] The Pahlavi state under the helm of Reza Shah deployed the political technologies of the state, namely, the school and the press, to integrate the people under a conception of blood and soil, drawing from coeval German Orientalist scholarly discourse the idea that Iranians were originally Aryans.[60] Whereas prior to the nineteenth century, *vatan* referred to the *telos* of the soul, thereafter, the Shah reconfigured its otherwise generic formulation into a meta-narrative of historical progress that originated in a "golden age," declined into a "dark age," and ended with a rebirth or renaissance.[61] In so doing, moreover, the Pahlavi state and de facto state historians placed the truth of the subject in an original moment of time that would, with just rule, become realized in the historical present. However, the legitimation crisis opened to contestation the *arche* and *telos* of the national subject.

Coinciding with the reception of historical consciousness, historical realism and debate over what Hayden White describes as the "fictive character of historical reconstructions," intellectuals were also debating the distinction between prose and poetry.[62] In response to classical Persian poets who were beholden to a conception that good poetry had formal unity in terms of its rhythm and rhyme, an emergent group of new poets maintained that the formal constraints imposed

[59] Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "From Patriotism to Matriotism: A Tropological Study of Iranian Nationalism, 1870-1909," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2002), 219.

[60] See David Motadel, "Iran and the Aryan Myth," in *Perceptions of Iran: History, Myth and Nationalism from Medieval Persian to the Islamic Republic* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2014).

[61] Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870-1940* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 99.

[62] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 2.

by the "traditionalists" put a constraint upon poetic expression altogether.[63] The late Qajar Shahs and the Pahlavi state who were fabricating a conception of autochthony and thereby opening to questioning whether the origins of Iran were the stuff of history or fiction were grounding the reality of their representations of history in the formal unity of the world and specifically in a naturalized conception of the homogeneous and linear time of Iranian history. In other words, the implications of debate over the formal unity of the poem, internal to literary criticism circumscribed about the genre of poetry, had implications upon debate over the question of whether the order of the historical present was beholden to the past by the unity of the world, conceived in historical criticism as the spatial and temporal order that constituted the life of Iran.

I now reconstruct a debate between the historian Ahmad Kasravi who saw it as his life's aim to banish poetry from Iran and to write history as it really happened and the modernist litterateur Sadeq Hedayat who lost faith in the subject of nationhood and the unity that the world promises. I demonstrate that the legitimation crisis that I have elaborated upon above was constituted on the terrain of the prose of the world and history as it really happened. First, I claim that though Kasravi employed the methods of rational historiography to write the history of Iran, he was not able to describe the subject of nationhood as is without fashioning it as ought to be. Thus, though he presented his histories as real depictions of Iran, he was, in the end, a poet. Second, I claim that Hedayat made the legitimation crisis that Kasravi could not resolve legible by conceiving the mediation of the intellect from the world as is as the condition of being in the world. If the *munavvar al-fekr* was ostensibly awake in the world and could depict it as is, Hedayat claimed that they were poets who were dreaming the worlds they were presenting as the truth of reality. Later, I will claim that propagandists were operating in the condition that Hedayat depicted.

[63] Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 22.

A. Ahmad Kasravi and the Quest for Truth

The nationalist historian Ahmad Kasravi is most well-known for employing rationalist historical methodology from the human sciences in Europe towards writing the history of Iran and of advocating for the application of rationalism in historical writing more generally. Born in the early years of the twentieth century, he lived through the Constitutional Revolution and the period of Reza Shah's rule. His life was cut short in 1946, when followers of Navab Safavi, the founder of the militant conservative Islamic organization the Fedayin-e Islam, assassinated him in the light of day because of what they interpreted as a long standing anti-Islamic thread in his life and work. Kasravi framed his own writings as histories of truth, both in terms of their content and in terms of the evaluative framework he drew upon to identify truth-tellers in history from the liars therein. Kasravi reconstituted the legitimation crisis and the attendant proliferation of sources and sites of truth-telling in newspaper culture on the terrain of narratives of national integration; and as such, he was an exemplar truth-teller about the reality of the national subject. Kasravi encountered the facticity of the facts of history as it happened in the reconstitution of the land and life of Iran.

In 1933, Kasravi launched the journal *Payman* (*The Promise*) in which he deployed a full-frontal assault against the liars in his midst who were disintegrating Iran by disseminating lies. In the few decades prior to Kasravi's entry into literary and intellectual culture, novelists, in tandem with the centralized state's efforts to disseminate history textbooks about Iran's past, were breathing life into the golden age of Iranian history in historical novels, within which they brought together "a curious blend of nostalgia and factual information about the past glories of Persia, gleaned from historical chronicles and the scholarly research of contemporary Orientalists."[64] Insofar as history as it happened served as the raw material for the setting of historical novels, they

[64] Houra Yavari, "Fiction, ii (b)," Encyclopedia Iranica, last modified January 26, 2012, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fiction-iibthe-novel.

were written in relation to the unsettled distinction between fictions and histories of Iran's past; and furthermore, insofar as they appeared at the height of the legitimation crisis elaborated above, they were implicated by the proliferation of sources and sites of truth-telling in print culture. Less important than if and whether they functioned to enlist readers into a history of truth is how literary critics who were making a claim to having authority therein evaluated their relation to reality.

On November 22, Kasravi published an article, "*Roman* (*The Novel*), in the first issue of *Payman*, in which he stated directly his conception of the novel's relation to reality. Kasravi described the novel as "a meaningless work" or *afkar-e pooch*: "To the extent that [the novel's] purpose is to give readers a source of life and for its readers to derive from it a lesson and to acquire wisdom," he wrote, "the fabrication of myths is folly."[65] The novel was thus "a lie" or *dorugh*.[66] Kasravi claimed, first, that the novel was not meaningful because it was not true; second, he claimed that because it was meaningless it did not aid its readers in acting the right way; and third, he claimed on the grounds that being true and being right were the same, their readers were being deceived. "What effects do all of the things of wonder that we see in dreams, and the observations that we make therein, really have on our hearts?," he asked. [67] He continued: "Is it really that when a man sees a woman in his dreams that he has fallen in love with her?"[68] Kasravi was invested in awakening his readers to the truth to guide their understanding of the things that had an effect on their lives, on the one hand, and to the things that satiated their hunger for meaning, on the other.

[65] Ahmad Kasravi, "*Roman*," *Peyman*, November 22, 1933, 6.

[66] Kasravi, 7.

[67] Kasravi, 8.

[68] Kasravi, 8.

Kasravi thus deployed the practice of historical criticism as an exercise in correcting histories by identifying fictive elements within them and consequently by identifying the lies therein. For example, on December 22, in the third issue of *Payman*, he published, "Both a Thief and a Liar," an article about a history of Shushtar in the western province of Khuzestan by Sayyed 'Abdullah, the nephew of Sayyed Ne'mat-ullah Jazayeri, a seventeenth century Shi'a scholar.[69] The substance of his criticism of Sayyad 'Abdullah's history aside, Kasravi deployed the same method of criticism that he deployed in relation to the novel to render judgments about history and in so doing actively held history as it really happened as the measure of historical criticism. Kasravi did not invest time and energy into identifying lies and liars purely because he cared for the truth; rather, he considered his overarching project as motivated by and in the interest of his nationalism. If, recall, in the late nineteenth century, the late Qajar Shahs collapsed the material and spiritual registers of the homeland to imagine and to enact *vatan-i Iranian*, Kasravi maintained that mediating territorial integrity and collective sensibilities was a constitutive lie, the cause of error.

His early preoccupation with mendacity shaped his evaluations of Iranian history. Across three histories on Sufism, Baha'ism, and Shi'ism published in the early years of the 1940s, he claimed that Shi'as in Iran had inherited pernicious elements of Sufis in times past who took flight from this-worldly existence and took refuge in other-worldly pursuits. Their foundational error was their belief in "the oneness of existence," to which they oriented themselves towards while overlooking altogether the fractures in their contemporary moment.[70] Sufis, moreover, were characteristic for "their fearlessness in lying and spinning tales."[71] Of the lies they most regularly

[69] Kasravi, "*Ham Dozd ham Dorughbaf*," *Peyman*, December 22, 1933.

[70] Kasravi, "Sufism," 74, in Lloyd Ridgeon, *Sufi Castigator: Ahmad Kasravi and the Iranian Mystical Tradition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

[71] Kasravi, 97.

disseminated was that of individuals with "charismatic powers" who, in light of the history of legitimacy and of the legitimation crisis, were the "holders of authority."[72] He claimed that the Pahlavi state benefited from Sufi prejudice in contemporary Shi'ism: "You see that the Ministry of Culture, which promotes this institution, wishes evil upon the Iranian people and regards Sufism as its cultural source and therefore has engaged in printing books and propagating Sufi words."[73] As heirs of Sufis, Shi'as were guilty, in his estimation, of passively exacerbating national disunity and the Pahlavi state was guilty, moreover, of thoughtlessly propagating their pernicious lies.

Kasravi conceived the relationship between the book and the reader in a way that sacrificed the agency of the latter to the force of the former, advocating for schools to enlighten Iranians by circulating "healthy books" that would guide them to "national salvation."[74] In his 1940 history of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, Kasravi was well-aware of the relationship between authority, legitimacy and truth and the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction in literary and intellectual culture, conceiving his own professional activity as an effort to ensure that the lies disseminated at the crucial juncture were dispelled before they took root.[75] Motiving his project of weeding out the lies in circulation for the purpose of national salvation was his commitment to inculcating a collective sensibility among his readers with the aim of national integration. For example, in the 1930s, he had directly criticized Arani and the Iranian Communist Party for enlisting readers into the history of a lie that sustained class difference through struggle.[76] Kasravi

[72] Kasravi, 104.

[73] Kasravi, 74.

[74] Abrahamian, 287.

[75] Alireza Manafzadeh, "Kasravi, Ahmad iii. As Historian," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kasravi-ahmad-iii, accessed June 28, 2019.

[76] Ervand Abrahamian, "Kasravi: The Integrative Nationalist of Iran," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9 (1973), 284.

thus suggested that in contrast to spiritualists who deceived Iranians into passively sustaining difference, the materialists deceived them into disintegrating Iran for their own self-interest. He now had to answer the question, however, of the truth that would unify the world of Iran.

Whereas the Iranian Communist Party was attempting to enlist readers into a history of truth and to enact subjects of truth in a way that maintained class difference through struggle, Kasravi claimed that Iranians ought to oblige themselves to one another in a contractual relation. Yet, in imagining a social contract between individual Iranians, Kasravi was forced to beg the question of the ground broadly conceived upon which contractually-obliged participants stood. He conceived the ground of the contractual relation as its physical and material reality: territorial Iran.

> What is patriotism? Some complain, how can one love a piece of land – a village, a hill, or a field. Others claim that all men are the same, therefore we should not distinguish between citizens of one country and citizens of another country. And some people believe that love for a nation is a new form of paganism, distracting man from his true goal, God. But all of these objections fail to understand the true meaning of nationalism. I repeat what I have often said: nationalism means the original contract for unity which individuals sign when they agree to constitute a nation. When twenty million people, sharing the same territory, form a nation, they are, in fact, agreeing to work together to improve their environment, to share jointly the hardships as well as the rewards, the grief as well as the happiness involved. For example, if there is an outbreak of tribal banditry in Kirman, the inhabitants of Azarbayjan, Khuzistan, and Gilan should willingly send help and should not shrug their shoulders and say 'it has nothing to do with me'.[77]

Kasravi indicted Arani and the Communist Party for imagining differences and disseminating the lie that the people of Iran could not and ought not be an integrated totality. He conceived history as it happened as normatively informed by the ideal of national unity and yet implied in his definition above was the more specific ideal of territorial integrity. Land unified life. The exemplar rationalist historian in Iran wrote history as it happened to enact Iranians as they ought to be.

Since land unified life, Kasravi considered territorial disintegration as an injury to Iran; more relevantly to the present matter, irredentism made apparent the facticity of the facts of his own historical writings that were invested in and grounded in the truth of the land and life of Iran.

[77] Kasravi, "What is Wealth," *Parcham*, March 30, 1942. Cited in Abrahamian, 285.

In 1945, the Soviet Union successfully facilitated the establishment of the Azarbaijan People's Government from November to December 1946 under the leadership of Ja'far Pishevari. The Central Government in Tehran was eventually able to force Pishevari into agreeing to reintegrate into Iran and in December 1946 deployed troops to reenter Tabriz. The army razed and pillaged Tabriz and killed at least 500 of its inhabitants. In an act of brutal resistance to the irredentism of the Azeris, the Central Government responded with an act of violent erasure. Following the 1946 Azarbaijan crisis, Kasravi lent his support to military intervention in Azarbaijan, denouncing the notion that the Azeris were a *mellat* or nation on the basis that they were a linguistic minority.[78] Foregrounding the realism of his conception of Iran was a fiction of unity that was his alone and buttressing the apparent truth of his conception of Iranian reality was the arm of the state.

In the course of his life and work, Kasravi was invested in identifying the mendacious actors who were responsible for deceiving their readers into living a lie and maintained, in contrast, that were Iranians to live the truth they would know to agree with one another. However, Kasravi had difficulty reconciling the positivist enterprise of writing history as it really happened with the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction and the truths and lies produced therefrom. In other words, whereas, on the one hand, he employed historical criticism to purify both historical novels and histories proper of fictive content, he was, on the other hand, ultimately a storyteller. His inability to differentiate himself from historical novelists was apparent in the setting that served as the foreground of the characters and the plots of his own histories: the territorial nation-state. The meaning of the life of the people of Iran for Kasravi hinged on the fact of its territorial boundaries and when the Azeris mobilized to secede, the reality of the setting of his histories was in question. Thus, though he wrote histories of Iran, the truth of Iran, the subject of his histories, was in crisis.

[78] Abrahamian, 284.

B. Sadeq Hedayat and the End of Truth

Born in 1903, Hedayat lived through the tumult of the Constitutional Revolution, through Reza Shah's time in power, his abdication of the throne, and the interregnum period that followed, dying in 1951 in Paris. Hedayat spent four years studying abroad in Europe from 1926 to 1930 before returning to Tehran. In 1928, he tried to take his own life. In 1951, he would succeed. In contrast to Kasravi who prioritized the territorial nation-state over any one ethno-racial heritage, Hedayat rather played a crucial role in a modernist literary revolution, its primary objectives "to denounce the use of the Arabic terminology; to work toward the purification of the Persian language through poetry; to promote a fictional language closer to common parlance instead of the conventional style; to link ancient Iran to the present time and expunge centuries of Islamic dominance from the memory; and, finally, to promote modernity by creating new literary forms."[79] With ardent faith in the truth of the subject of nationhood, Hedayat's faith in the world was shaken. In 1941, Hedayat published the first Iranian modernist novel *Blind Owl* in Tehran. In *Blind Owl*, Hedayat made the crisis of faith in the world legible to readers then and for the decades to come.

For the time being, I will circumscribe discussion about *Blind Owl* to its exposition to argue that Hedayat was responding to and questioning the value of the quest for truth and provide necessary context of the overarching concept that Hedayat draws on to think the source of crisis. With apologies to the reader, I am providing below a long translation of a crucial opening passage:

> In life, there are wounds that slowly, in solitude, eat and grind away at the soul like leprosy.
>
> It is not possible to make these pains visible to others, because they generally are in the habit of counting these pains as part of the rare and strange events and occurrences, and if anyone says or writes [sic], men will strive to regard them with a doubtful and mocking smile, in accordance with both current beliefs and their own – thus humanity has not yet discovered an antidote or a prayer and their only medicine is amnesia brought about from wine and the artificial sleep induced by opium and other narcotic substances – and yet what shame that the effects of such medicines are temporary and after a while in lieu of relief the pain escalates with intensity.

[79] Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 25.

> Will there be a day when somebody will understand the mystery of these supernatural events, this reflection of the soul's shadow which shines bright in the comatose and mediated state – *dar halat-e oghma' va barzakh* – between sleep and waking life?[80]

Hedayat published *Blind Owl* for the recently named *rawshanfekr-an* or intellectuals who were invested in the idea that their claim on authority was derived from their being awake to the truth. If, during the legitimation crisis of the time before, the *munavvar al-fekr-an* were enlisting readers into a history of truth and enacting them as subjects of truth to guide them towards salvation, Hedayat related the incommunicability of experience to the impossibility of being awake in an unwitting assault upon the sites and sources of veridiction and their aims and objectives.

The formulation "comatose and mediated state" or *halat-e oghma' va barzakh* contains a pivotal concept in the contemporary intellectual history of modern Iran. In the history and philosophy of Islam, *barzakh* generally refers to the interregnum space between the time when the body dies and the time when the soul receives its final judgment. In the Qur'an, *barzakh* appears only three times. In *al-Mu'mimin* 23:99-100, the verse reads: "Until, when death comes to one of them, he says, 'My Lord, send me back, so that I may do righteousness concerning what I left.' Surely 'No' is the word that He speaks. Behind them is a *barzakh* until the Day when they will be raised up."[81] In two other instances in the Qur'an, *barzakh* is used to describe the third space between which two seas meet.[82] George Archer observes that the Qur'anic corpus equates the dead to people who are asleep in the *barzakh*.[83] "In the Middle Ages," Archer explains, "Muslims, notably but not exclusively Sufis, developed particularly complex phantasmagorical depictions of

[80] Sadeq Hedayat, *Buf-i Kur* (Esfehan: Sadeq Hedayat Publishing, 2004/2005), 9.

[81] Qur'an 23:99-100.

[82] Qur'an 55:19-20 and 25:53.

[83] George Archer, *A Place Between Two Places: The Qur'anic Barzakh* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2017), 2.

the *barzakh* which were simultaneously a form of dreaming soul-sleep, a visionary pilgrimage, and a purgation."[84] The thirteenth-century Andalusian philosopher ibn Arabi described the *barzakh* as the human condition and thus the condition of existence as a soul that is dreaming in its sleep.[85]

The concept of the *barzakh* is located within a schematic of enlightenment that ends in what the French Orientalist Henry Corbin described as "a higher visionary knowledge, *hierognosis* a prophetic theory of knowledge which accounts for and distinguishes the visions of dreams as well as the visions of waking state."[86] In the quest towards higher visionary knowledge, the traveler is attempting a "recovery of [a] place of origin, this return home."[87] In the received narrative of progress in the prophetic tradition, the prophets received wisdom from the angels. There are three different types of prophets: prophets who see or hear angels in their dreams, those who see angels in waking life, and those who receive from angels the knowledge to enforce new laws.[88] Once the Seal of the Prophets was closed in the aftermath of the Prophet Muhammad's death, the phenomena both of prophecy and guidance continued with emphasis on the inner world.[89] The source of prophetic knowledge is the *mundus imaginalis* or the "imaginal world" that rests intermediately between the order of immediate sense-perception and the order of mediated intelligibility.[90] In contrast to the *mundus imaginalis*, the *barzakh* is closed off from the source of truth-telling.

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[84] Archer, 9.

[85] See Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of ibn Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[86] Corbin, "The Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality," in *The Dream and Human Society* ed. G.E. von Grunebaum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 2.

[87] Corbin, 3.

[88] Corbin 4.

[89] Corbin, 4.

[90] Corbin, 20.

Hedayat reconfigured the *barzakh* as a form of dreaming soul-sleep to capture the source of the crisis of legitimacy that foregrounded the terrain of intellection as a problematic of mediation. In 1946, more than seventy writers and critics gathered for The First Iranian Writer's Congress in the Iran-Soviet Culture House in Tehran where they debated the status of literature and literary criticism. Members of the Tudeh Communist Party dominated the scene and took the opportunity to disseminate Marxist literary theory. The main theoretician of the Party Ehsan Tabari delivered a speech to the Congress, stating that a critic "must have adequate awareness of social science, of psychology, of the history of philosophy, and of religion, so that it can accurately analyze an artistic work from a social and spiritual perspective."[91] He described *Blind Owl* to the Congress as "a hopelessly melancholic book" and diagnosed "the dark and hopeless environment of the dictatorship [of the Shah]" as the cause of the darkness and hopelessness of its worldview.[92] Tabari who was a comrade of the late Arani's employed a methodology not unlike Kasravi that presupposed an immediate conception of social and historical reality – that is, of waking life – that enabled him to envision the social and historical reality that *Blind Owl* obscured in its fictiveness.

Tabari maintained that the distinction between social and historical reality and fiction could serve as a schematic to identify the truths and lies embedded within literary texts; and moreover, on the premise of a positivist understanding of the facts of social and historical reality, he distinguished between the false consciousness of Hedayat and his own enlightened consciousness. Though Hedayat did not respond directly to Tabari, in *Blind Owl*, he voiced criticism of Kasravi's criticism of the novel in *Payman* in 1933 as a dream that was divorced from the truth of reality and his overarching conception of the magical power of rhetoric to deceive readers into living a lie:

[91] Ehsan Tabari, x.

[92] Tabari, x.

> A meaningless work (*afkar-e pooch*)! – so be it, yet it afflicts me more than any reality – are not these people who resemble me, who, at face-value, share my needs, wants, and desires, there to deceive me? Are they not like a fistful of shadow who have come to be to mock and trick me? Is it not the case that that which I feel, see, and judge is, from head to toe, fictitious, and that it differs greatly from reality?[93]

Like Kasravi, Hedayat too incorporated in the exposition of *Blind Owl* a self-reflexive conception for the reader of the novel as a "meaningless work" and as a dream that was different from reality; and moreover, he asked if the people about him were there to "deceive" him from seeing reality as it is. However, in contrast to Kasravi, Hedayat conceived reality and deception within and in relation to the original contamination of wakefulness and sleep internal to the concept of the *barzakh*. Since he could not beg reality as a question, he could not think "deception" as they did.

In *Blind Owl*, the narrator recounts a supernatural event that he himself had experienced. The supernatural event that the narrator recalls answered Kasravi's question, "Is it really that when a man sees a women in his dreams that he has fallen in love with her?" with an affirmative, the first episode of its plot the recollection of the narrator encountering the woman of his dreams in waking life and falling madly in love with her. The woman that the narrator falls in love with, however, is described as an "angel" who appears to him in the form of a revelation. Like Kasravi, Hedayat too reflected upon the truth of the subject of nationhood and the passion of the subject for that truth in the context, albeit, of the end of the prophetic tradition and the end of truth. Thus, in contrast to Kasravi who encountered the facticity of the facts of history as is in the 1946 Azarbaijan Crisis, Hedayat, five years prior, meditated upon the facticity of the fact of Iran as the condition of possibility of the subject of nationhood. Houra Yavari describes *Blind Owl*, to this end, as a "uniquely beautiful elegy on a nation's collectively held dream."[94]

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[93] Hedayat, 11.

[94] Houra Yavari, "The Blind Owl: Present in the Past or Story of a Dream," in *Sadeq Hedayat: His Work and his Wondrous World* ed. Homa Katouzian (London: Routledge, 2008), 54.

III. *Blind Owl* and the Crisis of Faith in the World

I have suggested that in historical and literary criticism, the crisis of legitimacy in contemporary Iran and the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction in print culture that enlisted readers into histories of truth and enacted them as subjects of truth was reconstituted in contestation over the fictiveness and historicity of the subject of nationhood. I have claimed that Hedayat's conception of the *barzakh* as a dreaming soul-sleep made legible the source of that crisis that Kasravi was forced to encounter in the irredentist struggle in Azarbaijan in 1946. In this section, I offer an interpretive reconstruction of *Blind Owl* that is centered on the *barzakh* to theorize the historicity of mediation as an externalization of a legitimation crisis conceived as a loss of faith in the world. In other words, in my interpretive reconstruction of *Blind Owl*, I am establishing at the outset of the longer history of the relationship between propaganda, mediation and reality an account of the problematic of mediation that Hedayat fixated upon as an irresolvable problem. Insofar as deliberation presupposes agreement to a conception of reality, in *Blind Owl*, Hedayat reflected upon the possibility that the reality of Iran can be poetically made anew.

Sitting in solitude in his room, an anonymous protagonist looked upon his owl-like shadow cast upon the wall and wrote, in the first sentence following the exposition, that he writes "for one reason and one reason only, to introduce myself to my shadow."[95] Resonant with the Parable of the Cave in Plato's *Republic*, the "blind owl" is like the cave-dwellers who cannot distinguish the phenomena of things in the world from the ideal form of which they are imitations. However, in the absence of a philosopher to unshackle him and show them the light, the blind owl is suspended in the liminal and mediated state between waking life and sleep prior to writing; and that absence is not indicative of the fact that there are no philosophers but that there is no truth. In search of a

[95] Hedayat, 10.

world lost, the blind owl attempts to communicate an incommunicable experience to himself – and his readers – of a "supernatural event" that he had experienced not long prior. The supernatural event that the blind owl recalled was of a time when he had, on the one hand, experienced an otherworldly revelation, and, on the other hand, encountered the limit of grasping its idea.

I will now proceed with a synopsis of the notoriously inscrutable plot of *Blind Owl*. The blind owl made an income illustrating an image of a woman leaning over a rivulet with lilac in hand towards a yogi-like man sitting beneath a cypress tree. He sent the pen-cases to an uncle in Bombay who sold them and returned to him a portion of the profits. One day, his uncle surprised him with a visit. On seeking out libations, he caught sight outside his dwelling the image he had illustrated manifest outside and fell in love with the "angel" that he had imagined. The blind owl spent his days in a quest for the woman of his dreams to no avail until he found her on his doorstop. She entered his home and laid on her bed. He poured wine into her mouth and she died. He desperately attempted to illustrate her form as is to animate her as he had before, but he could not. He hacked her body into pieces, put her limbs in a suitcase, and with the aid of a hunchback, transported her to the ancient city of Rayy, a capital of Iran in its "golden age," and buried her. He returned home and fell into an opium-induced sleep to escape the nightmare that had transpired.

Instead of falling asleep, the blind owl awakened into a second world; however, if in the first world, he imagined the idea of the woman of his dreams that when embodied he could not know in its ideal form, in the second world, the embodiment of the ideal he had imagined before was in the world and for that reason not the ideal in his dreams. In terms of setting, character, and plot, the new world is an uncanny imitation of the first world. However, if in the first world, the blind owl resided on the outskirts of the city of Rayy, he now lives in the city with a caretaker and his wife who he refers to as the "harlot." The blind owl is consistently paranoid that his wife is

sleeping with other men and obsesses over her refusal to sleep with him. He despises the city and its residents and, in a manic episode, believes he is awake among the somnambulant rabble. Suspicious that a vendor of trinkets is sleeping with his wife, the blind owl disguises himself in his image and seduces her. She draws blood from lip. He "accidentally" murders her. He looks upon himself in a mirror in her bedroom and sees that he has become the rabble and awakens again.

How does the plot above fit into the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction in print culture and amid the legitimation crisis and the broader crisis of faith in the world? To provide insight into an answer to that question, I will first reflect upon the temporality of the novel. The narrative arc of *Blind Owl* is situated firmly within the linear, homogenous time of national historiography: the golden age of Iran's past, the dark ages of the Arab conquests, and the renaissance that was to come. In both worlds, the blind owl is living in and about the city of Rayy, the capital of the Seljuk Empire in the eleventh-century. In the second world, he writes, "…[t]hey have named [the city] the bride of the world…a city that is the biggest city in the world that is accounted for…."[96] Therein, Rayy is a "living, breathing city."[97] In the first world, Rayy is demolished and dilapidated. The city is a ghost town. The *topos* of the golden age in the life of the past is depicted in a state of decline; its dark age, the life of the present, its continuation. The first world is the post-apocalyptic future of the second; the second a past that foreshadows the decay and demise of the first. There is no hope for a renaissance to come. There is only crisis.

The source of the loss of faith in the world, however, lies in-between the first and second worlds: it is the third world of the *barzakh*, the condition of the soul that is dreaming in its sleep. The blind owl is consistently perplexed by the question of what time it was that he was living.

[96] Hedayat, 51.

[97] Hedayat, 51.

When the blind owl first saw his illustration manifest outside his bedroom window it was "like a scene in an opiate-induced dream."[98] When she arrived at his doorstop, he described it as "when a person has a dream and knows that he is asleep, and wants to awake but cannot."[99] Thus, even as the blind owl fell to sleep and awakened in cycles, the condition of his existence was a dream. When he buried the body of the woman of his dreams, he experienced a crisis of faith in the world when the hunchback gifted him a vase from the eleventh-century with her face inscribed upon it. Her form was not only suspended in life and the hereafter but in time past and time present. Indicated was that the order of secular time in *Blind Owl* or the time of the clock and the calendar as the waking life of those who share the same reality did not provide its characters a firm ground.

Thus, the *barzakh* is figured in *Blind Owl* as well as the place of narration in a way that undercuts Kasravi's project to think the life of Iran as an extension of the land. In the first world, the narrator lived "outside of the city, in a quiet and calm area away from the bustle and tumult of the eventful life of the people – its surroundings are thoroughly separated, its whereabouts in shambles."[100] Near a "trench," "there is a clay house in sight, and beyond that the city begins."[101] In the second world, his room is "a dark closet and [sic] two doorways to the outside to the world of the rabble."[102] "One of those doors is faced towards and opens to our yard and the other to the alley…."[103] However, when the blind owl awakened from the second world, he was in the bedroom

[98] Hedayat, 16.

[99] Hedayat, 22.

[100] Hedayat, 12.

[101] Hedayat, 12.

[102] Hedayat, 51.

[103] Hedayat, 51.

of the first world and yet "opens the window facing the alleyway outside his window…."[104] The mis-en-scene of the setting of the place of narration is inhabited by things from both worlds. Furthermore, on a grander scale, while the blind owl lives in and about Rayy, the geography of Iran in the golden age of the past and the dark age of the present was permanently unsettled.

In suppressing the comatose and mediated condition between sleep and waking life, the blind owl displaced that condition onto the other characters that populated his world to safeguard and to justify his own status as exceptionally awake in relation to the somnambulant rabble and in so doing could not accommodate the humanity of others, a move that Kasravi would also make in denying the Azeris their right to self-determination. In the second world, the blind owl embarked upon a quest for truth in which he gradually became convinced of his own omniscience. "I had become a God," he wrote at the culminating endpoint of his own quest for truth, "I was even greater than God."[105] In contrast to his own state of absolute and disembodied wakefulness, he described his wife, "the harlot," as a "sensual woman," her love "inseparable from dirt and death."[106] Once convinced that he had ascended to the status of the intelligent knower of his reality and the reality of others, he took his wife's life. Meditating upon the nightmare he had experienced on waking up, he wrote that "[he] was not taught to look at the night and to be pleased with it."[107]

Blind Owl reconceived the process of enlightenment in which the prophets within the tradition of prophetology ostensibly ascended to a higher plane of visionary knowledge to discern waking life from dreams as the process of enlightenment that the *munavvar al-fekran* had claimed

[104] Hedayat, 120.

[105] Hedayat, 120.

[106] Hedayat, 61

[107] Hedayat, 68.

to have underwent as the holders of authority. Prior to the moment when the blind owl believed that he was "greater than God," he first escaped into his dreams to escape worldly existence:

> As the lids of my eyes gradually shut, a disappearing world was inscribed before them. A world that I myself had made to occur, and made to conform to my own thoughts and my own perceptions. By all means, it was much more real and much more natural than my waking life. It was as if no kind of reality existed in my thoughts and in my imagination; space and time had given up their effects…and after I would awaken, in that very instant I still doubted my own existence, uninformed of my own space, and my own time.[108]

The blind owl caught sight of the contingency of the spatial and temporal organization of the world in the time of dreams such that on waking up he was not comforted by the semblance of order. The fictive world conjured by his own thoughts and perceptions affected him more than reality. Furthermore, the blind owl was only comforted that he was because he thought after forgetting the awareness that he had attained in his dreams that what he was and what he thought was not constituted upon a spatial and temporal order that assuaged his doubt about the facts of life.

In the next stage of his process of enlightenment, the blind owl began to experience visions in waking life, the dreams that before were merely parenthetically woven into the fabric of existence. However, he was haunted by the realization that the daydream he was experiencing was not his own but the enactment of a dream and its enforcement in waking life by the tyranny of the rabble:

> I saw that pain and suffering have an essence yet it was emptied of all substance and meaning — in the midst of the rabble I had become an unknown and unrecognizable species, such that before they had forgotten that I was part of their world. The thing that was terrifying was that I would sense that I am neither living nor alive, only as a walking dead that neither had a relationship with the world of the living and neither did I make use of the comfort and forgetfulness of death.

The blind owl was caught in-between the solitude of his own egocentric fever dream and a social and historical reality or a waking life constituted by others in which his dreams were parentheses. Thus, even as he lived in the world through the mediation of his own fictive conception of reality, he was the "walking dead" because his existence was alienated to the reality of those about him.

[108] Hedayat, 86.

He thereafter took exit from the anonymity and unintelligibility of his own ego when he experienced thereafter the manic episode in which he came to believe that he was enlightened.

When the blind owl stared at himself in the mirror after he had taken his wife's life, he had seen that though he had believed that he had ascended to a higher plane of visionary knowledge, he had become the rabble; and yet, he proposed therein that the lesson he had learned was that in response to the crisis of faith about waking life, he had to recover that faith with stories and tales:

> Is it that I am a discrete and defined creature? I do not know – yet just now that I looked into the mirror I did not know myself. No, that "I" of the past has died, it has disintegrated, yet there no obstacle or barrier exists between us. I have to narrate my own story, yet I do not know from where I ought to begin – from the beginning to the end of my life there are only stories and tales. I have to squeeze this bundle of grapes, and pour its juice, spoonful by spoonful, down the parched throat of this old shadow.[109]

Though to the chagrin of his readers, Hedayat did not provide an answer to the problem that the space and time of the *barzakh* posed in *Blind Owl*, he had posed the *barzakh* as a question to the intellectuals who were enlisting readers into histories of truth and enacting them as its subjects: what good is a history as it really happened for a subject whose life is the embodiment of a dream? In making legible the relationship of legitimacy, authority, and truth, Hedayat annihilated the foundations of claims about the social and historical reality of Iran and opened to further reflection the relationship between poetic world-makings and readers who interpreted the world as a dream.

By situating *Blind Owl* in the context of the legitimation crisis in contemporary Iran and in literary and historical critical debates about the truth of the subject of nationhood, I provided an interpretive reconstruction of Hedayat's novel that was centered on the concept of the *barzakh*. I examined and elaborated upon the implications of centering the *barzakh* as a condition of possibility for the spatial and temporal order of the world by demonstrating how, internal to *Blind Owl*, resolutely defined conceptions of the temporal horizon of the world, its spatial boundaries,

[109] Hedayat, 49.

and the intellectual development of the characters are permanently unsettled by irresoluteness. Coeval with the publication of *Blind Owl* in 1941, Shi'a intellectuals began to publish newspapers in which they attempted to revive and to re-enact the prophetic tradition with *tabligh* or propaganda in direct contest with the Marxist-Leninists of the Tudeh Communist Party who were actively present in high schools and universities to recruit students to the Party. In what follows, I theorize the propaganda of Shi's intellectuals as a mode of communication that was attempting to restore faith in the world and to dream it anew as part of my more general inquiry as to if deliberation is an adequate concept for conceptualizing communication during a crisis of legitimacy.

IV. Propaganda after Prophecy

I will now demonstrate that during the golden age of print, from 1941 when Reza Shah was forced to abdicate the throne to 1953 when the UK and the US engineered a coup against the democratically-elected Prime Minister Muhammad Mussadeq, Shi'a Muslim intellectuals conceived propaganda or *tabligh* as a mode of communication that was able to restore faith in the world in response to a legitimation crisis and within the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction. I argue that Shi'a Muslim intellectuals affirmed the conception of mediation that Hedayat made legible as the source of a legitimation crisis in *Blind Owl* as a point-of-departure to reimagine and to reconstitute the spatial and temporal organization of the subject of nationhood. I thus theorize what *tabligh* was doing herein by reflecting upon what the *barzakh* made possible. Conceiving propaganda as the revival and re-enactment of the prophetic tradition, Shi'a Muslim intellectuals did not suture their conception of the life of Iran to a pre-conception of the land that unified it. Insofar as propaganda enlisted readers into an unsanctioned history of the subject of nationhood, it organized the life of the body into an imagined world independent of the state.

In *Danesh-Amuz* (*Student*) and *A'ine Islam* (*The Ethos of Islam*), two prominent Shi'a Muslim intellectuals posed a direct relationship between prophetic activity and world-making. First, they diagnosed the foundation of the organization of the political body in the Qur'an. In October/November 1941 in *Danesh-Amuz* (*Student*), Sayyed Sabooh Hussein diagnosed the cause of disunity in the decline of the status of the Qur'an among Iranians, claiming specifically, "In the time when we placed the teachings of the Qur'an behind us, we weakened the foundations of society, and we disintegrated its body."[110] Similarly, the cleric, orator, and writer Husseinali Rashed published a two-part essay, "The Unity of Society," in *A'ine Islam (The Ethos of Islam*) in late March 1944, claiming that "the majority of the people of this land, who have worshipped Islam and have worshipped God, have adhered to the original dictates recited in the Noble Qur'an."[111] In other words, in the wake of the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction, Hussein claimed that the Qur'an was decentered and as a result the political community was disintegrated whereas Rashed claimed that a political community centered around the Qur'an still remained.

Second, Hussein and Rashed claimed that since the antidote to the disorganization of the political body was a return to the foundations of the Qur'an, they were to revive and to re-enact the prophetic tradition to organize the political body anew. Like the blind owl who when at the height of his mania believed that he was God, Hussein claimed that he and his cohort were like "the prophets" who "determine specific deceptions to the weak and feeble people who cannot rely on their own faculty and strength…."[112] Though in 1941, Hussein gestured to the necessity of prophetic activity, Rashed concluded in 1944 with an enthusiastic note pertaining to the intentions

[110] Sayyad Sabooh Husseini, "*Che Shod va Che Bayad Kard*," *Danesh-amuz*, October/November 1941, 15.

[111] Husseinali Rashed, "*Hamahangi-e Ijtima'*," *Ayin-e Islam*, March 21, 1944, 6.

[112] Sayyad Sabooh Husseini, "*Che Shod va Che Bayad Kard*," *Danesh-amuz*, October/November 1941, 13.

of the Islamic Propaganda Center in Qom to "[publish] a large newspaper by the name of *Nur-e Danesh* (*The Light of Knowing*) that in all respects, even in its outward form, in the conditions of its production, its paper, its engravings, and especially the reach of its circulation, has not, to date, been seen in Iran."[113] However, Hussein and Rashed could not claim that they were the same as Muhammad. They rather claimed a relationship of analogy between prophecy and propaganda such that after prophecy, propaganda was the rule and not the exception of political activity.

What, then, was propaganda? In 1947, in the second issue of *Nur-e Danesh*, the editorial board expressed its intentions of eventually publishing a book-length manuscript on "the important issue of religious propaganda."[114] First, the editorial board claimed that "if we were to look with detail at a person's life from the beginning until the end, we will see that this life is comprised of agreements to a series of disparate impressions (*talghin-at*) that they have received from every which way, and these suggestions have disparate influences on their soul and on their life."[115] *Tabligh*, they claimed, is "comprised of words and writings and images that draws upon the rules of impressionability" and the difference between *tabligh* and *talghin* is that the former is intentional, the latter accidental.[116] The editors claimed that in the decades prior during the legitimation crisis, "the social activists and guides and teachers…were not aware of this important technology and even if they utilized it from time to time, they did not do so programmatically and with discipline."[117] Thus, what the editors of *Nur-e Danesh* were confronting was the relationship

[113] Rashed, March 24, 1944, 8.

[114] "*Tabligh-e Dini*," *Nur-e Danesh*, 1947, 243.

[115] "*Tabligh-e Dini*," 243.

[116] "*Tabligh-e Dini*," 243.

[117] "*Tabligh-e Dini*," 244

between *talghin* and the *barzakh* at the heart of a legitimation crisis when faith in the world is lost and in which *tabligh* had the potential of giving an impression to readers that restored their faith.

Thus, second, in claiming that the Prophet Muhammad was the original and exemplar propagandist in world history, the editorial board had implied that after the Seal of Prophecy was closed, they had become suspended in a world in which the relationship between worldly impressions and other-worldly truths was severed. "It can definitely be stated that the first person who utilized propaganda with care was the Prophet of Islam" since he communicated the "true word" and "true deed" to others to make his revelations "worldly."[118] However, the editorial board was also aware that in relation to the history of the prophetic tradition and its reconstitution in the legitimation crisis that Hedayat made legible in *Blind Owl*, they were not masters of rhetoric. Thus, in directly answering the question, "How does propaganda work?," they admitted that the propagandist cannot ensure the efficacy of propagandizing since "if only the soul of [the people] is ready for the reception of the good word they will accept it."[119] In relinquishing any semblance of self-mastery in their conception of propagandizing, the editorial board framed what it was doing in a way that affirmed the legitimation crisis as a problem that they could not resolve.

The propagandists implied that the *barzakh* or the mediated relationship to reality and not the *alam al-mithal* or the immediate relationship to it was the condition of intellection since only the prophets could ostensibly see and speak the truth in a way that was immediate. The propagandists were then also implicated by their own conception of life as constituted by "a series of disparate impressions" that are not immediately apparent for their reality or their fictiveness and are not immediately apparent as reflections or representations of the truth of reality. However, in

[118] "*Tabligh-e Dini*," *Nur-e Danesh*, 1947, 245.

[119] "*Tabligh-e Dini*," 251

contrast to Kasravi who conflated the representation of history with the manufacturing of history, the propagandists conceived propaganda as a poetic world-making activity that actively and intentionally gave the impression of a world that promised unity and that had a reason to be. Furthermore, in contrast to Kasravi who indirectly addressed lives unified by the land of Iran and who insisted that they agree to work with one another, the propagandists addressed an imaginary public that was in formation and offered an invitation to accept the impression they suggested; and, on the premise that the *barzakh* was the condition of intellection, they were not obliged to the land and did not agree to it as constitutive of the ideal and objective of deliberative communication.

Shi'a Muslims intellectuals actively propagandized impressions that sought to restore faith in the unity of a pan-Islamic political community in a demonstration of what the editorial board of *Nur-e Danesh* suggested ought to be done and with awareness of the impossibility of completely reviving and re-enacting the prophetic tradition. In December 1949 in *Musalmemin* (*Muslims*), Sadr Shirazi wrote, "The Muslim Bloc," in which he envisioned the emergence of a trans-national community. Shirazi claimed that "self-becoming individuals who lean on the guidance of the super-natural" were in need of good leadership "as a means of avoiding all kinds of dangers."[120] "This newspaper," he wrote, "is published with the purpose of making this path visible, its essential objective is for the uplifting of Muslims and for their renewed greatness."[121] Shirazi located the place of truth in the domain of the "super-natural" and was speaking to a condition in which the *barzakh* was constitutive of intellection. In that condition, the relation of power between the propagandist and its addressee was shaped by impressions and suggestions, rather than reason and

[120] "*Boluk-e Musalmemin*," *Musalmemin*, December 1949, 3

[121] "*Boluk-e Musalmemin*," 4.

force. In other words, the propagandist was not attempting to deceive with a false representation; they were "making this path visible" as a suggestion to readers who were ready to embark upon it.

From 1949 to 1952, religious intellectuals enlisted propagandizing activity to poetically fashion a world constituted upon the *barzakh*. In an April/May 1951 issue of *Ghanj-e Shayegan* (*The Treasure of Riches*), Sayyed Gholemrza Sa'idi claimed that in contrast the European nationalism and the idolatry of *khun* (blood) and *vatan* (homeland), Islamic internationalism:

> …comes into being by way of an association of society that is unified in relation to beliefs, thoughts, feelings, purposes, and practices, and thus, a nation (*mellat*) of Muslims knows each individual as its member by virtue of their becoming Muslim, meaning that they have accepted the beliefs and thoughts of Islam, and shared in those sentiments and practices, regardless of from what ethnicity they are, or what blood courses through them, whether they are black Africans, white-skinned Europeans, yellow, red, Japanese, Russian or American….[122]

Sa'idi enlisted his readers into a history of truth and enacted them as subjects of truth by manifesting a political community that was already in formation, instead of enforcing its existence. Islam, he suggested, rendered visible the facticity of the facts of the land and the life of Iran and created a space from which they could be evaluated as impressions and suggestions among others. He was thus not engaging in a game of giving and asking for reasons to deliberate with others since he refused to beg the land and life of Iran as a question in his conception of the space and time of that game; instead, he was actively propagandizing a conception of the constitution of the spatial and temporal organization of the place in which the practice of deliberation took place.

In this context, propaganda is rendered legible as a conceptually prior activity than practical deliberation since the latter begged the question of a space and time while the latter enacted it. In "The Median Bloc" in the May 1952 issue of *Ghanj-e Shayegan*, M. B. Razavi incorporated a map

[122] Sa'idi, 12.

of the world that Sa'idi had referred to, inscribing the words, "the median bloc: the capital of world evolution," and thus exemplifying the relationship between the *barzakh* and *tabligh* [123]

Razavi's conception of the Islamic international was not a lie intended to deceive readers as such. Insofar as the concept of deception rests upon a naturalized conception of social and historical reality, to evaluate the image above as a lie would be ignore the stakes of the legitimation crisis. Just as Kasravi encountered the facticity of the facts of the land and life of Iran in the Azeri's struggle for independence, Razavi affirmed facticity to dream the land and life of Iran anew. His claim that the median bloc was the capital of world evolution, moreover, rested upon a prior claim that what was exceptional about Iran was that Iranians had lost faith in the world, and for that reason were uniquely positioned to recover that faith and to reenact the subject of nationhood.

I have thus examined religious propaganda during the golden age of print in the context of the legitimation crisis in contemporary Iran and in the context of the reconstitution of the dispersion of sources and sites of veridiction in debate about the historicity and fictiveness of the subject of nationhood. In *Blind Owl*, Hedayat rendered the legitimation crisis conceived as a loss of faith in the world legible. I theorized the relationship between propaganda and mediation herein

[123] M. B. Razavi, "*Boluk-e Miyane*," *Ghanj-e Shayegan*, May 1952, 22.

as an attempt to provide an answer the problem that the *barzakh* posed. When Shi'a Muslim intellectuals framed their propagandizing as the revival and re-enactment of the prophetic tradition, they reconceived truth-telling as implicated by the *barzakh*, the condition of being after prophecy. Insofar as the *barzakh* was the condition of being in the world, *tabligh* was conceived as the rule and not the exception of political activity since absent a relation of immediacy to the truth, propagandists were all too aware that prior to entering a pre-constituted space of giving and asking for reasons within which deliberation is the organizing concept, they had to make that space anew. They justified their propagandizing with a leap of faith in the dream of a unified political subject.

V. Conclusion

Three months after Shakibnia published "The Median Bloc" in *Ghanj-e Shayegan*, in *L'Observateur* on August 14, 1952, the historian and anthropologist Alfred Sauvy published, "Three Worlds, One Planet," in which he claimed that his readers had forgotten the existence of a Third World in addition to the First and Second Worlds, that is "more important, and in short, the first in respect to time." [124] Sauvy observed that the Third World had entered a "new phase" of economic and technological advancement. "[In] the end," he stated, "this ignored, exploited, scorned Third World, akin to the Third Estate, wants to become something too."[125] In the meanwhile, the democratically-elected Prime Minister Muhammad Mussadeq spearheaded a campaign to nationalize Iran's oil to which, in response, the UK and the US swiftly intervened. Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi ascended to power thereafter and severely undermined the constitutional checks-and-balances that were codified in the Constitutional Revolution. 1953 would not be forgotten and would continue to haunt Muhammad Reza Shah's time in power. To

[124] Alfred Sauvy, "Trois Mondes, Une Planete," in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 12 (1986), 81.

[125] Sauvy, 83.

his many critics, he did not have a legitimate claim to authority, and what that legitimation crisis implied was not merely a lack of trust in the institution of monarchy but a lack of faith in its world.

In this chapter, I have examined a context when and where deliberation does not adequately help to conceptualize what communication was doing at the heart of a crisis of legitimacy. I first claimed that the legitimation crisis in contemporary Iran was broadly conceived as a loss of faith in the world and the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction in which claims about the truth of reality were made. I then demonstrated that the legitimation crisis was reconstituted in debate about the historicity and fictiveness of the truth of the subject of nationhood: in contrast to Kasravi who wrote history as it really happened to enact a political subject as it ought to be, Hedayat, who lost faith in the truth of the subject of nationhood, conceded that the world he believed in was a dream. I elaborated the consequences of that conclusion in an explication of *Blind Owl* where I theorized temporal horizons, spatial boundaries, and intellectual development absent a grounding in truth. I then offered an account of how propaganda works by considering what mediation makes possible to argue that propaganda that operates as to restore the spatial and temporal constitution of the world is a conceptually prior activity to deliberation that begs the world as a question.

As a contribution to political theory, this chapter is claiming that deliberative democratic theory rests upon a propagandic conception of social and historical reality, for better and for worse. I do not propose, however, that what that indicates or implies is that deliberative theory rests upon a lie nor do I propose that deliberative theory functions through an a priori act of self-deception since both of those claims would be to presuppose a conception of social and historical reality that is in formation. I propose that deliberative theory is estranged from the immediate conception of social and historical reality that the space of giving and asking for reasons ostensibly rests upon, rendering agreement to that conception of reality into a leap of faith among its participants. I have

elaborated both the limits and the possibilities of rethinking propaganda as the rule of political activity by examining its employment in the service of a critique of ethno-nationalism. In direct opposition to the Pahlavi state under the reign of Reza Shah which conceived the Iranian political community as constituted upon blood and soil, religious propagandists indexed intellection to the *barzakh* to publicize an unsanctioned and more capacious conception of political space.

In the chapters that follow, I trace the contemporary history of the reception of the *barzakh* as a concept that refers to the mediated condition of being in the world and as part of an alternative narrative of modernity in which modernity is conceived as the culmination of the end of prophecy. Whereas in this chapter, I argued that propaganda conceived as poetic world-making is a conceptually prior activity to deliberation and theorized propaganda as a mode of communication that restored faith in the world and enacted the world anew, in the chapter that follows, I theorize propaganda as a mode of communication that restores faith in the idea of the popular voice. Specifically, I ask if universal silence an adequate concept for theorizing the popular voice during a crisis of legitimacy when the idea of the people is open to contestation. I argue that propagandizing about what I will theorize as the silence of the people is a conceptually prior activity to claims about and appeals to the people as a source of legitimacy for popular sovereignty. I do so by theorizing the aural ecology of the popular voice in contemporary Iran as an externalization of the mediated condition of the *barzakh*, the condition of being after prophecy.

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Chapter II

Things Unheard

Popular Silence and the Popular Voice in Revolutionary Iran, 1953-1979

In 1953 after the United Kingdom and the United States successfully engineered a coup against the democratically-elected Prime Minister Muhammad Mussadeq, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi assumed power and quickly began to eradicate the constitutional checks-and-balances against the excesses of monarchical rule that were codified in the 1906 Constitutional Revolution.[126] In 1963, the Pahlavi state initiated The Revolution of the Shah and the People or more popularly the White Revolution as part of the politics of containment of the Cold War, its primary objective to redistribute land in the countryside to deter peasants from aligning with Marxist-Leninism. The Pahlavi state was at pains to win popular support for the White Revolution and for itself. In the next fifteen years, the state was not able to resolve the legitimation crisis that plagued it, notwithstanding its deployment of the strong arm of the state to suppress dissent and win support. In late 1978, nearly ten percent of the population of Iran participated in demonstrations against Muhammad Reza who had come to be perceived as an embodiment of the problems Iranians faced. In retrospect, the 1979 Revolution is most commonly known as the Islamic Revolution. However, the politics of naming is implicated by a crisis of legitimacy concerning the voice of the revolution.

At the outset of Book II of *The Social Contract*, Jean Jacque-Rousseau, in explaining that sovereignty cannot be transferred because it is the exercise of the general will, noted that when the sovereign authority or the people agrees to a chief's orders is that order an act of the general will. In contrast to the plurality of voices that express a desire for how things ought to be, Rousseau

[126] For a history of the 1953 Coup, see Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations* (New York: The New Press, 2013). For more scholarship on the Coup, see *Mohammad Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* ed. Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

conceived the general will as identical interests in relation to which each individual becomes a people. Yet, Rousseau innovated the concept of the general will as an idea unintelligible to its willing members and he conceived its unintelligibility with a metaphor drawn from the conceptual language of audition. "In such a case," Rousseau explained, "the universal silence implies that the people has consented."[127] The theme of silence appears again when later Rousseau strikes an equivalence between "tacit consent" and "silence."[128] Silence is indicative of the absence of voice whereby that absence is the same as a sign for consent. Thus, in *The Social Contract*, Rousseau lent an ear to silence as a universal that was prior to the moment of particularity and that safeguarded the ideal of a unified voice in distinction from the phenomenon of its plurality.

Silence is both the domain that safeguards the idea of the people and is a limit to its conception insofar as silence is inaudible and unintelligible to the individuals who constitute a people in relation to it. The theme of silence and its problematic in *The Social Contract* is at the heart of contemporary debate on the social and historical phenomenon of "populism," a mercurial term that refers to political leaders, organizations, or movements that are, broadly conceived, for the people. In a reflection upon the "disdainful rejection" of populism in contemporary life, Ernesto Laclau proposes that at stake is "the dismissal of politics *tout court*, and the assertion that the management of community is a concern of an administrative power whose source of legitimacy is a proper knowledge of what a 'good' community is."[129] Put another way, Laclau proposes that the rejection of populism is premised on the idea that experts are uniquely positioned to make authoritative claims as to what the silence of the people is and ought to be to which he forwards a

[127] Jean-Jacque Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract* trans. Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 64.

[128] Rousseau, 121.

[129] Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), x.

method of theorizing populism as a moment when the constitutive groundwork of the rule of the people or democracy is democratized in demands organized in the name of the people.[130]

Observers of populist leaders, organizations, and movements are rightfully weary of romanticizing populism as such. For example, the political theorist Jason Frank has theorized "constituent moments" when "the underauthorized...seize the mantle of authorization, changing the inherited rules of authorization in the process" by way of an excavation of the archive of the American Revolution and its afterlives, suggesting to his audiences present to take a lesson from the errors of the past and abandon the project of speaking for the authentic voice of the people.[131] Frank does not necessarily abandon authenticity, however; he displaces its idea into the horizon, framing critical self-reflexivity as a process of sacrificing this-worldly invocations of the popular voice on the altar of a more capacious idea of a popular voice that cannot be grasped as a totality. In the meanwhile, then, authenticity does not disappear as a problem that has been resolved since the moment when a people become a people it reckons with the universal of its own particularity and the particularity of the concept of the universal of which it is apparently a manifestation. In other words, in the appeal to abandon a politics of authenticity, a universal is begged as a question.

The political theorist Jane Anna Gordon has noted that Rousseau "gave little account…of how a society with norms of legitimacy could emerge out of contexts of illegitimacy," drawing upon the Martinician postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon's claim that "[d]ecolonization unites the people by a decision to 'remove from it its heterogeneity,' to unity on a national, sometimes racial,

[130] Laclau, x.

[131] Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 8.

basis." [132] Fanon examined the theme and problematic of silence as a metaphor for the tacit consent of the colonized to sovereign authority during a crisis of legitimacy. In listening to *Radio Algier* during the War of Independence, "[h]aving a radio meant paying one's tax to the nation, buying the right of entry into an assembled people" and yet also of "accepting domination" and exhibiting a desire "to live on good terms with oppression."[133] In listening to *The Voice of Fighting Algeria*, the colonized "experienced and concretely discovered the existence of voices other than the voices of the dominator which formerly had been immeasurably amplified because of his own silence."[134] Since *The Voice of Fighting Algeria* rendered identical "the voice of the Revolution with the fundamental truth of the nation," the colonized were "opened up [to] limitless horizons."[135]

In this chapter, I take a cue from Fanon's research on radio in revolutionary Algeria to ask if universal silence is an adequate concept for theorizing the popular voice in a crisis of legitimacy. In the previous chapter, I argued that propaganda is a conceptually prior activity to deliberation insofar as the former enacts the social and historical reality that the latter begs as a question by theorizing propaganda as a mode of communication that restores faith in the world and enacts it anew; in this chapter, I develop upon that premise to theorize propaganda as a mode of communication that restores faith in the idea of the people or what I refer to hereafter as popular silence that invocations of the popular voice beg as a question. In so doing, I contribute to scholarship in contemporary political theory on whether populism has a material and physical referent that actually exists by examining a context in which claims to authenticity served as a

[132] Jane Anna Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau through Fanon* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014, 133-140.

[133] Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 92.

[134] Ibid., 95.

[135] Ibid., 97.

point-of-departure from which norms of legitimacy emerged from out of a context of illegitimacy. I claim that during a legitimation crisis when sources and sites of veridiction are dispersed, political subjects are constituted as peoples through different experiences of the silences that ground them.

In the decade leading to mass demonstrations in late 1978 that ended with Muhammad Reza Shah's departure, the end of the institution of monarchy, and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, police doing the biddings of the Pahlavi state used torture on Marxist-Leninist dissidents to force them to confess their allegiance with the interests of the state and propagandized forced confessions in print, on television, and on radio. In other words, the police operated as if the truth of the nation was dormant in the silence of the soul. In December 1978, the Pahlavi state enforced a curfew, its transgressors to be shot on sight. In response, at night, political dissidents gathered upon their rooftops and chanted, "*Allah-u Akbar*" or "God is Great." In contrast to the political logic of the forced confession, the practice of rooftop chanting was organized around a concept of silence, truth, and authenticity that was identical with being qua being and was for that reason neither audible nor intelligible to the many who invoked its name. Taking a cue from Charles Kurzman's description of the Revolution as "unthinkable," I claim that the practice of rooftop chanting enacted the specific truth of the revolutionary subject as inaudible.[136]

Though Kurzman describes the 1979 Revolution as an "unthinkable" revolution, he has left open for further consideration the historicity of unthinkability in Iran and specifically of the historicity of truth as a silent idea that cannot be heard. I theorize rooftop chanting as an example of propaganda about the silence of the people amid the legitimation crisis that Sadeq Hedayat made legible with the concept of the *barzakh* and situate the act of chanting within the broader reception of the narrative of decline in which in modernity propaganda was conceived as the revival and re-

[136] Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

enactment of the prophetic tradition. I claim that propaganda about popular silence was thus a conceptually prior activity to appeals to and claims about universal silence and of tacit consent to sovereign authority and propose that in the crisis of legitimacy propaganda about popular silence was a mode of communication that sought to restore the faith that was lost in idea of the people in 1953. In so doing, I reframe the terms of debate about the popular voice away from immediate moralization against popular movements that are constituted upon a claim to authenticity by considering a moment when that claim was in the service of the democratization of democracy.

In Chapter I, I theorized propaganda as a conceptually prior activity to deliberation in print culture and framed that history around the public spheres of letters. Here, I assess the aural ecology of populism and of the popular voice in contemporary Iran to attend to criticism of and accounts about how the popular was made audible and aurally experienced. Prior to examining the criticality of rooftop chanting contra the brutal history of tortured confessions, I establish that during the legitimation crisis beginning in late nineteenth Iran and the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction, the popular was contested on the terrain of audition coevally with and not by any means secondary in respect to literary culture to claim that sound and music therein were enlisting listeners into histories of truth and enacting them as subjects of truth. I then consider how the legitimation crisis on the terrain of audition was reconstituted in debate around diagnoses of state-engineered propaganda's capacity to dominate the sonic imagination and recover the reception of the *barzakh* as a problem in the ruminations of Ali Shariati, the ideologue of the 1979 Revolution. I follow by theorizing mediation, propaganda, and voice in Shariati's interruptive political oratory. Only after I have done the above do I consider the work of rooftop chanting in December 1978.

I. The Interruption of Universal Silence

I will now demonstrate that during the crisis of legitimacy that plagued Reza Shah's time in power, music and musical education appeared as a terrain of contestation about the logic of the movement of national history and specifically of the historical progress of the people of Iran when popular silence emerged as a politically significant terrain of contestation. The aural ecology of Iran was synchronically entangled with the dispersion of sites and sources of truth-telling in print culture. For example, in 1925 in "My Fatwa," a well-known critic of the modernization of Iran's musical traditions Abu al-Qasim Arif Qazvini argued against the westernization of Iran's traditional music, claiming that "music is the indicator of ethnicity and the educator and catalyst of national spirit."[137] In other words, Arif listened to music as the audible formation of the constitution of a people and as causally related to the silent movement of the spirit of their history. In the 1960s and 1970s when Muhammad Reza was in power, the Pahlavi state celebrated the diversity of musical experience to the extent that it did not enact a different conception of silence.

In 1924, just nine years after Germany had established a telegraph connection between Noen and Esfehan, the Ministry of War in Iran purchased a wireless telegraph from the Soviet Union. Reza Shah introduced the new wireless system on the day of his coronation. [138] In 1937, the state extended the frequency of a short-wave radio it had introduced in 1928 and by 1940 established Radio Iran, its first broadcast the national anthem. [139] In the early-twentieth century, moreover, the state spearheaded an effort to transform the revolutionary ballad (*tasnif*) into the patriotic anthem (*surud*). In the heyday of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 which culminated

[137] H. E. Chehabi, "From Revolutionary Tasnif to Patriotic Surud: Music and Nation-Building in Pre-World War II Iran," *Iran* 37 (1999), 150.

[138] Annabelle Sreberni-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 52.

[139] Ibid., 53.

with checks-and-balances on monarchical rule, the *tasnif* was instrumental to mobilizing support for the constitutional cause.[140] In contrast, the *surud* "exalted the land, history, and independence of Iran, execrated its enemies, and celebrated the Pahlavi monarchy and its achievements," with lyrics that expressed opposition to national humiliation.[141] Reza Shah instrumentalized the *surud* as "a vehicle was [sic] organic nationalism of the *Blut und Boden* (*khak u khun*) variety…."[142] The *tasnif* and *surud* contrasted, moreover, both in respect to the messages their lyrics expressed and in how they were formally organized in respect to Iranian and Western musical theory and practice.

The Pahlavi state under Reza Shah's helm passed a law in 1939 enforcing the standardization of "the principles and rules of the scales (i.e. major and minor keys) of Western music."[143] Jacque Attali observes that the principles and rules of the scales of Western music that Reza Shah enforced in contemporary Iran historically were constituted upon a "concept of representation [that] logically implies exchange and harmony" and betrayed "[a] will to construct a universal language operating on the same scale as the exchanges made by colonial expansion: music, a flexible code, was dreamed of as an instrument of world unification…."[144] Thus, the content of the patriotic anthem and the question of to whom and to what allegiance was pledged was meaningfully significant in relation to the formal unity of the song. In broadcasting the anthem, the state was not only enlisting listeners into a history of truth and enacting them as a subject of truth; it was, more pervasively, organizing a national audience under a concept of

[140] Chehabi, 144.

[141] Chehabi, 151.

[142] Chehabi, 151.

[143] Chehabi, 150.

[144] Jacque Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 92.

representation in which each part figured equally into a unified, homogeneous, and silent totality.[145]

Put another way, the Pahlavi state's enforcement of what Attali conceptualizes as a "universal language" in the order of music mapped a silent logic of harmony and exchange onto the terrain of the universal silence of Iranians and thereby served as the logical groundwork of the general will. In addition, music was enlisted to mobilize its listeners. The musician and musical critic Ali Naqi Vaziri, the most prominent advocate for the modernization of Iranian music during Reza Shah's time in power, conceived art as "a social and public school" and held musicians who did not structure their musical works to give expression to the march of progress responsible for the cause of Iran's backwardness.[146] Vaziri claimed that *avaz* or unmetered musical work inculcated in Iranians a melancholic and hopeless disposition because of the melancholy and hopelessness of its sound.[147] In *avaz*, Vaziri claimed that in the order of its logic the music was *yek-navakht* or monotonous in contrast to western music that was energetic and exciting.[148] Thus, Reza Shah and Vaziri attempted to enlist listeners into a unified, homogenous, and silent totality to move them on the premise that if musical education were effectively employed it could inculcate citizens who were attuned to and in step with the historical progress of Iran as conceived by the Pahlavi state.

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[145] For a more detailed history of music pedagogy in twentieth-century Iran, see Arya Bastaninezhad, "A Historical Overview of Iranian Musical Pedagogy (1905-2014)," *Austrian Journal of Music Education* 2 (2014).

[146] Ali-Naqi Vaziri, *Ta'limat-e Musiqi: Dastur-e Tar* (Tehran: Yasavuli, 1982), 48. Cited in Hamidreza Salehyar, "The Revival of Iranian Classical Music during the Second Pahlavi Period: The Influence of the Politics of 'Iranian-ness'" MA diss., University of Alberta, 2015, 47.

[147] Vaziri, "Dar Alam-i Musiqi va San'at," in *Musiqi Namih-e Vaziri: Majmu'ih-yi Asar'I Qalami va Guftar-I Ustad Ali-Naqi Vaziri* ed. Sayyid Ali-Reza Mir'alinaqi (Tehran: Mu'in, 1998), 77-79. Cited in Salehyar, 48.

[148] Vaziri, 256. Cited in Salehyar, 48.

The Pahlavi State and modernizing intellectuals like Vaziri who identified with its objective of assembling Iranians into a national audience and orchestrating their movement were unable to maintain their exclusive claim on the sources and sites of veridiction about the logic of history and the silence of the people. In 1941, after Reza Shah abdicated the throne, the legitimation crisis showed its face in the aural ecology of Tehran: the party organ of the Tudeh Communist Party published a call for a composer to write a *surud*, writing that "the anthem of this party should manifest the austerities, desires, excitements, and hopes of those who allure for freedom of Iran."[149] In a review of the anthem, the score was described as "filling the hearts with 'gratification' and qualities that could facilitate a decisive victory over 'social lethargy' and 'backwardness.'"[150] The reviewer's claim that the anthem filled the hearts of the audience is crucially significant if mindful that the heart is employed as a metaphor for the silence of the spirit of the listener. In other words, the engaged intellectuals of the Tudeh Communist Party were enlisting the anthem to enact a collective subject that was constituted upon a particular conception of a silence that moved them.

From the 1920s to 1940s, the legitimation crisis appeared on the terrain of the sonic imagination and the silent logic of historical progress. With musical education, rational authorities attempted to orchestrate the movement of history. Following the 1953 coup of Mussadeq, Muhammad Reza initiated the 1963 Revolution of the Shah and the People with the purpose of forcing Iranians to move in step with Europe as part of a logic of history that would culminate in the realization of an orderly state, its primary tactic the redistribution of land in the countryside as part of the geo-political strategy of containment against the threat of Marxist-Leninism.

[149] Chehabi, 153.

[150] Chehabi, 153.

Muhammad Reza also promoted the westernization of Iranian music towards that end. In 1964, the high-ranking Shi'a cleric Ruhollah Khomeini who was exiled for participating in riots and protests in the holy city of Qom against the 1963 Revolution and who would return in February 1979 to spearhead the Islamic Republic as an Ayatollah, claimed that westernized music in Iran "ensued 'from a colonized culture' and produced 'a colonized youth,'" claiming, in response, that "the road to reform in a country goes through its culture, so one has to start with cultural reform.'"[151] Like 'Arif, Khomeini heard music as the externalization of the spirit of the youth and perceived "westernized" music in a way that presupposed the wholly novel conception of popular silence.

In the 1960s, celebrity musicians preceded and arguably were pivotal for intellectuals in 1970s to command authority as voices that gave expression to the universal silence of Iranians. Though Muhammad Reza departed from Reza Shah's ethno-nationalism and was tolerant of the diversity of musical experience, on Radio Iran, he "promoted images of a 'modern,' fashionable, youthful and 'beautiful' population" by way of the newly emergent genre of *musiq-e pap* or pop music.[152] In 1969, the ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl observed that the "musical experience" of the resident of Tehran "reflects the character of the city, which is a mad mixture of traditional and recent, of old Middle Eastern and modern American, of conservative Islam and the atheistic avant-garde."[153] The pop artist was unwittingly empowered with the ability to give expression to the character of the city. For example, widely considered as the queen of Iranian pop, Googoosh rose to prominence as a celebrity musician and as a paradigm of modernized Iran when "a culture of

[151] Gay Brayley, "Hope, Fear and Dance Dance Dance: Popular Music in 1960s Iran," *Musicology Australia* 23 (2010), 215.

[152] Brayley, 207.

[153] Bruno Nettl, "Attitudes Towards Persian Music in Tehran, 1969," *The Music Quarterly* 56 (1970), 183.

celebrity, modelled on the celebrity cult of the West, was beginning to take hold of the public imagination in Iran."[154] The culture of celebrity "provided a welcome opportunity for the populace to choose from a list of 'candidates'" in "a system where people could not elect their ruler…."[155]

The Pahlavi state was ostensibly tolerant of musical diversity; however, in 1974, the Organization of National Intelligence and Security (SAVAK) conducted arrests of seven pop musicians. In 1972, Dariush who was one of the arrestees had modified the renowned poet Ahmad Shamlu's "The Fairies" into song. In the poem, a horseman comes across fairies on the roadside who are weeping. In response, he tells them that the sound of chains they are hearing are the sounds of slaves and when the sound falls to silence, they will have been freed. Though in the poem, the fairies are revealed as demons which the horseman overcomes to rejoice with the slaves, Dariush edited the poem so that it was a narrative about a horseman assuring the fairies of a future silence. In a recent interview with Farzaneh Hammasi, Dariush speculated that the SAVAK censored his song because it "will give the majority the message;" however, Hammasi proposes that Dariush had sung "The Fairies" in a melodic form that expressed to listeners melancholy and grief.[156] In other words, in his capacity as a celebrity musician, Dariush had given expression to the character of the city with a voice that notwithstanding what he said re-signified the silence of the people.

I have established the historical and theoretical backdrop of the appearance of the overarching crisis of legitimacy in Iran with respect to the logic of history and the silence of the people. Reza Shah assembled the people in in a unified, homogenous, silent totality as part of his ethno-racial project of nationalizing the spirit of Iran; in the meanwhile, modernizers attempted to

[154] Brayley, 214.

[155] Brayley, 214.

[156] Farzaneh Hemmasi, "Intimating Dissent: Popular Song, Poetry, and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Iran," *Ethnomusicology* 57 (2013), 70-3.

move Iranians so that they would arrive at the end of progress. Amid a crisis of legitimacy, contending authorities deployed music and musical education to enlist listeners into histories of progress and to enact them as different subjects of universal silence. Khomeini formulated a conception of "colonialism" that perceived the state and modernizers as foreign agents who were occupying the terrain of the silence of the people and filling their hearts. In the 1960s and 1970s, the younger Pahlavi tolerated musical diversity while promoting modern popular music. He opened a space for celebrity musicians to command the authority to express the character of Iran. Though Muhammad Reza tolerated diversity, he mobilized the police when pop musicians bypassed the censors by re-signifying the silence of the people as the future of their emancipation. As such, I have demonstrated that universal silence emerged as a contested terrain, lending itself to the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction about the silence of the people.

II. The Voice of Truth and the End of Prophecy

I now claim that the terrain of universal silence that was a site of contestation in music and musical education was reconstituted in the discourse of cultural authenticity. In 1967, the High Council of Culture and Arts, the state-sanctioned organization that was responsible for Iran's cultural policy, stated that "cultural authenticity (*esalat-e farhangi*) is the important element that reinforces the foundations of national unity…; national unity will become more consolidated [only] if it is based on self-awareness (*khod-agahi*) of cultural heritage."[157] The Pahlavi State was responding to a more general moment of public reflection about the authentic culture of Iranians among intellectuals who were bypassing the censors by indirectly questioning its legitimacy and who had been inspired by anti-colonial Third World movements looming in the background.[158]

[157] Negin Nabavi, "The Discourse of 'Authentic Culture' in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s," in *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran: A Critical Survey* ed. Negin Nabavi (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 95.

[158] Nabavi, 93.

Cultural authenticity was equated with universal silence and was located in the hearts of Iranians. In other words, when the Pahlavi State claimed that the authentic culture of Iran was monarchy, they were proposing that, notwithstanding the will of all, the general will bowed before the king. When intellectuals enlisted audiences into a different history of cultural authenticity and enacted them as different subjects of cultural authenticity, they rejected the legitimacy of the state.

After Muhammad Reza initiated the White Revolution in 1963, Shi'a Muslims who were committed to reforming Islam into a political ideology or "reformist" Shi'as emerged as the most vocal opposition to the monarchy, in part because the Pahlavi State had, since 1953, deployed the strong arm of the state to arrest and imprison its Marxist-Leninist opposition. In the 1960s and 1970s, rituals during the holy month of Muharram that were centered around the Imam Hussein who was killed by the Caliph Yazid in the Wars of Succession and whose martyrdom thereafter was configured as the historical origin of Shi'a Islam, were "sites for political expression" and "the most effective means by which religious opposition groups mobilized masses against the state."[159] Amid the "mad mixture" of sound in Tehran there appeared what the anthropologist Charles Hirschkind describes as an "ethical soundscape" when and where a subterranean audience was able to listen to Shi'as critical of the monarchy who slipped under the radars of the Pahlavi State.[160] Most notably, from exile, Ruhollah Khomeini spoke to his followers in Iran by way of cassette. The 1979 Revolution that haunts post-1953 Iran is often described as the "cassette revolution."

In the 1960s and 1970s, the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction in sonic landscapes occurred in tandem with the proliferation of the discourse of cultural authenticity. In

[159] Kamran Scot-Aghaei, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 73.

[160] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

what follows, I trace the reception and reconfiguration of the concept of the *barzakh* – the condition of being after prophecy that Hedayat rendered legible as a loss of faith in the world – in the political thought of the literary critic, short story writer, and essayist Jalal Al-e Ahmad and the charismatic orator and so-called ideologue of the 1979 Revolution of Iran Ali Shariati, each of whom were respectively the most popular intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s and each of whom reflected upon the relationship between cultural authenticity, the popular voice, and universal silence. I demonstrate that between 1961 and 1963, Al-e Ahmad, who popularized the concept of *gharbzadegi* or west-stricken-ness as a diagnosis of cultural colonialism, had a change of heart about the state's ability to dominate the sonic imagination of Iranians with state propaganda on the premise that the sound of the voice was not an immediate expression of the silence of the state. I then claim that Shariati did the work of theorizing the dynamic Al-e Ahmad gestured towards by suggesting that the voice was mediated by the *barzakh*, the condition of being after prophecy.

A. Jalal Al-e Ahmad and the Silence of the State

In 1961, Al-e Ahmad published the long-form essay *Gharbzadegi* or *West-stricken-ness* in which he claimed that westernization was the cause of the unhappiness of Iranians. He conceptualized *gharbzadegi* as the culmination of the effects of industrialization: for subjects to be socially productive workers, they had to be disciplined to conform to the logic of the machine. He suggested the Pahlavi State governed the country as if it were a machine and disciplined the subjects of the state to exert their energies and to alienate their labor to maintain the machine. Al-e Ahmad claimed, in 1961, that the Pahlavi State had dominated Iranians; in 1963, he revised his opinion. His revision in 1963 was centered upon the figure of a lone worker who sung to himself at night in the context of a brief reflection on the Pahlavi State's efforts to discipline the imagination. If in 1961, Al-e Ahmad claimed that if the political body is disciplined to conform to

the machine, the popular imagination is too; in 1961, he claimed that insofar as the popular imagination cannot be disciplined, the political body can be disciplined anew. Specifically, in 1963, he affirmed the loss of faith in universal silence as a point-of-departure for a new silence.

Al-e Ahmad claimed that Shi'a Muslims who were awaiting the second coming of the Twelfth Imam, whose return would usher in the end of injustice on earth, were right to do so because the Pahlavi State had betrayed its obligation to serve the interests of Iranians. In other words, he claimed that the people of Iran lent their ears to a universal silence in an inaudible future in the absence of faith in the state and conceived that loss of faith as part of broader loss of faith in its concept of universal silence. The monarchy "with its organizations, its schools, its barracks, its offices, propagandizes (*mablagh*) the nation-state and sings to itself another tune."[161] A former member of the Tudeh Party, Al-e Ahmad turned to the anthem: "Every child learned the anthem of the monarchy as if it were the anthem of the nation and forgot to pray…."[162] "In our culture," he continued, "we have heard that they say our schools our constructing workers…There is nothing to argue here. Yet more important than this is that our schools are constructing the *gharbzadeh*."[163] Al-e Ahmad suggested that the *gharbzadeh* could only hear the silence of the state.

Al-e Ahmad described the condition of *gharbzadegi* or west-stricken-ness with the term "machinism." "To conform before the machine," he wrote, "to be regimented in the workplace, to come and go right on the dot, and to do one kind of wearisome work throughout one's lifetime become second nature to all who are involved with the machines."[164] "Our schools, are

[161] Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi* (n.p., 1961), 53.

[162] Al-e Ahmad, 53.

[163] Al-e Ahmad, 54.

[164] Al-e Ahmad, 124.

universities, our whole educational system," he lamented, "whether by design or through the unfortunate logic of the age, raise such people [who are] standing on thin air…"[165] Standing on thin air, Al-e Ahmad suggested, was the condition in which the west-stricken lived. He described the age of *gharbzadegi*, to that end, as the age of *barzakh* or *dore-ye barzakh*.[166] Though he conceived "second nature" to be structured by the logic of the machine, he reconfigured the concept of the *barzakh* and generalized it to position the object of *gharbzadegi* as the subject that enacts it as a reality. He conceptualized the subject and object of history as originally mediated by the imagination and conceptualized the logic of the machine as an effect of a habituated imagination. Like the blind owl, the west-stricken was living waking life in a reality enacted and enforced by others.

By describing the contemporary age as the age of the *barzakh*, Al-e Ahmad located his diagnosis of *gharbzadegi* into the narrative of decline in which modernity signaled the culmination of the end of the prophetic tradition and the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction therein. In his account, Shi'as who lent an ear to the horizon of a universal silence independent of the state were reviving and re-enacting the prophetic tradition when they prayed – and thus hoped for – the restoration of the idea of universal silence. To the faithful, universal silence was not then indicative of tacit consent to sovereign authority insofar as it was prior to the logic of the machine; yet, to the Shi'as who hoped for the silence to come, they were deafened from hearing it as a consequence of the general alienation of the intellect from the space and time of universal silence. Just as Hedayat had lost faith in the reality of Iran, Al-e Ahmad lost faith in the idea of its authenticity; and

[165] Al-e Ahmad, 133.

[166] Al-Ahmad, 100-103.

moreover, Al-e Ahmad inherited from Hedayat the concept of the *barzakh* to conceptualize the crisis of legitimacy conceived as a loss of faith in the idea of the universal silence of Iranians.

In 1961, Al-e Ahmad had written himself into a bind. Insofar as he acknowledged the role of the productive and creative imagination in enacting *gharbzadegi*, he could not justify why he was mapping the logic of the machine onto the terrain of the universal silence of the present and displacing the potential and possibility for the coming of another silence into the future horizon. He confronted in the process of articulating a critique the obvious problem that the Pahlavi State confronted in the 1940s when the Tudeh Party inverted the anthem to mobilize the rank-and-file: the relationship between disciplinary means and disciplinary ends was mediated by the imagination. However, writing eight years after the 1953 Coup, Al-e Ahmad had witnessed Muhammad Reza Shah's ruthless and violent suppression of active members of the Tudeh Party rendering the anthem obsolete. He attempted to tie up the loose end above by examining how the Pahlavi State had succeeded in engendering the "slumber" and "somnolence" of the people with "melancholia" by way of the deployment of political technologies broadly conceived to dominate the popular imagination.[167] Al-e Ahmad conceded to a reality in which the people were deceived and dominated.

In what follows, I provide a translation of Al-e Ahmad's typology of three kinds of "melancholy" that, in 1961, he maintained the Pahlavi State had instilled in Iranians. I will thereafter contrast it with Al-e Ahmad's revision of the passage below in 1963. In 1961, Al-e Ahmad claimed that the Pahlavi State had dominated the people of Iran by disciplining their habits of perception in the visual, aural, and intellectual registers of their mode of being and thinking:

> The first is the melancholy of grandiosity; in parades, in profligate ceremonies, in commonplace monuments assembled in mere days – in the treasures of the national bank, in fashion, in the saddles

[167] Al-e Ahmad, 11.

> and harnesses of travelers, in the tassels of military commanders, in gargantuan buildings, in brief, in that which fills the eyes!
>
> The second the melancholy of the incessant pursuit. Such that every day you construct a new and imaginary enemy and propagandize in print and on radio so that you instill fear in the people and moreover sell despair, and to bribe them of any force they have. One day there was the discovery of a network of the Tudeh Party, the next a war against opium, then a war against heroin, then the case of Bahrain, or the war with Iraq and, in short, that which fills the ears!
>
> And third the melancholy of the glory of the ancient past! In nostalgic glorification, in self-aggrandizing and seductive demonstrations, in Cyrus and Darius, in me for whom Rostam was a man in Sistan! And I have criticized this melancholia in the margins of my history book from the fifth grade, and this melancholy in aggregate fills our minds![168]

In the above, Al-e Ahmad does not privilege one organ above others. The Pahlavi State deployed political technologies to organize the political body by disciplining perceptual habits and by regulating how individuals perceived the social and historical reality of Iran. Furthermore, Al-e Ahmad conceived propaganda as an instrument of domination and deception and thereby begged the question of social and historical reality and subjection to it prior to the moment of critique; in so doing, he resolved without extending its consequences the crisis of legitimacy plaguing Iran.

In 1963, Al-e Ahmad reorganized how he conceived the relationship between organs of perception and spaces of domination. He began his schematic of the types of melancholia as he did in 1961 with his claim that the Pahlavi State had "filled the eyes" of Iranians. In 1963, however, he followed with the "melancholy of the glory of the ancient past" yet indexed it to the ear:

> Though [the melancholy of nostalgic remembrance] follows from the melancholia of grandiosity, it has more to do with the ear. You mostly hear this kind of melancholia manifested: asinine self- glorification, with plentiful references to Darius, Cyrus, and Rustam, the sort of thing that pours from every radio in the country and from there fills our publications. This melancholia serves to fill the ear. Have you seen how a tired young worker walks down a lonely lane on a dark night? He generally sings to himself because he is afraid to be alone. He fills his own ears with his voice and thus dispels his fear. The radio fulfills the very same function. You hear it on everywhere, just to make some noise, to fill the ear.[169]

[168] Al-e Ahmad, 112.

[169] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis* trans. R. Campbell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984 [1963]), 134.

Though the tired young worker appears glancingly in the margins of *Gharbzadegi*, Al-e Ahmad's introduction of his character in the essay is meaningfully significant if considered in relationship to the dynamic he had already established in 1961 between machinism and the *barzakh* and in the context of his claim that the monarchy "sings to itself another tune" than what it sings to Iran. Having left the space of the factory, the tired young worker was no longer subject to machinism; in the absence of the enforcing mechanisms of that space, he was free to sing his own tune.

In 1963, Al-e Ahmad considered the consequences of the *barzakh* for the relationship between voice, the noise it makes, and the silence it enacts. The difference between noise and sound in *Gharbzadegi* is that the latter is an immediate extension of the apparently sound logic of the machine, the former indicative of its noisiness. The radio, he claimed above, makes noise, enacts silence, and sustains the sound of the machine; yet the tired younger work who sings makes a sound that is mere noise to the silence of the state. In the conclusion of his essay, Al-e Ahmad claimed that he had discovered "the ultimate solution to the problem of how to resist the machine" on reading the French-Romanian playwright Eugene Ionesco's 1959 play *The Rhinoceros*:

> …there is a city, and its people lead their normal lives without a care. Then suddenly a disease strikes the city…This disease is to become a rhinoceros. First one develops a fever. Then one's voice changes, becomes thick and coarse. Then a horn appears on one's forehead. Then the faculty of speech reverts into a faculty for producing animal cries. Then the skin thickens, and so forth. Everyone catches it, the housewife, the corner grocer, the bank manager, someone's sweetheart, and all take to the streets and trample city, civilization, and beauty.[170]

Because the *gharbzadeh* was the ultimate embodiment of an age that was after prophecy, when they voiced themselves, the sound of their voice was not and could not communicate their truth. Instead, Al-e Ahmad suggested, when the "disease" had run its course, the voice was a mere noise beyond the sound of the machine and the silence of the state. Thus, he suggested that when the *gharbzadeh* remembered that their voice is a noise and not a sound, they can create a new silence.

[170] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 136.

B. Ali Shariati and the Noise of the World

I now claim that Shariati posed the relationship between the sound of the voice, the noise it makes, and the truth it speaks in a way that developed upon Al-e Ahmad's conception of that relationship above and upon Hedayat's concept of the *barzakh*. Al-e Ahmad gestured towards "the ultimate solution to how to resist the machine," beginning in the late 1960s. Shariati did the work of theorizing the "ultimate solution" by developing a perceptual politics of sound and a political ethics of oration and audition. Though for Al-e Ahmad, the tired young worker served as the character he reflected upon in 1963 to consider the potential and possibility that subjects of the state were able to enact their own silences, Shariati excavated the archive of Iran's past to remember that its history originated with interruption. Specifically, Shariati maintained that the sound of the voice and the noise that it makes originally contaminated one another; as such, the sound of the voice was originally interrupted by its own noise. In the section that follows, I demonstrate that Shariati applied the perceptual politics of sound he developed in the late 1960s in his political oratory thereafter and to his recollection of sharing silence with others.

In the late 1960s, Shariati, who had recently returned to Iran from studies in Paris, wrote a series of written works that his biographer Ali Rahnema has described as his "mystical murmurs."[171] As a professor of the history and philosophy of Islam at the University of Mashhad, Shariati gained popularity both in Mashhad and across the country, traveling in the meanwhile to deliver invited lectures and speeches. In 1968, Shariati delivered a lecture titled, "*Bazgasht be Khishtan*" or "The Return to Self-ing" at the University of Jandishapur. Shariati participated in the discourse of cultural authenticity with an appeal to his audience to return to their Islamic and Shi'a self. More specifically, Shariati asked that they return to the historical origin of Shi'ism, namely,

[171] See Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biogrpahy of Ali Shari'ati* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2014).

the martyrdom of the Imam Hussein at the hands of the Caliph Yazid. Shortly after, the SAVAK heavily restricted Shariati's freedom to deliver public lectures. Censored, he took to writing. I claim that his concept of "return" was informed by a perceptual politics of sound that was premised on the impossibility of returning to the idea of universal silence. Instead of asking his audience to return to silence, like Al-e Ahmad, he asked that they remember that the world was mere noise.

In 1968, Shariati wrote "The Desert," an autobiographical depiction of his own development from a child to an adult who was disciplined to conform to the logic of the machine and an exercise in remembering that he embodied its original contamination with an interruptive noise. By examining the autobiography that he wrote months after delivering his lecture in Jandishapur, I suggest that Shariati extended the consequences of the *barzakh* towards furthering a critique of the discourse of cultural authenticity and attendant claims to hearing universal silence. "'My essence' is only a 'speech,' he wrote, "and my existence is only the 'voicing' of that speech…"[172] He conceptualized the distinction between speech and voice as a mediated one insofar he could not know the "essence" of *logos* – the silence that it keeps – as it really is. Shariati perceived the aural phenomena of existence as an indicator of an essence that eluded his ears, framing the problem of listening to understand around the impossibility of hearing silence. Unlike 'Arif who claimed that music was the indicator of ethnicity, in 1968, Shariati expressed that he had lost his faith in the idea of universal silence and in the order of the cultural authenticity of Iran.

The desert figured in Shariati's "mystical murmurs" as the contested terrain of universal silence; he conceived history, moreover, as the audible formation of "the 'voicing'" of a logic of being. Reflecting on the intellectual Hassan Taqizadeh, who was one of the most ardent advocates of modernization and who had declared that the people of Iran ought to be inwardly and outwardly

[172] Ali Shariati, "Kavir," in *Hubut dar Kavir* (Tehran: *Intisharat-e Chapkhesh* 2007/2008), 234.

"Europeanized" to become released from tradition, Shariati asked why he was taught in school that "the spirit of our history has manifest itself" in his personality.[173] "Listen to history," he asked, after claiming that history had "massacred and suffocated" his ancestors.[174] He continued: "Why do you not hear their voices? Other than the shouts of viziers and khans…there is no sound."[175] Shariati inscribed a distinction between the ideal terrain of universal silence and popular silence, conceiving the former as a terrain of contestation between different conceptions of the latter. Furthermore, he claimed that sovereigns enacted popular silence with the sound of their voice by enforcing a particular conception of popular silence as if it were the universal silence of the people. He thus suggested that historians who listened to voices heard echoed the silence of the state.

Like Al-e Ahmad who claimed in *Gharbzadegi* that schools and universities in Iran were creating a west-stricken youth who were only attuned to the silence of the state, Shariati claimed that when as a child he left his ancestral village of Mazinan to receive a modern education in the urban center Mashhad, he also had become disciplined to conform to the logic of the machine and claimed, moreover, that each summer that he returned to Mazinan, life in the village appeared increasingly alien to him. He described Mazinan as a city "on the peripheries of the desert."[176] He narrativized his departure from Mazinan and his coming of age in Mashhad within the narrative of decline that Hedayat had popularized in the 1940s in which modernity signaled the culmination of the end of prophetic tradition. "The desert," he waxed poetic, "a land that is not and that is full of

[173] Shariati, "*Kavir*," 275 fn. 1.

[174] Shariati, 275 fn. 1.

[175] Shariati, 275 fn. 1.

[176] Sharitai, 261.

secrets, within which the world and its end rest one upon the other."[177] He continued: "Hell is its ground and heaven its sky, and the people…are in the *barzakh* in between these two …."[178] Shariati suggested that a return to the idea of universal silence was as impossible as the return to childhood, centering the question of the restoration of universal silence around the ethics of giving voice.

Shariati articulated a critique by way of self-critical historiography of the Pahlavi State's conception of the authentic culture of Iranians and the universal silence that was indicative of consent to its authority on the premise that the voice and existence are not indicative of speech and essence. First, however, historical and textual context is necessary to understand his critique. In the 1930s, the Pahlavi State under Reza Shah's helm strove to place the poet Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* or *The Book of Kings* at the center of a "newly established national pantheon" to establish the constitution of monarchy as the groundwork of the Pahlavi State.[179] Taqizadeh played a formative role in justifying the tenth-century poet's status as "a spokesmen of the nation," presenting the existence of the epic as indicative of the essence of Iranians.[180] In the *Shahnameh*, the first man and first king Kyumars journeys to an otherworldly land to retrieve his son who had been abducted by demons. Though he failed, he returned to his kingdom with a rooster who had saved him when he was faced with a threat to his life from demonic creatures. At home, the rooster crowed at midnight. Fearing its otherworldliness, the king's subjects killed it. The *khurus-i bi-mahal* or the "homeless rooster" is used idiomatically to describe a person who speaks out of turn.

[177] Shariati, 281.

[178] Shariati, 281.

[179] Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870-1940* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 94.

[180] Marashi, 99.

Shariati recalled the night in Mazinan when he became self-ware that he had come of age. The morning after a rooster crowed at night and disrupted sleep in the village, the village elder slaughtered the homeless rooster before his eyes, after which he claimed he had learned a lesson. The cry of the rooster interrupted the "unchanging, repetitious, senseless wheel [of time]…that understands nothing other than order."[181] By excavating the homeless rooster from the *Shahnameh*, Shariati applied a perceptual politics of sound that registers its original contamination with noise to recall that the silence of the state internal to the canon of its traditions began with an interruption. Thus, insofar as the Pahlavi State derived its legitimacy from the tradition of monarchy, Shariati claimed that the order of cultural authenticity did not rest upon the idea of universal silence; and furthermore, he made audible a crisis of legitimacy at the time he wrote that lent itself to the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction on the terrain of the voice of the people and its truth. In the age that was the culmination of the end of prophecy, the world of its inhabitants was noise.

In a departure from Al-e Ahmad who proposed that the "ultimate solution to how to resist the machine" was to return to a state of noise, Shariati introduced the imagination or "fantasy" as a barrier for that solution. "[The] 'golden age' of all our nations," he wrote," is always situated in the past. In which past? In the farthest ends of history, that place where we have no memory other than legends and fantasies, and where other than fantasy there is no way in that direction."[182] In other words, Al-e Ahmad relied on a conception of nature as a physical and material reality; therefore, were the west-stricken to return to that state, they would unite around the cry of nature. In contrast, Shariati suggested that both the ideal terrain of the cry of nature as well as the ideal terrain of universal silence were mediated by fantasy. If in 1963, Al-e Ahmad had extended the

[181] Shariati, 287.

[182] Shariati, 271.

consequences of the *barzakh* for his conception of the silence of the state, Shariati, in 1968, had adequately elaborated the problem the *barzakh* posed for the contested terrain of universal silence. In the midst of the discourse of cultural authenticity, Shariati undermined the authority of the apparent holders of authority who presented themselves as the spokesmen of the people of Iran.

In 1969, Shariati revealed more explicitly the centrality of *Blind Owl* on this thinking and the problem that the *barzakh* posed for its author who had lost faith in the world. Alluding to the opening lines of the novel, Shariati lamented that Hedayat was "sleeping a few steps away from [him] in a forgotten corner of this mournful Pere Lachaise! How he suffered in life from those 'pains that like leprosy eat way at the soul from the inside and carve out its interiors.'"[183] Shariati was haunted in this period by Hedayat's suicide and was invested in recovering faith lost. Like Hedayat, Shariati had lost faith in the world, conceived, however, as a loss of faith in universal silence and the capacity for the voice to mediate that silence. "How arduous it is," he wrote "to exist in the *barzakh*: don't the mediums of the *barzakh* see more than the doomed inhabitants of hell?"[184] In "The Desert," he had described hell as the ground of the desert or as the apparent silence of the state. During the crisis of legitimacy that opened to contestation the terrain of universal silence, there was a dispersion of sites and sources of truth-telling about the silence of the people.

III. The Silence of Ali and the Invocation of Hussein

I have demonstrated that Shariati affirmed Al-e Ahmad's "ultimate solution to the problem of resisting the machine" in the return to the cry of nature and yet problematized it by extending the consequences of the *barzakh* for the concept of universal silence. I now demonstrate that

[183] Rahnema, 147.

[184] Shariati, "Hubut," in *Hubut dar Kavir* (Tehran: *Intisharat-e Chapkhesh* 2007/2008), 86.

Shariati re-signified popular silence during the crisis of legitimacy and the pervasive loss of faith in the idea of universal silence as tacit disagreement to sovereign authority and witnessed thereafter the appearance of a collectivity around the particularity of its own silence. I propose that universal silence is not an adequate concept for understanding the popular voice during a crisis of legitimacy since it begs the question of "the people" prior to its enactment. In light of my broader argument, I claim herein that propaganda about the silence of the people is a conceptually prior activity to deliberation about the identical interests of the people writ large. 1953 haunted Shariati from the past; for us present, 1979 is the specter that haunts his orations. Though Shariati is named the ideologue of the Islamic Revolution, I claim that he excavated the archive of Islamic history and philosophy in the service of a universal silence that exceeded Islam.

On December 1, 1969, the SAVAK permitted Shariati to deliver speeches again; on December 2, he delivered an oration, "Ali is Alone," at the Husseynie Ershad. The title, "Ali is Alone," refers to the Imam Ali's retreat from political life for twenty-five years from Muhammad's death in 657 AD who had asked the Imam Ali to stay silent until he was declared as his rightful successor, conventionally described as "the twenty-five years of Ali's silence." From 1945, the cleric Seyyed Hussein Boroujerdi was regarded by Shi'as as the Grand Ayatollah and the *marja-e taqlid* or "source of emulation." Boroujerdi dictated that clerical elite including his pupil Khomeini remain silent. After he died in 1961 so too ended the force of his dictate. In 1963, Khomeini, unbeholden to Boroujerdi, vocally scathed the Pahlavi State, leading to exile. Thus, though clerical elite listened, their silence was not indicative of their consent to the Pahlavi State. Similarly, Shariati had also just spent over a year biting his tongue, banished from speaking in public. With his newfound freedom, in reflecting on the silence of his own self, or on Ali, he publicly reflected upon his tacit disagreement under the veil of silence through reflection on the silence of the Imam.

In 1963, as the Pahlavi State was arresting Shi'as critical of its rule, reformist Shia's began construction of a religious and cultural institute by the name of the Husseynie Ershad, which they finally completed in 1967. The *husseynieh* is a location where Shi'as conventionally gather to mourn the Imam Hussein and his family, yet by predicating the name of the space with "ershad" or "enlightenment," its architects intended to "guide the believers back to the source of their faith, interpret its historical evolution and explain its meaning and role in the modern world."[185] From 1968 to 1972, Shariati was a regular and popular orator at the Husseynie Ershad. In "Ali is Alone," Shariati opened his speech by reflecting upon a paradox internal to the site of oratory:

> To begin, distinguished participants, ladies, and gentleman, I must make an apology, two apologies: The first apology: I am standing in a position from which I must speak about Ali and this is the apex of embarrassment and inability. The second apology is that: I am not an orator, I am not a lecturer, I am a simple teacher and without my wanting it, my tone — *lahn-am* — is the tone of a teacher in a classroom, which may not be appropriate for such a magnificent congregation. Yet, I think, that the original problem that I would like to speak of is not my self — *khodam* — rather I think that, more than anything, we are in need of pedagogy (*tahsil*), and even prior to propaganda (*tabligh*), to pedagogy.[186]

Shariati posed at the outset the problem that propaganda was a conceptually prior activity to deliberation insofar as the "self" – in contrast to the selfless space of reasons – was the site and source of truth-telling. When he spoke with "the tone of a teacher," his voice appeared as a medium of universal silence; yet, in the *husseynieh* and in respect to topic of his speech, he was voicing a particular silence. In other words, the particular history of silence of the *husseynieh* mediated the point-of-access towards the immediacy of universal silence in a space of *ershad* or knowledge.

In a performative mode in his lecture on Ali, Shariati was recalling his tacit disagreement to the Pahlavi State under Muhammad Reza's rule while he was personally banned from voicing disagreement in order to model for his present audience an ethics of listening to the silence of the

[185] Rahnema, 229.

[186] Shariati, "Ali Tanhast," in *Ali* (n.p. 2011/2012, 146.

people with a method that did not re-inscribe the apparent universal silence of the state. By giving voice to his silence in the immediate past, Shariati was imposing a distinction between the silence of the state and the silence of its critics; and in so doing, he suggested that the silence of the state was being interrupted by voices unheard. Thus, in reflecting on the Imam Ali's tacit disagreement to the caliphate after Muhammad died, Shariati claimed "[the Imam's] appeal is to us and our calling is clear: recognizing these lessons, singing these words, listening to these silences."[187] The loss of faith in the idea of universal silence and the dispersion of sites and sources of truth-telling opened the contested terrain of popular silence to its re-signification as indicative of tacit disagreement to the Shah. Shariati was attempting to modify the perceptual habits of his present audience to imagine that even when they could not hear disagreement, they were not alone.

Shariati developed a two-fold conception of noise and silence as political acts: first, he observed that the sonic phenomena of noise and silence were secondary analytic distinctions that partitioned the original contamination of noise and silence with one another; second, he theorized enactments of noise and silence that interrupted and unsettled the partitioning of noise and silence. Specifically, he did so by rending audible the silences in his midst that indicated tacit disagreement. Therefore, he also suggested that noise that was sanctioned by the state and was perceived as sound presupposed the semblance of the silence of the state under the guise of universal silence. However, he also suggested that the silence of the state was constituted upon the original contamination of noise and silence and namely of the genesis of the state in an act of interruption. In 1971, Shariati observed and took part in the collective enactment of an unsanctioned political community that enacted an unofficial subject of popular silence. He experienced the condition of being in the middle of their cries and of standing on thin air in sonic space as a space of freedom.

[187] Shariati, 155.

If in 1968, he publicly reflected upon the silence of Ali, in 1971, in a private meditation upon the message of Hussein, Shariati claimed to have been enacted as part of a subject of popular silence.

To understand the political significance of his recollection in 1971, biographical and historical context is useful. Shariati was banned from speaking at the Husseynie Ershad because of conflicts among its administrators pertaining to the anti-clerical undertones of his speeches. In February 1971, the Marxist-Leninist organization the Iranian People's Fedayi Guerilla's orchestrated a militant operation against the SAVAK in the mountainous region of Siahkal in northern Iran. The SAVAK infiltrated the Fedayin's networks, raided their offices, and arrested many of its members. On February 8, a contingent of armed Fedayis launched an attack on a gendarmerie post of the city of Siahkal and took the lives of two of its members. From February 9 to February 28, the SAVAK hunted the Fedayin down. February 10 coincided, moreover, with the Day of Ashura when Shi'as mourn the death of Hussein. Unbeknownst to Shariati, the administrators of the Husseynie Ershad decided to permit him to deliver speeches again on that day. On February 10, Shariati recalled his experience walking the streets amid collective mourning. Like the tired young worker, Shariati who had lost faith in the idea of universal silence had his faith restored when enlisted into a history of popular silence and enacted as its subject.

Recalling his activism in the campaign for self-determination in 1951, Shariati wrote that "in those twenty years the whole of my true life has passed in accordance with one 'word'…;" though in 1968, he had claimed, however, that his voice was indicative a word he could not hear, in 1971, he was reminded of the word his voice was indicative of: *mardom* or "the people."[188] If, though, on the Day of Ashura, Shariati was listening to Shi'a Muslims specifically giving voice to the silence of the people in a ritual of collective mourning that was shaped and informed by a

[188] Shariati, "*Hussein Vares-e Adam*," in *Hussein Vares-e Adam* (Tehran, *Intesharat-e Ghalam*, 2011/2012, 20.

particular history of silence, he nonetheless attested to the fact that the manifestation of the popular voice in the air opened his ears to and restored his faith in the idea of universal silence. In the midst of the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction, Shariati made a distinction between the "mendacious totality"[189] of the "the order of the caliphate" in an allusion to the monarchy and the "one *tawhid*" or the true totality of the idea of universal silence.[190] The Shi'as mourning reminded Shariati that the historical origin of Shi'ism began with the interruption of the mendacious totality of "authenticity" and the act of sacrifice on the Day of Ashura for the idea of a true authenticity.

In late 1968 and 1969 prior to his speech on the Imam Ali, Shariati had departed from Al-e Ahmad's suggestion that the *gharbzadeh* ought to return to the cry of nature to resist the machine by suggesting that the ideal terrain of nature was originally contaminated by the archive of historical memory and mediated through the operation of fantasy. In *Gharbzadegi*, Al-e Ahmad had also claimed that the youth had forgotten how to pray – and had lost faith in an idea of universal silence that was not beholden to the silence of the state – as the monarchy constituted them as subjects of the logic of the machine with the anthem. Reflecting on the above, Shariati wrote:

> And I who had wished to lead the call to prayer of the religion of the self (*mazhab-e khish*), to resist sacrificing the truth for the sake of expediency, to not become part of the order of masters in "the desert" and in "the monotonous order of time," to not sing the same tune and to not play the same instrument as others, felt that I was "the homeless rooster," who at night and at midnight, unexpectedly, crows, and I set with my voice when the sun rises and when it sets.[191]

In reflecting on the state of being in-between the mendacious totality of the order of the caliphate and the true totality of *tawhid*, Shariati was asking how, in the midst of a loss of faith in the idea of universal silence, the return to the original act of interruption could lend itself to its restoration.

[189] Shariati, 46.

[190] Shariati, 21.

[191] Shariati, 22.

In a friendly criticism of the act of interruption on February 8 that he was mourning on Ashura, Shariati warned that the act of interruption alone would not transform the pre-dominant order of things just as the Imam Hussein's last act of martyrdom did not transform the order of masters.

Shariati deployed his perceptual politics of sound to listen to the cry of mourning as a mediation of the universality of the cry of nature and the particularity of Muharram rituals. Though the twenty-five-years of Ali's silence chronologically preceded the death of Hussein, Shariati reconfigured both stories to formulate a dynamic between the tacit disagreement of Ali to "the order of the caliphate" and the interruptive act of Hussein in the name of the truth. On the Day of Ashura, Shariati wrote that he had left the "seamless blanket of silence and pain" of his home and had become immersed in "the seamless blanket of mourning" of the streets.[192] On returning to his home after his immersion therein, he asked, "How could I withdraw from Ashura?"[193] If however, he was narrativizing his awakening into a history of authenticity and his enactment as its subject, he claimed that the "return to the self" in the history of Shi'ism demanded that the specific collectivity who remained to speak for the people sacrifice themselves on the altar of universal silence. He thus affirmed the return to a history of authenticity that obliged its witnesses to self-sacrifice on the premise that witnesses present could not hear the idea of universal silence.

I have demonstrated that beginning in 1968, Shariati reflected on the legitimation crisis that Hedayat had made legible in *Blind Owl* with the concept of the *barzakh*, conceived as a loss of faith in the idea of universal silence. I have argued that in attempting to habituate his audiences to hear popular silence as tacit disagreement, Shariati brought to the surface of intellection the effects of the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction about the authentic culture of Iranians;

[192] Shariati, 29.

[193] Shariati, 29.

and furthermore, in narrativizing his own enlistment into a history of cultural authenticity and his enactment as a subject of it, he suggested that the collectivity that appeared as if it were a unified body was a prerequisite condition for the future realization of the people writ large in a world in which the people had ceased to be. In so doing, Shariati raised the question of if the refusal of modes of belonging that are centered around a concept of authenticity as a critical method is adequate in the midst of a legitimation crisis. He suggested that the propagandizing of authenticity enacted the space that invocations of the popular voice begged as a question.

IV. Forcing the Truth

I now theorize the collective act of rooftop chanting and specifically of the chant, "God is Great," as the enactment of a political subject that was constituted on the unthinkable idea of universal silence by applying Shariati's formulation of a perceptual politics of sound to listen to their cries. I draw on the sociologist Charles Kurzman's attention to the fact that the 1979 Revolution was "unthinkable" for its participants up until the day Muhammad Reza left Iran. Beginning in 1971, the Pahlavi State under Muhammad Reza's helm began to respond to the legitimation crisis plaguing his rule and specifically his status and station as a technocratic ruler who was authorized to guide Iran with the Revolution of the Shah and the People or the White Revolution by waging an aggressive campaign to propagandize support for his modernizing program. He tortured the Marxist-Leninist opposition to the 1963 Revolution until they confessed that the Shah and his White Revolution were guiding the people of Iran on the road to truth. I propose that SAVAK's use of torture to force confessions was indicative of the Pahlavi State's conception of the relationship between the state, the people, and truth and theorize rooftop chanting as the enactment of a criticism of the foundation of the Pahlavi State's claim to authority.

In the year after Ashura 1971, Shariati delivered a series of lectures on what he referred to as "the science of Islam" or Islamology in which he sought to establish the "true totality" or *tawhid* as the principle upon and around which his congregants ought to orient their thinking, conceiving the name "Islam" as the referent of an "ideology" founded upon the ever-fleeting idea of universal silence. One year after Ashura, the SAVAK executed eleven members of the Fedayin. Shariati delivered a speech, "*Pas az Shahadat* (After Maryrdom)" at the Narmaq Mosque in Tehran. "The martyrs," he proclaimed, "have said their speeches and we, who are deaf, are their audience."[194] Alluding to the Fedayin, Shariati stated that "Hussein and his friends have delivered the first revelation (*'resalat*')," he continued, "the revelation of blood."[195] His audience who were the witnesses to their deaths were responsible, he maintained, for reviving and re-enacting the prophetic tradition with the "revelation of the message" by delivering "the martyr's message to the world's ear."[196] Shortly after he delivered his speech, the SAVAK responded swiftly to what was evidently a call to arms, shuttered the doors of the Husseynie Ershad, and imprisoned Shariati.

In a cruel twist of fate, present-day critics cite as evidence of Shariati's "nativism" a book-length text by the name of *Bazgasht be Kodam Khish?* (*Return to Which Self?*): a cruel twist of fate because the text was published under his name in 1974, the year after which he was released from prison and a year before which he passed away in exile. He had now ostensibly experienced a moment of conversion: "We are in possession of an historical-cultural self. Of ancient Iran: a nationalism that has its roots in the history of the Achaemenids, the Parthians, and the Sassanians, and in the Zoroastrian religion, and the beginning of the legend of Iran — in Arianism. A self that

[194] Shariati, *Pas az Shahadat*," in *Hussein Vares-e Adam*, 185.

[195] Hussein, 192.

[196] Hussein, 192.

is buried in Shush, and in Persepolis and in Pasargad, only its crumbling pillars remain…"[197] Shariati had seemingly abandoned his excavation of the archive of national historiography to bring into the order of the audible the genesis of that tradition with an original act of interruption. He now suggested that the nation was integrated in accordance with the "geography of speech" or *jografiya-ye harf*, amounting to a pre-discursive logic of history that destined national self-becoming, which constituted the groundwork of a national "collective conscience."[198] *Bazgasht be Kodam Khish?* is part and parcel of a dark history in contemporary Iran: the forced confession.[199]

The concept of the "geography of speech" that was invoked in Shariati's recantation revised his foundational criticism of the Pahlavi State's claim to authority as "the spokesmen of the nation." In contrast to Shariati's claim after 1968 that the voice was not indicative of the "word" or the *logos* of the speaker, in 1974, he now ostensibly made claim that the voice of each individual or their existence was an extension of the "collective conscience" of the people of Iran writ large, thereby establishing the groundwork for a method of listening and a mode of evaluation that was able to discern that the speaker was giving voice to the truth when they consented to sovereign authority and likewise to discern that the speaker was giving voice to a lie when they disagreed. Shariati had mapped the ideal terrain of universal silence across the political body, resolving the problem that the *barzakh* posed for the temporalization of the silence of the people, and collapsing the space of difference between the idea of universal silence and invocations of the popular voice. In a radical departure from his written and spoken word, he now evidently gave voice to silence.

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[197] Shariati, "*Bazgasht be Kodam Khish?*" in *Bazgasht*, 266-267.

[198] Shariati, 234-235.

[199] See Arash Davari, "A Return to Which Self? 'Ali Shari'ati and Frantz Fanon on the Political Ethics of Insurrectionary Violence," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 34 (2014) for an illuminating essay on the relationship between "return" and martyrdom in Shariati's thought.

In 1971, eight members of the Marxist organization the International Confederation of Students – the leftist organization that by and large was carrying the baton of the Tudeh Party – gave what was referred to in the press as "interviews" after enduring torture at the hands of the SAVAK in Evin prison in which they claimed that after returning to Iran after studies abroad they found that the White Revolution had succeeded.[200] Though in retrospect, evidence is available to prove that the "interviews" were not delivered by the volition of their speakers, at the time, audiences listening to leftists "recanting" and pledging allegiance to the state could not know, a circumstance that still to-date implicates evaluations of the "authenticity" of Shariati's recantation. For audiences who were attuned to the legitimation crisis and the loss of faith in the idea of universal silence, their comrades' vocal consent to sovereign authority was foregrounded by a conception of the silence of the people perceived as tacit disagreement to the order of things, analogous to the Imam Ali who "consented" to Abu Bakr while disagreeing to his rule in silence. In other words, prior to when the SAVAK forced Shariati to recant, he undermined them, and invited audiences present to listen to his vocal consent while listening for his tacit disagreement.

In 1975, under international pressure, the Pahlavi State stopped torturing prisoners. By early 1978, the tacit disagreement that was indicated by the silence of the people was collectively and unexpectedly given voice. There were nationwide strikes including strikes by oil workers who were effectively incurring unignorable costs upon the economy. On November 4, security forces fired upon and killed at least three students who were fenced inside of the University of Tehran. On November 5, the students revolted, breaking through the barricades that imprisoned them, spilling into the streets, and burning buildings to the ground. Muhammad Reza responded by establishing a military government and announcing its establishment on television, apologizing for

[200] Abrahamian, 115.

his missteps and failures, and proclaiming to his audience, "I have heard the message of your revolution, nation of Iran."[201] He thereafter deployed armored vehicles to patrol the streets of the cities as a means of keeping the protests in check, heavily censored the remaining newspaper publications, and took control of National Iranian Radio and Television. The state's crackdown was swift, severe, and fatal, with hundreds left dead and hundreds imprisoned. In December 1978, there was a nationwide curfew from 6 AM to 6 PM. Transgressors were shot on sight.

December 1978 fell on the month of Muharram when the Imam Hussein was martyred. After the Pahlavi State enforced the curfew, a "culture of resistance" emerged that "used popular means of diffusing information, mimicking the strategies of mass media."[202] If in the days, members of the growing collectivity of opposition to Muhammad Reza remained silent, in the nights, they went upon their rooftops and shouted "God is Great" or "*Allah-u Akbar*" in protest. The Shah's Prime Minister Gholam Reza Azhari claimed that cassette tapes were cause for the popularization of what had become "the defining sound of the 1978 protests" – in part because from exile Khomeini had called upon his followers to do so – and thereby "denied in one stroke the thousands upon thousands that climbed the country's rooftops nightly to protest."[203] The rooftop or *bam* thus emerged as "a liminal urban space, neither public nor private" at night from which a collective body gave voice to the tacit disagreement of their own silence in the day.[204] The rooftop was neither a space constituted by the silence of the state nor was it yet constituted by the

[201] Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 107.

[202] Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 85.

[203] Negar Mottahedeh, "Allah-o Akbar," *ArteEast*, http://arteeast.org/quarterly/allah-o-akbar/?issues_season=spring&issues_year=2012.

[204] Moallem, 85.

silence of the people. It was a *barzakh*: a space after prophecy that mediated the boundary of sleep and waking life.

The rooftop chant of "*Allah-u Akbar*" was a "sonic performative" that "[enabled] the performance of a collective will" and unfolded and was realized at "the threshold of the political."[205] Whereas in 1963, Al-e Ahmad had suggested in his reflection on Ionesco's "The Rhinoceros" that the "ultimate solution to the problem of resisting the machine" was the return to the cry of nature, Shariati elaborated the problem of "fantasy" that the *barzakh* imposed upon the return to the self. The collectively held fantasy of the ultimate source of legitimacy conceived as the idea of universal silence enacted conditions from which legitimacy emerged out of a condition of illegitimacy. In circulation at the time was a variation on the "defining sound of the 1978 protests" that professed, "*Allah-u Akhar, Khomeini Rahbar*" or "God is Great, Khomeini is our Guide," centering Khomeini as the medium between the idea of universal silence and the popular voice. On its own, however, the rallying cry, "*Allah-u Akbar*" enacted a subject of authenticity that was constituted upon the idea of God, inaudible and unthinkable as the ultimate site and source of legitimacy. In bearing witness, a collectivity was awakened to the dream of a silence that prophesied their freedom.

I have enlisted Shariati's perceptual politics of sound to theorize rooftop chanting and the attendant rallying cry, "God is Great," as a challenge to the authority of Muhammad Reza on the contested terrain of universal silence. I claimed, beforehand, that the Pahlavi State betrayed its conception of the relationship between silence, truth, and authenticity when it used torture to force Marxist-Leninists opposed to its sovereign authority to confess their allegiance the state. Specifically, the Pahlavi State was beholden to the idea that the people of Iran shared a silence that

[205] See Roshanak Kheshti, "On the Threshold of the Political: The Sonic Performativity of Rooftop Chanting in Iran," *Radical History Review* 121 (2015).

could be made heard and made intelligible by and through mediations of the sound of the voice, articulated with the formulation "the geography of the word" and of the "collective conscience." Alight beneath the surface of the order of monarchy were the embers of rage and resentment. In 1969, Shariati beckoned his audiences to listen for the silence of the people as tacit disagreement; roughly a decade later, ten percent of the population of Iran gave confirmation to his prophecy. In chanting "God is Great," a people appeared around the inaudibility and the unthinkability of the idea of universal silence, mediated through the particularity of the collectivity that remained.

V. Conclusion

Shortly after Muhammad Reza left Tehran and Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile to spearhead the Islamic Republic of Iran, a voice from Radio Iran declared, "This is Tehran, the true voice of the Iranian nation, the voice of the revolution."[206] The anonymous voice introduced thereafter Khomeini and the Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari who, in the years to follow, would voice criticism of Khomeini and face house arrest until his death in 1985. General Baqeri who currently commands the Islamic Revolutionary Guard and General Neshat who was then the commander of the Imperial Guard delivered a message together declaring their alliance with one another and their allegiance to the newly established state. Responding to concerns about the sound of guns firing, Neshat added: "There are no disconcerting reports about Firouzeh Palace. No-one has attacked it. Just a group of young men are around celebrating and firing into the air in joy. The sound of shooting has scared some families in the vicinity of the building."[207] The newly self-anointed spokesmen of the nation attempted to re-signify the sounds of the city as indication of their victory just as they staked their claim on the still yet contested terrain of universal silence.

[206] "Report Broadcast on Tehran Radio," BBC World Service. http://www.bbc.com/persian/revolution/radio.shtml.

[207] "Report Broadcast on Tehran Radio," http://www.bbc.com/persian/revolution/radio.shtml.

In this chapter, I examined the aural ecology of Iran beginning in the 1920s to demonstrate that universal silence emerged as a contested terrain. With both the westernization of Iranian music and the genre of the anthem, the Pahlavi State attempted to modify the perceptual habits of Iranians to conceive of themselves as part of a unified, homogeneous, and silent totality and as part of the steady march of progress. I then demonstrated that the contested terrain of universal silence was reconstituted in the discourse of cultural authenticity in the 1960s and 1970s and in the attendant discourse of *gharbzadegi*. Jalal Al-e Ahmad proposed that the "ultimate solution" to *gharbzadegi* was a return to the cry of nature; in contrast, Shariati reflected upon the problem that the *barzakh* posed for Al-e Ahmad's solution. In turn, Shariati maneuvered on the contested terrain of universal silence by attempting to modify the perceptual habits of his listeners to hear silence as indication of tacit disagreement to the state and to hear the voice of the people with a perceptual politics of sound deafened to universal silence. I then applied his perceptual politics of sound to theorize rooftop chanting as the enactment of criticism to the Pahlavi State's conception of the popular voice which I claimed was betrayed in the brutal history of the use of torture to extract confessions.

As a contribution to political theory, I have argued that in the absence of faith in the idea of universal silence, propaganda operates to enact the popular silence that the spokesman begs as a question. By consequence, I have suggested that criticism of a subject of authenticity on the grounds that authenticity is somehow intrinsically problematic does not attend to the stakes of a legitimation crisis when and where there is a pervasive loss of faith in the idea of universal silence. I have thus theorized propaganda as a mode of communication that restores faith lost in the people and proposed that authenticity can serve as a point-of-departure for the enactment of the people. As such, I have also contributed to current debate about populism and the adequacy of populism as an organizing concept to reflect on organizations, movements, or leaders that are for the people.

Simply put, when and where an organization, movement, or leader claims the authority to speak and to act on behalf of the people, propaganda is a conceptually prior activity to its claim; likewise, the phenomenon of collective mobilization is not, I have showed, indicative of consent to a people insofar as at stake in a legitimation crisis is the absence of the people as an existing reality.

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Chapter III

Revelations of the Impossible

Images of Reality and Visions of the World in Post-Revolutionary Iran, 1979-1989

In October 1978, Michel Foucault published an article "What are the Iranians Dreaming About?" in *Le Nouvel Observateur* after a visit to Tehran. Foucault listened to two slogans in the air at the time: "Islam, Islam, Khomeini, We Will Follow You" and "Khomeini for King," locating the collective desire for Khomeini's return in a tradition of spiritual guidance internal to the received history of Shi'ism in which after the Prophet Muhammad the imams "carry a light, always the same and always changing…that is capable of illuminating the law from the inside."[208] The Imam Mahdi, the twelfth and the last of the imams, disappeared in his life: "Although invisible before his promised return, the Twelfth Imam is neither radically nor fatally absent. It is the people who make him come back, insofar as the truth to which they awaken further enlightens them."[209] On his return from exile in February 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini assumed the status of the Imam, as the embodied presence of the absence of the Mahdi who would usher forth the age of truth. Coinciding with his return was a pervasive loss of faith in images of reality and an attendant moment of deliberation over the vision of the world that would safeguard the truth he revealed.

The collective chant, "God is Great," crossed over into the post-revolutionary period and settled firmly onto the ground as the constitutive foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As such, after Muhammad Reza Shah fled Iran, the Islamic Republic reckoned with what Wael Hallaq argues is the "inherently self-contradictory" and "impossibility" of the modern Islamic state.[210] In

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[208] Michel Foucault, "What are the Iranians Dreaming About?," in Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 205.

[209] Foucault, 205.

[210] Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), xi.

contrast to the nation-state which is "the end of all ends," the community of the faithful in the received history of Islam or the *ummah* and its individual members "are a means to a great end" such that the *ummah* "neither possesses sovereignty nor does it have – in the sense the modern state has – an autonomous political or legal will, since the sovereign is God and God alone."[211] As the "charismatic" leader with a "radius that spread beyond the boundaries of Iran to reach millions of Muslims all over the world," the Ayatollah and Imam Khomeini was uniquely authorized to give presence to the divine, in his capacity as the representative of the Twelfth Imam.[212] The issue that preoccupied the ideologues of the Islamic Republic, however, was how to reconcile the Imam's authority with spectacle of the general will that was brought to presence in the Revolution.

The question that I ask is if images of the reality of the modern state capture the common ground of subjects who faithfully behold it and orient themselves with respect to it, dovetailing with the question of if and whether the society of the spectacle imprisons the mind. In his letter to d'Alambert, Rousseau called for a return to public festivals where "the spectators become an entertainment to themselves" and "actors themselves," as an antidote to the "gloomy cavern of the theater, which keep them fearful and immobile in silence and inaction."[213] Likewise, Guy Debord diagnosed the society of the spectacle as "a domain of delusion and false consciousness;" in particular, he described the spectacle as "a worldview that has actually been materialized" and as "the bad dream of a modern society in chains." [214] Debord observed that in bureaucratic capitalist societies the "concentrated spectacle" "imposes an image of the good which subsumes everything

[211] Hallaq, 49.

[212] Ahmad Ashraf, "Charisma, Theocracy, and Men of Power in Postrevolutionary Iran," in *The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan* ed. Myron Weiner and Ali Banuazizi (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 102.

[213] Rousseau, 125-126.

[214] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 2005), 7-12.

that officially exists, an image which is usually concentrated in a single individual, the guarantor of the system's totalitarian cohesion" and may be imported as a technique to reinforce state power.[215] However, with "the diffuse spectacle" in late capitalist societies, "[i]rreconcilable claims jockey for position on the stage of the affluent economy's unified spectacle…."[216]

The original contamination of the concentrate spectacle of the Imam with its diffusion was raised as a question in post-revolutionary discourse about the ideal vision of the world. In a reflection on "imaginal politics," Chiari Bottici draws upon Henry Corbin's conception of the *mundus imaginalis* or the "imaginal world," which, recall from Chapter I, referred to the domain of revealed truth to which the prophets, in received history, apparently had immediate access. The "repositioning of religion in the public sphere," Bottici claims, is "the privileged place to observe the current transformations of the nexus of politics and the imaginal."[217] During a legitimation crisis, where "politics is increasingly unable to provide resources for meaning," religion, Bottici continues, appears "with its vocation of eliminating contingency through its system of beliefs" as "an endless reservoir of meaning, capable, potentially, of covering any appearance of chaos."[218] In the previous to chapters, I have demonstrated, however, the proliferation of discourse about the *barzakh*, the condition of the soul dreaming in its sleep and the state of being after prophecy, in a narrative of decline in which the *mundus imaginalis* was no longer available as a source of truth. In turn, the concentrated spectacle of the Imam was diffused by dreams of the future he revealed.

[215] Debord, 32.

[216] Debord, 32.

[217] Bottici, 154.

[218] Bottici, 152.

Though there is a difference between the modern Islamic state and the modern nation-state, the ideologues of the Islamic Republic, in reckoning with the ideal terrain of *tawhid*, the true totality of being *qua* being, as the bedrock of the state, were remembering that, in Jodi Dean's words, "the subject emerges where ideology fails because the subject is collective."[219] In a reflection on Sigmund Freud's analysis of Gustav Le Bon's *The Crowd*, Dean notes that whereas for Le Bon the crowd was moved by unconscious forces, Freud suggested that "the unconscious is itself a crowd."[220] Dean suggests that the ideal party "holds open the space from which the crowd can see itself (and be seen) as the people."[221] The Imam was widely perceived as the beginning of the end of the problem Dean proposes that the party could resolve, insofar as he was the embodiment of the truth. However, I propose, by way of an internal critique of his followers, that he embodied the space of ideology's failure, holding endlessly open the contingency of images of the reality of the state. Thus, in this chapter, I do not consider lines of contestation between those who are for and against the Islamic Republic, focusing rather on the preponderance of the impossible state for its ideologues who reckoned with the challenge of envisioning the impossible.

The Islamic Republic began to consolidate power immediately after the soon-to-be Imam Khomeini landed in Tehran in February 1979 to be met with throngs of admirers looking forward to the new beginning. 1979, however, did not demarcate the end of the momentum of the revolution. The immediate "post-revolutionary" moment was dizzying and chaotic. In addition to mass protests making concrete demands from the newly-established state, the Islamic Republic was at war: from the north-western province of Kurdistan, Kurds attempted to secede to establish

[219] Jodi Dean, *Crowds and the Party* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2016), 57.

[220] Dean, 60.

[221] Dean, 160.

an autonomous and sovereign Kurdish nation-state and were ruthlessly met with the strong arm of the state; in the next year, Saddam Hussein, fully-aware of the precarity of the post-revolutionary moment, attacked Iran, initiating nine devastating years of combat in the Iran-Iraq War; and amid its geo-political conflicts, opposition to the Islamic Republic waged violent campaigns to end it at its birth. Beginning in 1980, the Islamic Republic initiated the *Enghelab-e Farhangi* or the Cultural Revolution with the aim of Islamicizing universities and of eradicating any trace of *gharbzadegi*, buttressed by mass trials and executions of dissidents suspected of nefarious intent. Though the Islamic Republic lived through the tumult of its first decade, it was not for that reason complete.

The Islamic-Heideggerian Ahmad Fardid, the spokesperson of the Cultural Revolution who innovated the concept of *gharbzadegi* that Al-e Ahmad popularized in his eponymous essay, delivered lectures on state-run television, in which he periodized the time before 1979 as the time of the *barzakh*, suggesting that with the Imam's return, the Islamic Republic was ushered into the age of truth. Coevally, war propagandists who were aligned with Fardid and captured raw footage of the battlefront deliberated over how to depict and to narrativize images of the *shahid* or martyr, who was giving their life to the Islamic Republic and the Twelfth Imam, the Imam of Time. Emphasized therein was the incommunicability of the truth for which the *shahid* died, conceived as the space of the *barzakh* between images of the reality of the war and a vision of the world true to its meaning. By examining a documentary of the war and a fictional cinematic depiction of survivors sitting with its memory, I theorize the presence of the Imam Khomeini as propaganda embodied – and as a mode of communication that resolved a crisis of faith in the reality of the world – and the *shahid* as an embodied revelation the impossibility of the Islamic Republic.

Prior to examining documentary and fictional meditations on the War, I first demonstrate that in the 1960s, when the Pahlavi State was constructing a society of the spectacle, sites and

sources of veridiction concerning images of the reality of Iran proliferated, in large part by way of the dispersion of spectacular political activity by the Iranian opposition to the Shah outside Iran. I then claim that religious intellectuals after the 1979 Revolution responded to the crisis of faith in images of the reality of Iran with deliberation over the correct vision of the world to behold it; and, in so doing, demonstrate that Khomeini and his followers disagreed over how to interpret the spectacle of mass demonstrations in 1979 and the status of the Imam's relationship to its truth. In the penultimate section, I argue that in his attempt to justify the Khomeini as the presence of the truth, Fardid heightened the contradiction of the impossible state, condemning "mass media" as a domain of mendacity insofar as it diffused the concentrated spectacle of the Imam. Only after, I conclude by theorizing the "fog of war" in war cinema in the 1980s as a *barzakh* to render visible the act of following the cause to its end on the warfront as a revelation of the impossible.

I. The Shattered Image of Reality

I now demonstrate that beginning in the late 1960s, there was a dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction about the ideal image of reality that coincided with though was by no means primary to the pervasive loss of faith in the logic of the world and the silence of the people. The Pahlavi State under Muhammad Reza engineered images of reality within the territorial boundaries of Iran. Outside of Iran, leftist critics of the monarchy and its 1963 Revolution who were in the United States for myriad reasons – in some though not all cases to receive an education – assembled mass demonstrations in protest of the Shah when he visited the capital that were performatively enacted for the purpose of their future mediation in audio-visual space. Within Iran, the cinema emerged as a site and source of truth-telling about images of reality. I locate an infamous episode in 1978 when a group of arsonists burned the Cinema Rex theater to the ground while it was airing Masoud Kimia's 1975 film *Ghavaznha* or *The Deer* within the contested terrain

of the spectacle. I suggest that it foreshadowed the self-contradictory constitution of the Islamic Republic as an invisible idea that could not be brought to presence.

Television gained popularity in Iran in the context of the rapid economic development of the 1950s. The entrepreneur Habibollah Sabet Pasel who "literally created the Iranian Pepsi generation" and his son Firuz Pasal acquired permission from the state to establish the first television station after the younger Pasel acquired an MBA from Harvard Business School.[222] Just as he had with radio, the Shah welcomed television. He waxed optimistic about its ability to "[train] the youth and improve social knowledge" in October 1958.[223] The first television broadcasters mostly used the political technology for advertising purposes since only a few urban middle-class families had the luxury to purchase one. In October 1966, the Shah established a government television station. In its first week, it broadcast his birthday celebration. In 1969, the Shah took possession of Sabet's station and forced him out of Iran. In the ten years from 1967 to 1977, there was a startling increase in the number of people who had access to television. In 1967, that number was two million of roughly twenty-six million people; in 1977, fifteen million people or roughly fifty-percent of the population had access to television.[224] It was a widely viewed medium.

In 1971, the Pahlavi State established National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT) as "a public broadcasting monopoly run as an independent government corporation."[225] NIRT had two stations: Channel One and Channel Two, the latter educational and cultural, the former general. Thus, the state had exclusive control over the content of televisual broadcasts. In line with its

[222] Anabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 61.

[223] Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 62.

[224] Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 66.

[225] Ibid., 66.

liberalizing cultural reforms, Channels One and Two broadcast US-made blockbusters and soap operas, domestically-produced serials, and traditional music.[226] However, the Pahlavi State was busily "creating an official culture of spectacle that depended both on Westernizing Iran and on revitalizing a partly fabricated monarchic and chauvinistic ideology and history that predated Islam."[227] For example, in 1971, NIRT broadcast the twenty-five-hundred-year anniversary of monarchy. From exile in Najaf, Khomeini addressed his audiences within Iran and asked them to persuade other Iranians to not go to the "filthy celebration."[228] He was not alone in rejecting the imagery of opulence and wealth as a reflection of Iran. After the celebration, the Pahlavi State encouraged Western companies to make documentaries about the celebration, one of the most notable Shahrokh Golestan's 1972 *Flames of Persia*. It only screened for a week in Tehran since "the forced and massive exposure of propagandistic films about an event whose extravagant expenditures had become legendary and highly resented was like pouring salt into a wound."[229]

If within Iran, the Pahlavi State had effectively taken control of NIRT, outside of Iran, Iranians who were critical of Muhammad Reza and his White Revolution regularly protested the Shah when he paid visits to Washington D.C. In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson, standing next to Muhammad Reza before the eyes of news cameras, defended the 1963 Revolution since it was effectively a direct extension of the United States' policy of containment and thus a paradigmatic terrain of struggle within the United States during the anti-war movement afoot therein:

> You are winning progress without violence and without any bloodshed: a lesson that others still have to learn. To destroy the existing order, to dismiss the past without a plan for the present and the future – well, that is never enough. We Americans challenge every propagandist and every

[226] Ibid., 66-67.

[227] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema v. 2*: The Industrializing Years, 1941-1978, 60.

[228] Ruhollah Khomeini, "Bargi az Tarikh / I'teraz-e Imam Khomeini be Bargozari-ye Jashnha-ye 2500 Sale-ye Shahenshahi," *Portol-e Imam Khomeini*, https://tinyurl.com/y47t6pwa (April 25, 2019).

[229] Naficy, 139.

> demagogue, whether he speaks on the radio waves of the world or on the streets of our cities to demonstrate his commitment to progress with the facts and the figures. The people of the world cry out for progress, not for propaganda.[230]

After Johnson then congratulated Muhammad Reza for the success of his "land reforms," Muhammad Reza stated, in turn, that the White Revolution was for the "majority." On the South Lawn, Iranian student demonstrators held up signs attempting to challenge Johnson and the Shah, one of which, visible in raw footage from the event, read simply, "Land Belongs To Peasants."

In the next decade, as tacit disagreement to the state lived dormant in silence, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-monarchist organizations were attempting to publicize to a national and global viewership the injustices Iranians were suffering. In November 1977, Muhammad Reza visited President Jimmy Carter at the White House when Carter described Iran as an "island of stability." Demonstrators who were largely members of the umbrella leftist organization International Confederation of Iranian Students orchestrated a mass protest of Carter and the Shah. The mounted Park Police Service attempted to quell the demonstrators with tear gas. A breeze carried the fumes to the South Lawn prompting a teary-eyed Carter to apologize to the Shah for the "air pollution."[231] Before 1977, news coverage in the United States accounted for only one-percent of international news stories, the majority of which were produced elsewhere; moreover, little attention was paid to the discontent of Iranians critical of the Shah, instead focusing on oil and arms sales. [232] After November, ABC, NBC, and CBS placed correspondents in Tehran, half

[230] National Archives, *Iranian Student Demonstration at the White House*, 1967, http://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.1600885.

[231] Linda Charlton, "Clashes and Tear Gas Mar Shah's Welcome in Capital," *The New York Times*, November 16, 1977, sec. Archives, https://www.nytimes.com/1977/11/16/archives/clashes-and-tear-gas-mar-shahs-welcome-in-capital-clashes-and-tear.html.

[232] Richard Jackson Harris, *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 197.

of the stories thereafter originated from Iran, and focused on anti-government demonstrations gaining momentum.[233] NIRT lost control of the images viewers outside of Iran could see.

Though the official culture of spectacle within Iran was not contested on television, cinematic productions and cinema halls emerged as terrains of struggle. In the early 1960s, fifty-two million people attended the cinema. Its popularity provoked some intellectual elite to worry about its potential for "mass manipulation" and criticized films if they were seen as diverting the care of viewers away from the nation.[234] The majority of the most popular films of that time were melodramas that were centered on the family: in melodramatic films, national heroes "gave of themselves to perform the will of God or the fate of the nation in preserving the family."[235] In such films, the family was represented "as an enduring if threatened institution whose survival depended on the willingness of its members to sacrifice their own individual rights – countering the individualism of emerging modernity."[236] On August 19, 1978, a group of arsonists set fire to the Cinema Rex theater in the city of Abadan taking the lives of over four hundred people while it was showing a viewing of Masoud Kimia's 1975 *The Deer*, an exemplar of the genre of melodrama. In the quest for truth, the arsonists condemned the terrain of spectacle as a domain of mendacity.

In Kimia's film, a man by the name of Ghodrat is wounded in an armed robbery gone wrong in Tehran and immediately sets out to find his childhood friend Seyed who is struggling with abject poverty and heroin addiction and lives in the impoverished south of the city. Seyed accepts Ghodrat as a hideaway. In the meanwhile, Ghodrat tries to help Seyed by motivating him

[233] Harris, 197.

[234] Pedram Partovi, *Popular Iranian Cinema before the Revolution: Family and Nation in* Filmfarsi (New York: Routledge, 2017), 42.

[235] Partovi, 43.

[236] Naficy, 231.

to rebuild his life and escape his present condition. Seyed despairs and does not immediately accept Ghodrat's helping hand, rejecting Ghodrat because he is not any better off than him. Their dialogues revolve around the structural and historical impediments to self-flourishing and a mutual reckoning with the unfortunate conditions that carried them to their current destination. Their conversations do not culminate in any kind of resolute answer though there is a fleeting moment of mutual reconciliation in the acknowledgment of their common despair. The police eventually track down Ghodrat. Ghodrat pleas to Seyed to flee to save his life but Seyed refuses, insisting that he would rather die there alongside his friend. *The Deer* concludes with the police riddling both men with bullets. It barely made it past the censors because of its stark depiction of reality.

In condemning the cinema hall as a site and source of mendacious images of reality, the arsonists had, if not purposefully, re-signified Seyed and Ghodrat's act of self-sacrifice as oriented towards a lie and with an aim and objective that begged the question of a mendacious totality. The tension between the act of martyrdom, its mediation, and conceptions of the immediate conditions of intelligibility revealed in the act of arson against a melodrama of self-sacrifice highlights a more profound and pervasive loss of faith in the ideal image of reality, a resentment towards the dispersion of sites of sites of veridiction about the image of reality, and a sense that nothing short of the annihilation of images would save Iran from corruption. In February 1979, when Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran as the coming of the Twelfth Imam, the crisis of legitimacy intensely pronounced in the rage against the tyranny of the image persisted. As I demonstrate in the section below, Khomeini and leaders of the Islamic Republic were at pains to reconcile his presence as the immediate revelation of truth and the problem of mediation. Thus, the crisis of legitimacy conceived as a loss of faith in the image of reality and the dispersion of attendant sites and sources of veridiction was constituted in discourse about visions of the world.

II. Envisioning the World

In the 1940s, Marxist-Leninists most likely introduced the concept of *jahan-bini*, the Persian translation of *weltanshauung* or "vision of the world," to Iran. By 1952, Muhammad Nakhshab, a founding member of the Organization of God-Worshipping Socialists whose former members were propagandizing different conceptions of Iran in literary space, echoed a growing sentiment that "[i]n the case that the ideology of a party is based upon an accurate *jahan-bini* and a philosophical way of thinking, [is it] more able to solve social and economic problems."[237] The main theoretician of the Tudeh Communist Party Ehsan Tabari used it casually in essays and books he published in the 1960s, usually in respect to *jahan-bini-ye marksisti* or "The Marxist vision of the world," though without substantive commentary on its meaning.[238] In the 1970s, reformist Shi'a Muslims who were affiliated with the Husseynie Ershad began to reflect upon the relationship of the ideology of Islam to the *jahan-bini-ye tawhidi* or the vision of the world of the true totality. For example, in 1971, Shariati described *jahan-bini* as "the concrete substructure of every school of thought" and *jahan-bini-ye tawhidi* as a vision of "all of the cosmos in the form of a totality."[239]

In 1979, the director of the Husseynie Ershad Murteza Mutahhari, who played a formative role in temporarily banning Shariati from giving speeches due to his anti-clerical undertones eight years prior, published a six-volume treatise *Jahan-bini-ye Tawhidi*, in the second volume of which he posed the *jahan-bini* as an obstacle and a limit to the completion of the now so-called Islamic

[237] Muhammad Nakhshab, *A Dictionary of Societal Concepts* in *The Collected Works of Dr. Muhammad Nakhshab* (Tehran: *Intisharat-e Chapkhesh*, 2002/2003), 230.

[238] Ehsan Tabari, *Barkhi Barresi darbareye Jahanbiniha va Jonbeshhaye Ijtima'i dar Iran* (*Intisharat-e Anjoman-e Dustdaran-e Ehsan-e Tabari*, 1968).

[239] Ali Shariati, *Islamshenasi* (Tehran: *Sherkat-e Intisharat-e Ghalam va Bonyad-e Farhangi-e Doktor Ali Shariati*, 2011/2012), 49.

Revolution of Iran: "Every person can see a scene, or a performance, and as a collective," he wrote, "but only a few people can interpret it, and most likely do so differently."[240] The Ayatollah and Imam Khomeini returned from exile to spearhead the new state, the spectacle of his return captured on television with thousands of admirers following the vehicle that escorted him from the airport. However, from an apparent position of objective observation, Mutaharri was not convinced that what he referred to as *jahan-ehsasi* or a feeling for the world on display on the screen was indicative that the eyes of those who beheld the Imam were oriented towards the image of reality. In other words, if the Imam were apparently giving presence to a truth that was one, even his most well-intentioned followers, if erroneously constituted, would corrupt the truth he made present.

In 1980, the Islamic Republic initiated *Enghelab-e Farhangi* or the Cultural Revolution to Islamicize universities as a means of answering to the problem that Mutaharri had observed. In what follows, I demonstrate that the crisis of legitimacy conceived as a loss of faith in images of reality was reconstituted on the terrain of spectacle about the ideal vision of the world. I first argue that Khomeini like the arsonists who burned Cinema Rex to the ground condemned the terrain of spectacle as a domain of mendacity and locate his eventual deployment of Voice and Vision of the Islamic Republic (VVIR) to proliferate truths therein. Second, I claim that the spokesperson of the Cultural Revolution Ahmad Fardid saw the domain of mendacity as a symptom of the *barzakh* and of the condition of being after prophecy. In contrast to Al-e Ahmad and Shariati who conceived the *barzakh* as an endless wellspring from which they could draw to restore their faith in the world, Fardid conceived the *barzakh* as cause for the appearance of mendacious worlds and as the ultimate symptom of *gharbzadegi*. In the section that follows, I reconstruct Fardid's conception of the Imam as the answer to articulate a critique of the Imam as the mediated presence of the impossible state.

[240] Murtaza Mutaharri, *Jahanbini-e Tawhidi V. 2* (Tehran: *Intisharat-e Mulla Sadra*, 1993/1994), 7.

A. Ayatollah Khomeini and the Quest for Immediacy

After Khomeini returned to Iran on the morning of February 1, 1979, he drew his source of legitimacy from the spectacle of the crowds who were admiring him. Prior to his first speech before the body of people who had amassed to welcome his return, Khomeini faced a crowd of thousands that chanted together, "*Allah-u Akbar, Khomeini Rahbar*" or "God is Great, Khomeini Our Guide." "What have these people said and what have they demanded," he asked, "for such bloodshed, looting, and oppression ever since they raised their voices?" Promising to the spectators before him that he would put the "criminals" on trial and establish a government, he stated, "Since the people have accepted me…," giving space for applause and the chant that began his speech. In the months that followed, the momentum of the few months prior did not cease and in the next decade, the Islamic Republic consolidated its power and ruthlessly suppressed dissent. In March, Khomeini and the self-anointed spokesmen of Iran were confronted with both an unemployment movement that was organized and in motion prior to February and on International Women's Day, mass demonstrations appeared in opposition to his decree to re-enforce the compulsory veil. More generally, the return of the Ayatollah regardless, the legitimacy of the state was in question.

In the same month, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran organized a massive uprising during which Kurds achieved military victories against the Revolutionary Guard, prompting Khomeini to declare war against the Kurds. Khomeini had inherited and was living in the afterlife of the crisis of legitimacy as it was conceived in the late nineteenth century and thereafter as a loss of faith in the logic of the world and the historical and geographical constitution of Iran. Alongside the Azarbaijan People's Government in 1946, the Komalay Jiyanay Kurdistan established the short-lived Republic of Mahabad to which the Central Government responded with ruthless force as it was doing as well with the Azeris. In the 1960s and 1970s, irredentist movements in Kurdistan

made attempts to establish Kurdistan as an independent nation-state. In contrast to Ahmad Kasravi who had disseminated the "truth" that the life of Iran was unified by the land that foregrounded it, Khomeini suggested that the monarchy's propaganda that Iranians were living the same kind of life had deceived them into perceiving the sight of the destitution of their lives as an exception. He articulated and elaborated his above concern on October 21, 1979 in a speech, "The Sensitive Role of Radio and Television," in Qom to the Personnel of Audio and Visual Foreign Programs.

Khomeini, who was familiar with Jalal Al-e Ahmad's 1961 *Gharbzadegi*, drew upon Al-e Ahmad's typology of the three kinds of "melancholia" that the Pahlavi State had inculcated within Iranians with political technologies that he perceived had effectively "filled" the eyes, ears, and minds of the people of Iran. Admonishing "deviant figures" in Kurdistan who went around "propagating that [the Islamic Republic] does not want Kurds to exist," Khomeini stated, "In the meanwhile, since I've returned to Iran, various tribes have come here, and each have stated this very thing, and I have said that you speak the truth, because a person sees one thing with their eyes, and hears one thing with their ears."[241] In an allusion to *Gharbzadegi*, Khomeini continued:

> Your ears have been filled by propaganda of 'the great civilization' and 'the era of the great civilization!' They have filled our ears. On the one hand, they see that, well, it's not here. They think that here's the only place that it isn't; the great civilization must be everywhere else! They think that it's everywhere but here! If we search we'll find that it's nowhere! Well, go to Tehran which is the capital, go to the slums, and ask, are Kurds or Baluchis worse off than the slums of Tehran? These people who are currently living in its peripheries. I sometimes see them on television. They show their homes; these holes from which they come out of![242]

In the 1963 revision of *Gharbzadegi*, Al-e Ahmad had discovered the potential and possibility of individuals to sing their own tunes and to enact their own silences. Khomeini offered his own revision of the 1961 original by suggesting that by listening to radio, audiences were deceived into

[241] Khomeini, "The Sensitive Role of Radio and Television," *Jamaran*, https://tinyurl.com/y3glwewr (April 25, 2019).

[242] Khomeini, "The Sensitive Role of Radio and Television."

thinking that they had been exceptionally short-handed while television offered spectators a reflection of the immediacy of the destitute social and historical conditions of the lives of Iranians.

Khomeini proclaimed April 1 "the first day of the Government of God" after an alleged 98.2 percent of voters approved a referendum on whether Iran should become an Islamic Republic. The Assembly of Experts, who were elected in August, deliberated over the new government's first constitution. On November 15, two-thirds of the Assembly approved the Constitution. It was ratified on second and third of December. Principle 5 of the Constitution stated: "During the absence of the Glorious Lord of the Age" – in reference to the Twelfth Imam whose return was to usher in an age of truth – "may God grant him relief, he will be represented in the Islamic Republic of Iran as a religious leader and imam of the people by an honest, virtuous, well-informed, courageous, efficient administrator and religious jurist, enjoying the confidence of the majority of the people."[243] As the *Vali-ye Faqih* or the Guardian of the Jurists, Khomeini was authorized to govern by "the confidence of the majority of the people" and as the presence of truth indicated in his anointment within the Constitution as the Imam Khomeini, the presence of the Lord of Age. Khomeini was thus authorized to govern through a self-contradiction between the people as the site and source of his legitimacy and an absent truth he made present independent of the people.

Though he did not explicitly consider the contradiction above, he nonetheless reckoned with it in the years that followed. When Khomeini watched televisual depictions of images of reality, he trusted that his mode of spectatorship was mediated by a vision of the world that was indexed to the truth of reality, and yet indicated in policy and practice was that he did not extend that same trust to the eyes of the national viewership. The first director of Voice and Vision of Iran (VVIR) Sadeq Ghotbzadeh along with Khomeini described audio-video programming as a "public

[243] Rouhalla K. Ramazani, "Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Middle East Journal* 34 (1980), 189.

university."[244] In the month of Ramadan in 1980, the Islamic Republic began to censor radio and television programming that was "non-Islamic" and aggressively maintained the "purity" of broadcasts thereafter, coinciding with and as an extension of the Cultural Revolution.[245] Some Iranians began to derisively refer to Channel One and Channel Two as "glass wool," "wooly glass," and "mulla vision" since the content of their broadcasts was now overwhelmingly comprised of Islamic educational programming and snidely described radio as the "minaret" or "pulpit" of the Islamic Republic.[246] In a two-fold process, VVIR was attempting to censor mendacious images of the world from appearing in audio-visual space while inculcating a true vision of the world among viewers to safeguard the immediacy of the presence of truth.

If, on the one hand, Khomeini embarked upon a quest for immediacy and enlisted VVIR to facilitate the circulation of immediate depictions of Iran's reality and to inculcate viewers who could see the truth, he was, on the other hand, invested in presenting what he had taken to referring to as "the barefoot" – the abject and the poor – as the immediate subject of the revolution. In 1985, two years after the official end of the Cultural Revolution, five years into the Iran-Iraq War, and in the maelstrom of crisis, VVIR was playing a hand in the cult of personality around the Imam. Khomeini visited the head of VVIR Muhammad Hashemi and VVIR's employees to explain that he was unhappy with "radio-television" for that very reason. In plain language, he stated:

> The reality is that we do not have as much of a right to radio-television as the barefoot…The reality is that they have built this order and have brought this movement into being; it is this collective that brought these victories to hand; nobody in the upper stratum has a right to this issue. Of course we have also participated at the root of this, yet the right is with them. It has been a long while that I see that my name is always brought up on radio-television, and I do not like

[244] Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema V. 3: The Islamicate Period, 1978-1984*, 159.

[245] Naficy, 160.

[246] Naficy, 160.

> that…Just as now, those things that are are on television, like when the news is about to start, they display my picture. Remove that, and if anybody asks, tell them I said so.[247]

Hashemi responded with flattery, "You have a place in the hearts of the people." Khomeini replied brusquely that "[t]he hearts of the people is aside from this."[248] In their disagreement, Hashemi and Khomeini brought to the surface the appearance of the crisis of legitimacy in the image of the Imam: for Hashemi, the Imam was the immediate presence of the truth; for the latter, the barefoot.

In other words, within the first half of the first decade of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini and his followers were unaligned and in disagreement in how they understood the relationship between the mediation of truth, the image of reality, and the attendant true vision of the world as it concerned and weighed upon the status of the Imam Khomeini and the subject of the revolution. Three years later in 1988, Khomeini penned a letter to the historian Hojjat al-Islam Hamid Rowhani who was busy writing a history of the "Islamic Revolution" with help from *Bonyad-e Shahid* or the Association of Martyrs, in which he insisted again upon his intervention to VVIR:

> I want you to try as hard as you can to make clear the goal of the uprising of the people. Why is that historians slaughter revolutions in the slaughterhouses of their own motives and those of their masters? Today like with all histories of revolutions, a group of people, Easterners and Westerners alike, are occupied with writing the history of the glorious Islamic Revolution. You will have done a great service to Iranian history if you are able to base history upon audio-video documentation in the common language of the masses of suffering people, containing the complex issue of the revolution. The foundation of histories of our Islamic Revolution, like the revolution itself, should be built upon the shoulders of the barefoot [masses who are] disfavored by the powers and the superpowers.[249]

Khomeini maintained that the "barefoot" gave presence to the truth of the Islamic Revolution in mode of appearance on the streets. Thus, he claimed that the history of the revolution as it really

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[247] Ruhollah Khomeini, "Integhadi ke Imam be Barnameha-ye Khabari-ye Radio va Television Mutarah Kard," *Portol-e Imam Khomeini*, https://tinyurl.com/yygv9mq8 (April 25, 2019).

[248] Ruhollah Khomeini, "Integhadi ke Imam be Barnameha-ye Khabari-ye Radio va Television Mutarah Kard."

[249] Abu al-Fazl Shakuri, *Daramadi bar Tarikhnegari va Tarikhnegari-e Mosalmanan* (Qum: Markaz-e Entesharat-e Daftar-e Tablighat-e Islam-e Howzeh-e Elmiyyeh-e Qum, 2001," 228-229, cited in Kamran Scot-Aghaei, "Islamist Historiography in Post-Revolutionary Iran," 237-238.

happened ought to bring the truth to presence with the immediacy of audio-video documentation, instead of relying upon the written word and the attendant problem of the mediation of truth. For the likes of Hashemi, the "barefoot" who crowded the image of the 1979 Revolution did not give presence to truth; more troublingly, they persisted as its constitutive lie, the source of error. Though the presence of the Imam was to resolve that lie, the Ayatollah Khomeini insisted upon it.

B. Ahmad Fardid and the End of Immediacy

When the Islamic Republic initiated the Cultural Revolution, Ahmad Fardid, who had coined the term *gharbzadegi* that Al-e Ahmad popularized in his eponymous essay, emerged as one of its most fierce advocates and as its self-proclaimed spokesmen. Fardid wrote very little throughout his lifetime, however. The *filsuf-e shafahi* or "oral philosopher," he lectured at universities and delivered lectures on *gharbzadegi* on Channel Two in the Cultural Revolution and in its aftermath. Though faithful to Khomeini, Fardid, like Hashemi of VVIR, insisted that the return of the Imam to Iran had brought forth the dawn of the end of history and of the age of truth. Like Hashemi, moreover, Fardid looked upon the barefoot with deep suspicion that followed from a conception of *gharbzadegi* he formulated by way of an engagement with the twentieth-century German philosopher Martin Heidegger's critique of the tyranny of reason that subjected the being for whom being was an issue for it – being-there – in the advent of the Enlightenment. Fardid drew upon Heidegger to inscribe a distinction between pre- and post-revolutionary Iran that mapped onto a distinction between the age of the *barzakh* and the age in which the truth was revealed.

In February 1978, at the height of the mass demonstrations against the Pahlavi State under Muhammad Reza Shah, Fardid published an article, "The Fall of Hedayat into the Septic Pit of French Literature," in *E'tellat* (*Information*), in which he proposed a method of literary criticism that he named *surat-shenasi* or the science of faces, an enactment of what Houchang Chehabi

refers to as "the paranoid style in Iranian historiography." "Each history," he wrote, "begins with the 'erasure' of one face and the 'constitution' of another."[250] "The conflicts of Eastern civilizations unfold in respect to their materiality, not their faces," he continued, "and the 'new face' of all Eastern civilizations on the ground today, is the 'new face' of Western civilization."[251] In other words, Fardid proposed, like Al-e Ahmad, that the logic of the machine which he claimed was apparent at face-value in the West had been constituted as the ground of history in the East. In contrast to Al-e Ahmad, however, for whom *gharbzadegi* had unwittingly emancipated Iranians from the grip of tradition and provided them the opportunity to return to the cry of nature, Fardid, attuned to the indebtedness of the intellectuals to Hedayat, applied his method to reveal their faces.

Fardid located Hedayat within the tri-partite periodization of national historiography that began with a golden age, ended with a dark age, and culminated with a renaissance, well-aware of the reconfiguration of that meta-narrative in *Blind Owl* around the condition of being *in medias res*. "Like everyone, Hedayat was a creature with a yesterday, a today, and a tomorrow," Fardid wrote.[252] "His yesterday was 'the traditions of history,'" he claimed, "and his tomorrow the rotten, decayed literary tradition of the inter-war period, and specifically, the French literary tradition."[253] In a paranoid mode, Fardid maintained that Hedayat was the representative face of *gharbzadegi* who, in the received history of Iranian thought, was constitutive of the ground of the space of intellection. In a lecture, "The Truth of History, Historical Place and Historical Time" that he delivered at the University of Tehran after Khomeini's return, Fardid elaborated upon his criticism

[250] Ahmad Fardid, "The Fall of Hedayat into the Septic Pit of French Literature,"

[251] Ahmad Fardid, "The Fall of Hedayat into the Septic Pit of French Literature,"

[252] Ahmad Fardid, "The Fall of Hedayat into the Septic Pit of French Literature,"

[253] Ahmad Fardid, "The Fall of Hedayat into the Septic Pit of French Literature,"

of Hedayat by revisiting and reflecting upon the pivotal concept of the *barzakh*. Fardid reconfigured the concept of the *barzakh* by way and through a characterization of Heidegger, during which time and before he referred to himself accordingly as an Islamic-Heideggerian. To understand Fardid's reconfiguration of the *barzakh*, it will be useful to briefly turn to Heidegger.

Though Fardid never directly cited or stated from which of Heidegger's works he was drawing, he did, notwithstanding, reflect on the relationship between being-there and the "saving power." In his 1927 magnum opus *Being and Time*, Heidegger claimed that the way that the world appeared to being-there – the incomplete, irresolute being for which being is an issue for it – was unconditionally mediated by its temporal horizons.[254] He depicted the world as the unwitting cultural and historical construction of disoriented minds: in an anxious flight from the haunting specter of their own mortality, being-there struggled to be redeemed of guilt that was consequence of its indebtedness to its abysmal finitude by sustaining the world it had inherited. Being-there lived by forgetting that however masterful it was and however sublime the architecture of its existence it could not master the brute fact that its creations will end. Insofar as he was suspicious of creation, Heidegger was also suspicious of creators: the fallible gods, the crowd or the "they," who did not question that why and for what it cared was not meaningful. Heidegger oriented his thinking towards an authentic world purified of inauthenticity in which life was meaningful such that essence and existence were happily married.

In his 1979 lecture, Fardid reconfigured the narrative of decline in *Being and Time* in which the existence of being-there moved in a destined unfolding towards the brute fact of its own death as the face of a world constituted, in the received narrative, by the death of God. Fardid reconceived the nihilism of Heidegger in 1927 as the nihilism of Hedayat in 1941. "Then today we must say,"

[254] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962).

Fardid stated, "that the sky and even destiny no longer exists for us and man no longer dies."[255] "Man has now become uprooted," he continued, "and is, in a word, without a homeland (*bi-vatan*). His birthplace and his country have fallen away."[256] "Man today, who worships the nation," he concluded, "is without a homeland," on the premise that man had lost faith in the divine.[257] "Heidegger gives the name of being-there to this *barzakh-i* creature (*mujud-e barzakhi*), meaning that the essence of man is *in medias res* and *barzakhi* (*wujud-e binabini va barzakhi*)." [258] He then asked, like Hedayat, Al-e Ahmad, and Shariati before him, "Yet what is this *barzakh*?"[259] If, in other words, for Heidegger, death replaced the godhead, Fardid, reflecting on the decades prior, claimed that the *barzakh* had assumed that place in Iran as the condition of being after prophecy.

Though Fardid maintained that prior to February 1979, Iranians were caught in the *barzakh*, after then, they experienced a transformation in their feeling for the world, articulating his claim with the formulation that Mutaharri would use in the second volume of *Jahanbini-ye Tawhidi*:

> …for humans, a feeling emerges in respect to the world [after the revolutionary event] and their vision changes. A new *jahanbīnī* emerges that the Germans call *Weltanschauung* and the English worldview and the Italians *concezione del mondo* and the French *conceptione du monde* and the Russians *mirovozzreniye*, yet the interpretation of the English, French and Italians of *jahanbīnī* is at a distance since *jahanbīnī* is the face of the feeling of worldliness which is beyond vision.[260]

In other words, Fardid claimed that prior to 1979, the "face" of the world was constituted by the condition of being after prophecy of which Hedayat was its representative, after 1979, a new face,

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[255] Ahmad Fardid, "*Haghighat-e Tarikh, Movaghef va Movaghiyat-e Tarikhi"* in *Didar-e Farhi va Fotuhat-e Akharzaman* ed. Muhammad Madadpour (Tehran: *Mu'asese-ye Farhangi-ye Pazhouheshi*, 2014/2015), 44.

[256] Fardid, 44.

[257] Fardid, 44.

[258] Fardid, 45.

[259] Fardid, 45.

[260] Fardid, 47-48.

the truth of historical place and time, was constituted as the ground of the space of intellection. Unlike Hashemi, however, who, in his reply to Khomeini in 1985, would state in the mode of flattery, "You have a place in the hearts of the people," Fardid, consumed by paranoia, was not so certain. Listening intently for the beating hearts of the west-stricken, who, in hiding their mendacity, were living the event as a lie, he worried about the annihilation of the Islamic Republic by the living embodiments of pre-revolutionary Iran and the diseased condition of the *barzakh*.

Fardid's diagnosis of the *barzakh* as the diseased condition of west-stricken-ness and as constitutive of what, put otherwise, was the end of immediacy in "pre-revolutionary" Iran was informed by his reception of Heidegger's later thinking on modern technology and the modern world picture and his gesture to the "saving power" that would save being-there from annihilation. In his 1954 essay, "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger claimed that everything in the modern world was a means that served the ends of others. The essence of modern technology, he claimed, was "en-framing," "the gathering together that belongs to the setting upon which sets upon man and puts him in a position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve."[261] In other words, being-there appeared as a subject when its constituent organs were gathered together into a coherent and unified body; alienated and estranged from the world, being-there "gathered" together the constituent things of the world into a coherent and unified totality. In the "mode of ordering" of "standing-reserve," everything, including being-there, was objectified and commodified, awaiting use, consumption, exhaustion, and annihilation.[262] Thus, when Fardid decried that "man today worships the nation," he perceived the nation as a modern technology.

[261] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Gardland Publishing Inc., 1977), 24.

[262] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 24.

In "The Age of the World Picture," Heidegger expanded the breadth and scope of his inquiry from modern technology specifically to the essence of modern science in general: "[when] we reflect on the modern age," he wrote, "we are questioning concerning the modern world picture" in which "that which is in its entirety" – the world as a spatial and temporal order – is "juxtaposed as that for which man is prepared and which, correspondingly, he therefore intends to bring before himself and have before himself, and consequently intends in a decisive sense to set in place before himself."[263] "As soon as the world becomes picture," he continued, "the fundamental stance of man in relation to what is, in its entirety, is defined as the world view."[264] In "Poetically Man Dwells," Heidegger grasped desperately for an exit from the modern world picture by recovering hope from despair that being-there is now at the least freed to poetically make the world anew: "[poetic] dwelling," he wrote, "flies fantastically above reality."[265] However, Heidegger insisted that being-there "does not fly above and surmount the world in order to escape and hover over it;" rather, being-there is oriented towards and motivated by a "saving power." [266]

In the "golden age of print," the crisis of legitimacy conceived as a loss of faith in the world was legible in literary spaces. In a lecture, "Vision and Idea, Idealism and Realism," Fardid, trembling before the crisis that haunted him, condemned the whole moment as indicative of the modern world picture and the nihilism of modern technology: "I am regretful," he stated, "specifically about some of the modernizing individuals of the past, who picked language up and

[263] Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 128-129.

[264] Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," 133.

[265] Heidegger, "…Poetically Man Dwells…," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 218.

[266] Heidegger, "…Poetically Man Dwells…," 221.

put it to use."[267] "The old have forgotten," he continued, "and the new do not know. They have forgotten to ask what language is."[268] Critical of "the language of the newspaper" therein, Fardid condemned language as "the greatest obstacle to revolution."[269] He explained, however, that "[a]ll of you sitting here have a vision."[270] "Your essence is everyone's essence," he continued; "This essence is our nature – nature in the sense that it is our type, meaning that new face that has stricken our essence."[271] The crisis of legitimacy was reconstituted as a loss of faith in the images of reality and the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction about the vision of the world. Fardid maintained that the truth was not revealed in the mediation of the word but in the revelation of a saving power, placing his spectators in the impossible position of following the cause to its end.

III. The Apocalyptic Present

In the previous section, I claimed that, in contrast to Khomeini who insisted that the barefoot were the immediate subject of the revolution, a few of his faithful followers insisted that he embodied the truth of the Islamic Revolution. I located their disagreement within a broader crisis of legitimacy conceived as a loss of faith in the image of reality and the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction about the true vision of the world. As one of the fiercest advocates of the Cultural Revolution, Fardid ironically and unwittingly gave voice most explicitly and most starkly to the disagreement over the status of the truth of Islamic Revolution in relation to the presence of the Imam Khomeini as a revelation of the saving power. In this section, I examine

[267] Fardid, 112.

[268] Fardid, 112.

[269] Fardid, 112.

[270] Fardid, "*Didar va Ideh, Idealism va Realism*," in *Didar-e Farhi va Fotuhat-e Akharzaman* ed. Muhammad Madadpour (Tehran: *Mu'asese-ye Farhangi-ye Pazhouheshi*, 2014/2015), 94.

[271] Fardid, 94.

Fardid's televised lectures on Channel Two as part of his series *West-stricken-ness and its Global Crisis in the Present Day* to articulate an immanent critique of the Imam Khomeini as the revelation of the impossibility of the Islamic Republic and, furthermore, to theorize the diffusion of truth in audio-visual space as a challenge to his concentrated spectacle. I thus argue that propaganda enacts the images of reality that visions of the world beg as a question to thereafter theorize the mediation of the act of following the cause to its end amid a legitimation crisis.

On May Day 1983, the Islamic Republic resurrected the Pahlavi State's practice of using torture to force the opposition, namely, the Marxist-Leninists of the Tudeh Communist Party, to admit to the crime of treason, to recant, and to pledge their allegiance to the new state as converted Muslims; in response, Tudeh leaders claimed that their comrades had been "brainwashed" with "mind-altering drugs" and many leftists simply "had trouble believing their eyes and ears."[272] In the year that followed, VVIR regularly aired televised recantations from Marxist-Leninists, during a more general period when the Islamic Republic was aggressively purging Iran of *gharbzadegi* in a brutal reign of terror. From May to September, members of the central committee of the Party were charged with espionage on grounds that they were tools of the KGB. In the longest of the confessions, Ghulam-Hossein Qaempanah stated, "Sometimes one needs a sudden shake to wake up from deep sleep. I woke up in prison, opened my eyes, and saw that over the years I had fallen into treacherous quicksand."[273] In May 1984, the main theoretician of the Party Ehsan Tabari, to the shock of his comrades, delivered a confession as a new convert to Islam and as a willing subject of the Islamic Republic, claiming that he was awakened to the truth on reading Mutaharri.[274]

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[272] Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 178.

[273] Abrahamian, 188.

[274] Abarahmain, 205.

Yet, though the Islamic Republic was continuing the practice of forced confessions, it was doing so on different terms and with different premises than the Pahlavi State: if for the latter, torture was employed to make a truth audible that was intelligible in the order of the "geography of the word;" the former was employing torture to force into the order of the visible an occulted truth beyond vision. On May 3, 1984, Fardid delivered the first lecture of his series *West-stricken-ness and its Global Crisis in the Present Day* on Channel Two, after the official end of the Cultural Revolution, amid the Iran-Iraq War, and at the height of the reign of terror. In an austere, poorly fit two-piece suit, Fardid stood in front of a dais overlooking a copy of the Qur'an, behind him a picture with an emerald green background and the word "Allah" inscribed upon it, to his side a blackboard upon which he had written an expanded formulation of the title of the series: *gharbzadegi va bohran-e havalat-e tarikhi-e jahani-e an dar ruzegar-e nistalgar-e makr al-layl va nahar zade-ye akhar zaman-e konuni*, or, "west-stricken-ness and the crisis of its global historical destiny in the nihilist and historicist stricken-ness of the apocalyptic present."

Lending his ear to the rallying cry "*Allah-u Akbar*" or "God is Great" that reverberated and spilled over the barrier separating the sleep of time past from the awakening of time present, Fardid claimed that the collectivity that invoked the name of God prophesied the coming of the Imam, suggesting that the subject of the revolution that appeared around the inaudibility of its own being was promised a future in which its existence was actualized in the embodied presence of truth with the *mahdi-e mu'ud* or "the Promised Mahdi," the Twelfth Imam who would bring the truth:

> Such it was that the moment of the reckoning of the Revolution began with [the messianic time of the coming of the *mahdi-e mu'ud*]. I am of the belief that the resolution that had been uttered, the resolutions, in [the utterance of] *Allah-u Akbar* – in this very *Allah-u Akbar*, the time of the historicism of west-stricken-ness passed, and the captivating time of the yesterday of man and his tomorrow with the manifestation of the *mahdi-e mu'ud* came towards and made itself present to [the west-stricken] essence and habitat of the people. Time came to its end. It is visible.[275]

[275] *Gharbzadegi va Bohran-e Jahani-e an dar Ruzegar-e Konun*. 1. *Shabkey-e Doh*, May 3, 1984, 24:30-25:14

In the age of the *barzakh*, the *barzakhi* creatures were caught in "the time of historicism," in which they were, akin to the blind owl, cut across by the irresoluteness of the spatial boundaries, temporal horizons, and intellectual development that would give them a footing to live a meaningful life. If, however, on the one hand, he diagnosed historicism as the disease of the revolutionary, he claimed, on the other hand, that, in the order of phenomena, they were promised an exit from its time.

Breaking rank with Khomeini, Fardid condescended the "barefoot" or what he referred to as the *jam'iat* or "the crowd."[276] He recounted that when he was "stricken by positivism" in his youth, he held Gustav Le Bon's *The Crowd* in high esteem, until, one day, he "threw all of it outside," recognizing its absurdity.[277] In *The Crowd*, Le Bon predicted that "[the] age we are about to enter will in truth be the era of crowds" whereby "[the] divine right of the masses is about to be replace the divine right of the kings."[278] His study of "the genius of crowds" was foregrounded by the premise that the crowd is intellectually inferior to the isolated individual," and yet, he hoped that "from the point of view of feelings and the acts these feelings provoke, the crowd may, according to circumstances, be better or worse off than the individual."[279] Crowds, he went on, "are only to be impressed by images," because "the figurative imagination of crowds is very powerful" such that they are "to some extent in the position of the sleeper whose reason, suspended for the time being, allows the arousing in his mind of images of extreme intensity."[280].

Fardid inherited the crisis of legitimacy from now long ago that appeared with *estebdad* or the arbitrary rule of the Shahs who lost their claim to authority as the prophets of the times and

[276] Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2002, 34-35.

[277] *Gharbzadegi va Bohran-e Jahani-e an dar Ruzegar-e Konun*, 30:03.

[278] Le Bon, x-xi.

[279] Le Bon, 9.

[280] Le Bon, 34-35.

who were authorized to rule not by divine right but by their claim to seeing and knowing the truth. Furthermore, he inherited Hedayat's conception of that crisis in *Blind Owl*: like the arsonists who burned Cinema Rex to the ground, he condemned the "circumstance" of time past as, in Hedayat's now familiar formulation, the *halat-e oghma' va barzakh* or the unconscious and *barzakhi* state. Suspended in the hysteria of the condition of the soul that is dreaming in its sleep, the crowd, he maintained, was disoriented amidst the crisis of legitimacy conceived as the loss of faith in images of reality and the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction about the true vision of the world. If, then, the crowd was akin to a "sleeper" who was "impressed by images," Fardid registered the collective act of daydreaming as the presence of a mendacious order of things. Like Freud, who proposed, in response to Le Bon, that the unconscious is also a crowd, Fardid was at war against the crowding of the image of the 1979 Revolution by the diseased unconscious of revolutionaries.

Fardid then claimed that the crisis of legitimacy conjured in the concept of *estebdad* in which the temporal authority of the prophets of the times was cut across by the *barzakh* was resolved by the presence of *mahdi-e mu'ud* or the Promised Mahdi who ushered in the age of truth. However, instead of resolving the crisis above, Fardid unwittingly intensified it by mapping the presence of the absence of truth as the constitutive groundwork of community of the faithful:

> In any case, in the time of the past and of the crowd, destiny was such that the religious and political collectivity could not – it was not the time for religion and society, for spiritual and temporal authority – *valayat va velayat* – to be unified, and for spiritual authority to appear as the inner command of temporal authority, such that spiritual authority is the exteriority of the interior – *zuhur-e butun* – and temporal authority the interiority of the exterior – *butun-e zuhur*.[281]

In other words, insofar as the temporal authority of the Imam derived its legitimacy from a spiritual authority that was hidden in the occulted domain of truth, Fardid had inscribed the unthinkability of the subject of the revolution upon the groundwork of the modern Islamic state, acknowledging

[281] *Gharbzadegi va Bohran-e Jahani-e an dar Ruzegar-e Konun*, 41:34-41:59.

through a leap of faith ideology's failure in the concentrated spectacle of the Imam who was uniquely authorized as the revelation of the impossible to guide and to govern the impossible state.

Fardid also then reckoned with the dispersion of the spectacle of truth in audio-visual space and conceptualized it both as the dissemination of lies and as a criminal act of sedition, insofar as it disintegrated the concentrated spectacle of the Imam with unsanctioned commanding presences. To that end, on January 12, 1985, Fardid delivered a lecture on the issue of *fitnah*. The conventional and popular conception of *fitnah* is of strife and sedition; however, it refers more broadly to a lexical constellation of words that roughly orbit around the concepts of "temptation" and "trial." Fardid elaborated upon what he claimed was the two-fold meaning of *fitnah* by way of spurious etymological reasoning: on the one hand, he claimed that the concept of *fitnah* was the equivalent of the Latin *fascinatio* and thus related to the English "fascination;" on the other hand, he claimed that the concept of *fitnah* was equivalent to the Greek *basanos* or torture and thus related to trial. He conceived the concept of *fitnah* as the temporal exteriority of *gharbzadegi.* The *gharbzadeh*, in his diagnosis, was a *fitnah-gar* or a seditionist. Thus, he claimed that "[e]ven I am *fitnahzadeh*" or stricken by sedition since he was of a world that was temptation and trial. [282]

Then, if on the one hand, Fardid looked upon the Islamic Republic as in an age of truth, on the other hand, he suggested that its subjects were responsible for following the cause to its end to bring it to light, in a process in which sedition was the point-of-departure and the truth the place of return. Employing an English-language formulation, Fardid inscribed a distinction between propaganda or *tabligh* as the revival and re-enactment of prophecy that would enact the image of reality that the true vision of the world would beg as a question and "mass media," condemning the latter not only for its content but also its form insofar as it externalized the *barzakhi* condition:

[282] *Gharbzadegi va Bohran-e Jahani-e an dar Ruzegar-e Konun*, 6. *Shabkey-e Doh*, January 12, 1985, 21:00-21:02.

> That which the world of today is, pay attention, is *fitnah-gari* – the *fitnah-gari* of the devil. There are two senses in which man is a *fitnah-gar*: in one sense, in respect to the so-called "collective messages" – *resale-ha-ye hamegani*. The meaning of *resale* is propaganda – *tabligh* – but mass media doesn't mean *tabligh*. *Tabligh* has another meaning. But we'll say *resale*. Mass media. "Mass" meaning "of the people." "Media" meaning "technology." In any case, this "mass media," on a planetary scale, is collective mediation – *vasatat-e jam'i* – which includes television and radio.[283]

His distrust in the people and his suspicion of technology coincided in his critique of mass media as a domain of mendacity or as "collective mediation," a symptom of the age of the *barzakh*. He prescribed, as he was doing on Channel Two, the deployment of audio-visual political technologies in the service of reviving and re-enacting prophecy by helping bring to light the truth of the Imam. The more that the Islamic Republic revealed his truth, the more it realized its own impossibility.

IV. The Fog of War

In the previous section, I articulated a critique of Fardid's efforts to think the relationship between authority, legitimacy, and truth after the Imam's return by suggesting that he heightened the contradiction of the impossible state. In this section, I examine portrayals of martyrdom in films that were in circulation in the 1980s about men who were, in some way or another, giving their life to the truth in the Iran-Iraq War. The fog of war, in the films I examine, obscured more than the strategies and tactics of the enemy; more pervasively and more troublingly, it obscured the reason for why men chose to die at all. At stake was the true image of reality for which they gave their lives and the true vision of the world to employ to reckon with the meaninglessness of death and the meaning of life on the warfront. To that end, I propose that observing the dispersed spectacle of martyrdom for the Islamic Republic as if the martyr were dying for a thinkable cause would be to overlook the stakes of the crisis afoot. Amid the legitimation crisis, the martyr posed a challenge to ideology as such by dying for the impossible, the condition of ideology's failure.

[283] *Gharbzadegi va Bohran-e Jahani-e an dar Ruzegar-e Konun*, 25:08-26:00.

Following the 1979 Revolution, the Husseynie Ershad, in which Shariati had delivered his speeches not long prior, was transformed into *Hozey-e Andishe va Farhang-e Islami* (The Center for Islamic Culture and Thought), and in 1980, to *Hozey-e Honari* (The Center for Arts), its central aim and objective to attract artists and intellectuals to produce Islamic propaganda. On September 22, 1980, Saddam Hussein took advantage of the instability of the post-revolutionary period and attacked Iran, initiating nine years of devastating combat in the Iran-Iraq War. In the Center for Arts, under the direction of the filmmaker Murteza Avini, a generation of artists began to produce what is now known as *cinemay-e defa-ye moqaddas* or Sacred Defense Cinema. Sacred Defense Cinema played a crucial role in constructing the memory of the Iran-Iraq War "by "[bringing] individuals and community into the presence of the martyrs to pay homage to them and to renew their commitment to following the example that the martyrs had set."[284] As such, Avini stated, "The presence of Iran in that war was not to prove her power or just a simple fight with Iraq," but to depict the war as a battle between justice and truth and injustice and lies.[285]

In a sixty-three-episode documentary *Ravaayat-e Fath* or *Narratives of Victory*, Avini attempted, according to his brother, to capture the War's "hidden reality."[286] In contrast to Western media which tried to "hide the truth," Avini claimed that what he was doing was "unveiling" it.[287] To do so, Avini had the responsibility to edit the presentation of the War and the events surrounding it. "If our camera captures a woman answering our interviewer with a harsh tone: 'I

[284] Pedram Khosronejad, "Introduction: The Iran-Iraq War and the creation of Sacred Defense cinema," in *Iranian Sacred Defense Cinema: Religion, Martyrdom and National Identity* ed. Pedram Khosronejad (Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2012), 3.

[285] Khosronejad, 12.

[286] Mehrzad Karimabadi, "Manifesto of Martyrdom: Similarities and Differences between Avini's *Ravaayat- Fath* [Chronicles of Victory] and more Traditional Manifestoes," *Iranian Studies* 44 (2011), 383.

[287] Karimabadi, 384.

do not want my son to go to war,'" he asked, "what should be done while editing? Should it get deleted or should it say it? The answer goes back to the message behind the film. We never leave these scenes in our films, since they do not match the reality of our society."[288] Avini reflected upon the work of propaganda in his documentary: "Our meaning for propaganda is that same duty that all eminent prophets of God received from God to inform the nation."[289] He suggested that *Ravaayat-e Fath* drew viewers into the "reality" of battlegrounds and soldiers, and drew them closer to the "truth."[290] The cameramen conducted interviews with soldiers "[t]o gain access to the soldier's soul" by waiting "for a special moment when they could express their true feelings."[291] Finally, instead of speaking directly to the cameramen, soldiers were to speak directly to the camera such that viewers could sense that the soldiers were speaking directly to them.[292]

Broadcast on Channel One in 1986, the first season of *Narratives of Victory* documented the First Battle of Faw, wherein from February 9 to March 10, 1986, the Islamic Republic gained a strategic hold on the al-Faw peninsula in southern Iraq, which Iraq would reclaim in April 1988. Its first episode, "A Night Like Ashura," begins in the city as soldiers prepare for deployment, surrounded by crowds chanting for them and celebrating their choice to go to war. Later, young soldiers are depicted in a sheltered space weeping, singing dirges, and embracing each other prior to marching forth towards the battlefront. Their fear for the imminent future is palpable. There begins an extended shot of soldiers marching in line, over which Avini narrates their movements, and in the background a voice sings a *rawzeh* or a dirge commemorating the Imam Hussein:

[288] Karimabadi, 383.

[289] Ibid., 14.

[290] Ibid., 13

[291] Ibid., 15

[292] Ibid., 16

> Howsoever the morning of victory, the sky was still saturated from the dew of the rain, yet the sun of the hearts of the faithful kept everyone warm. We were tasked with the responsibility of the narrative of victory, yet with what language and interpretation and how to narrate that which was passing? These youths are of a new generation that has appeared on the planet earth and the Lord Almighty has bestowed this varied responsibility to them. The age of the message of humanity has again begun and they are the messengers of this age and their message is that word that Gabriel bestowed upon the blessed heart of the Prophet and from there flowed from his blessed tongue….The unceasing line of children tends toward future victories with tranquility and trust from the victorious front and bring themselves to the front line, and you will not grow tired of watching them. It is quite astonishing that man lives in the midst of these tremendous world historical transformations and in the midst of the leaders of this evolution, and from neglect never discovers where and in what time they are living. It is here that you pursue the depths of this strange narrative and pursue knowledge of the Imam of Time as the condition of an exit from ignorance.[293]

Avini dispersed the spectacle of truth across the line of "children" marching, insofar as the end towards which they tended was "an exit from ignorance" as they gave their lives to the Imam, the absence of the presence of truth in *this* world in "the age of the message of humanity." To narrate such a "victory," Avini proposed, was fraught, since the beginning, middle, and end of their story was cut across, in his opinion and as he saw it, by the revelation of truth gifted by the prophet. The *shahid* or martyr thus posed a challenge – if not obviously so – to the truth embodied by Khomeini.

In the same year that the first season of *Narratives of Victory* aired on Channel One, Ebrahim Hatamikia, "the most prominent director of fiction war films," released the film *Hoviyat* (*Identity*), a meditation on the relationship between truth, identity, and martyrdom.[294] In *Identity*, Nasser Pouyanfar, a member of a motorcycle gang in Tehran, struck a young child who was potentially killed and left him in the gutter, on their way to the north of Iran. Though he and his friends fled, Nasser had a change of heart en route and declared that he needed to return to confess. The leader of the gang wrestled him and threatened him if he were to tell the truth since they were all implicated. On his way back to Tehran, Nasser was struck by a vehicle. The ambulance that

[293] *Ravayyat-e Fath*, "The Night was Ashura," Episode 1. Directed by Murteza Avini. Written by Murteza Avini. Channel 1, 1986, 35:50-38:18.

[294] Naficy, A *Social History of Iranian Cinema Volume 4: The Globalizing Era, 1984-2010* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 27.

retrieved him broke down. He was transferred to an ambulance with victims of the war. The medical staff wrapped his face in gauze such that he could not be identified and thereafter stayed silent, refusing to say a word about who he was. He was haunted, night after night, by flashbacks to the day he killed the child, the weight of the truth an increasingly intolerable burden.

The flashback is regularly employed in *Identity* as a cinematic device to draw images of the past into the present, both for Nasser, who is haunted by the truth, and by the wounded, who remember their time at war. One day, two elementary aged students visit Nasser's ward to conduct interviews, asking each veteran how they were wounded and what message they have for students. The first interviewee, on being asked what message he has for students after recounting the memory of his martyrdom, laughs, asking, "A message? What would I say?"[295] The second encourages the youth to study what they learn in school but to also "sit in the classroom of the martyrs" and to "learn from them."[296] Neither answer the question directly, gesturing rather to the image of martyrdom as a message as such. Between the image of the reality for which they gave their life in Iraq and the vision of the world was a chasm they could not easily breach, as Avini had noted when asking what language or interpretation to draw upon to narrate the war. When they turn to Nasser, he is silent, claiming the domain of truth that grounded that space as his own.

The chasm of incommunicability above is portrayed as the *barzakh*. One of Nasser's friends in the ward Ahmad Salehi to whom Nasser eventually confessed asked him if he was scheduled for surgery. Ahmad stated, "They see and say things that we have pursued for a lifetime and have not found. What's funny is that when they awaken, they say they don't remember what

[295] *Hoviyat*, film, directed by Ebrahim Hatamikia, 1986 43:09-43:12.

[296] *Hoviyat,* 44:10-44:30.

it is they have seen and said."[297] Nasser has a nightmare in which he tells the truth while under, and later tells Ahmad that he can no longer live a lie. He fills out a form with his identification that he had put off since being admitted, hands the form to Ahmad, and instructs him to tell the hospital staff the truth. After Ahmad tells Nasser he had done so, Nasser is puzzled that the staff says nothing of it. He learns that Ahmad was privy to the truth about Nasser and had covered for him from the beginning. *Identity* concludes with a conversation between Nasser and Ahmad, after Ahmad tells him that the ambulance driver Ali was the first to inform him of what had happened:

> "I remember one day, Ali asked, 'Do his eyes see?' When I said, 'Yes,' he raised his head and said, 'I hope he sees correctly.'"
>
> "I don't understand what that means."
>
> "I didn't understand at first. But when I saw your eyes, I realized what an apt thought he had."
>
> "This place is a *barzakh* for me."
>
> "Thank God you say that it is a *barzakh*."

The hospital ward was not merely a place of ignorance, Nasser stated, but a place of dreams. However, in *Identity*, the fog of war is not dispelled for the wounded. It remains for them a *barzakh*. In contrast to Avini who had attempted to awaken his viewers to the reality of war, Hatamikia remembered the *barzakh* as the limit and the possibility of awaking to the truth of the warfront. And at stake was nothing more or less than the utter meaninglessness of the lives lost to the war.

V. Conclusion

On June 3, 1989, Khomeini died, shortly after "drinking the poisoned chalice" and ending the Iran-Iraq War. On June 8, the editorial board of the New York Times published an op-ed "After Charisma in Iran" in which it claimed that after his death so had come to pass, in their opinion, the end of his unique kind of authority. Though the majority of the op-ed considered the

[297] *Hoviyat,* 52:24-53:13.

potential for a crisis of legitimacy in the Islamic Republic, the editorial board introduced it by marveling at the audio-visual mediation of the crowds mourning Khomeini's death. In the same gesture, they interpreted the crowd present as a confirmation that the Islamic Republic was no longer held together at its seams by the authority of his charisma:

> Television has rarely shown more astonishing sights than the crowds in Teheran literally ripping the shroud from Ayatollah Khomeini. It was a scene from the Age of Belief: mourners flagellating themselves and crushing one another as they grabbed at a helicopter bearing aloft the Imam's coffin. What may also have fed the crowd's awesome grief was awareness that the Ayatollah's authority was unique, that this was the last act of a drama expiring with its dominating character.[298]

The editorial board's characterization of the crowds and its inability or unwillingness to bear witness to the crowd as anything more or less than a barbaric and subservient mob blinded it to the potential and possibility that the crowd, if differently motivated, had a power at its command that Fardid feared. The editorial board could conclude that the Islamic Republic was "after charisma" on the premise that the only political space and time that mattered therein was the state's alone.

Charismatic authority, however, does not adequately capture the Imam's significance. In this chapter, I have argued that in post-revolutionary Iran, propaganda was employed as a mode of communication to restore faith in the image of reality that the vision of the world begs as its question to revive and to-renact the prophetic tradition as a means of enacting the world anew, through an historically-inflected theorization of the loss of faith in images of reality, the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction about visions of the world, and the articulation of crisis and reaction in attempts to resolve the paradox of the impossible state. The Imam Khomeini was perceived by some influential voices of the Islamic Republic as a revelation of the impossible; likewise, the followers of the Imam, in giving their lives, dispersed the impossibility of the state. In the chapter that follows, I attend to the expansion of the problem posed by the *shahid* in the

[298] "After Charisma in Iran," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1989, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/08/opinion/after-charisma-in-iran.html.

articulation and enactment of the individual as the prophet of the times and as a medium of truth. The self-centered individual appeared as the locus of a crisis of legitimacy as the landscape of "intellectual history" and of intellectual authority more generally was scattered from below.

As a contribution to political theory, I propose that the *barzakh* aids in thinking through the problem that the party encounters when "[holding] open the space from which the crowd can see itself (and be seen) as the people." I have done so, specifically, by posing the problem above with respect to the image of reality that is enacted and perceived as foregrounding collectivities and the attendant visions of the world that beg images of reality as a question. In contrast to Debord, for whom the spectacle is "a worldview that has actually been materialized" and "the bad dream of a modern society in chains" and for whom the society of the spectacle is "a domain of delusion and false consciousness," I have suggested herein that in the midst of a crisis of legitimacy, there is a proliferation of spectacles that mediate social relations and uncertainty as to the relationship between the spectacles that constitute collective life and the truth of reality. In post-revolutionary Iran, that radical uncertainty was articulated as the impossibility of the state. The conservatives who strove to attain mastery of the image of reality and who were ostensibly awakened to the truth were blinded, as they would learn, from dreams that exceeded them.

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Chapter IV

Centers of Attention

Individuality, Immediacy, and Networked Intimacy in Post-Reformist Iran, 1997-2009

In the years after Khomeini died after which the Ayatollah Khamenei assumed the position of the Supreme Leader, a rift emerged between "establishment clerics" or "hardliners" and "reformists."[299] Stated crudely, hardliners advocated for the consolidation of power in the juridical branch spearheaded by Khamenei while reformists advocated for democratization within the terms of the Islamic state. In 1997, Mahmoud Khatami was elected to the presidency on a platform of reform, transforming the political landscape of the Islamic Republic by giving representation to reformist tendencies that had been suppressed in the turmoil of state consolidation and the wartime state of emergency. The rift between reformists and conservatives appears in the present-day in ways that defy simple explanation, in part because of the imbalances of power between the executive, legislative, and juridical branches of government such that even when the reformist Khatami was president and even after substantial gains in parliament, he and the reformists were fighting an uphill battle against Khamenei and a conservative dominated juridical branch. If in Chapter III, I reconstructed conservative thought to suggest that conservatives heightened the contradiction of the impossible state, I now reflect on "reformists," who reckoned with that impossibility by dispersing the authority of the one to individuals as the prophets of the times.

Internal to reformist political thought in the Islamic Republic was a return to the self-reflexive transcendentalism that Hedayat had depicted in *Blind Owl*, as well as the critical relationship between the space and substance of justice, or between the map and the scale. The immanent critique of conservative apologia for the authority of the one that I articulated in the previous chapter establishes the groundwork for an examination of the emergence of self-centered

[299] See Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

individualism both within and beyond the terms of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The specific case of martyrdom during the crisis of legitimacy of the first decade of the Islamic Republic opened to a more general problem: that each individual was a potential medium of truth. In this chapter, I propose that the emergence of a discourse of individualism in the Islamic Republic coincided with articulations of self-centered individuality in which the problem of distance from others was temporarily resolved by an ephemeral and fictive sense of collective immediacy and intimacy. Thus, the question of the destiny of Iran was shaped, informed, and multiplied by the question of the destiny of individual Iranians, both within the territorial boundaries of Iran and beyond it, insofar as the "self" of conceptions of "self-centered individuality" opened to dreams of the future.

In engagement with a tradition of reflection on individuality that stretches back to Alexis de Tocqueville by way of George Kateb, Jack Turner has recently argued that individualism as it is conceived by Tocqueville or atomistic individualism is "systematized self-delusion" insofar as the individual is distorted by a "social perception" that it is the author of its own destiny.[300] Recalling the Emersonian tradition, Kateb stated that "[p]olitics is necessary, but cannot define an individualist life for most people; its realism is indistinguishable from fantasy, especially group fantasy."[301] Instead of taking flight from "privatism," Emerson aimed to reform it.[302] The reformation of privatism hinges around the practice of dreaming. In contrast to undemocratic individualism, Kateb, thinking within the Emersonian tradition, advocates for democratic individualism, in which "the normal condition of sleep [is] thrown off and life [is] entered into."[303]

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[300] Jack Turner, *Awakening to Race: Individualism and Social Consciousness in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 25.

[301] George Kateb, "Democratic Individualism and its Critics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (2003), 304. See also George Kateb, *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1992).

[302] Kateb, 304.

[303] Kateb, 304.

Reflecting upon the problem of the color line in the United States, Turner encourages his readers to "awaken to race" to see the realities that draw individuals into the same world. James Baldwin personified the "awakening to race," employing prophetic speech to "re-center political discourse on 'what (and who) we count as real,'" to incite in others a rude awakening to the fact of racism.[304]

In contrast to Turner's appeal for an awakening to our entanglements with others, Wendy Brown has argued that the transmogrification of democracy by neoliberal rationality especially since the 1980s has undone the conditions of possibility for liberal democracy to triumph, lending to the disappointment of Francis Fukuyama's wishful prophecy about the "end of history" after the fall of the Soviet Union. Though Brown does not invoke the distinction between atomistic and democratic individuality, she speaks analogously of the contamination of political life by economic rationality, and the predominance of the *homo economicus* over the *homo politicus*: "Bare democracy," she claims, "contains nothing beyond the principle that the demos rule" and "that all might be regarded as ends, rather than means, and that all may have a political voice."[305] The meanwhile, in the destructive wake of the undoing of the demos and prior to its resuscitation, was, in reformist political thought, conceptualized as a time between sleep and waking life, inflected through practical deliberation between the voice and the vote of individual Iranians, whereby the former, though commensurable within a utilitarian calculus, was not reducible to it. In other words, the politics of the vote in the last two decades has mediated reform and revolution.

In this chapter, I ask if the conception of atomistic individualism as systematized self-delusion translates to moments when there is a crisis of faith in the *demos* and of democratic individualism, in light of the arguments of Chapters II and III, in which the idea of being qua being

[304] Turner, 106.

[305] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015), 202-203.

appeared as an open-ended resource to take an exit away from the hegemonic order of things. Thus, I locate the proliferation of discourse about the freedom of individuals within the longer history of "freedom dreams" in the contemporary history of Iran beginning in 1941 and in the heterotopic experiences that lent themselves to the formation of an ethos of modernity from before. I argue, in contrast to the conception of atomistic individualism as systematized self-delusion, that the return to a conception of atomistic individuality that is estranged from reality was an open-ended gesture to an external source of potential that safeguarded the self-determination and destiny of individuals and was, thereby, conceptually prior to individually mediated dreams of collective destiny. Whereas, in the previous chapters, I attended to employments of propaganda as prophecy by other means, in this chapter, I attend to nostalgia for an exit from the hegemonic order of things as a return to the potential of self-fulfilling prophecy beyond propaganda about the end of history.

On June 12, 2009, mass demonstrations appeared on the streets of Iran contesting the legitimacy of the re-election of the conservative president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who had spent four years eradicating the small gains that Khatami had made, in what was referred to as the Sea of Green or the Green Movement. The predominant slogan of the Green Movement, "*Ray-e Man Kojast?*" or "Where is my Vote?" was self-centered and de-centered: with respect to the former, the political body that the slogan referred to was comprised of individuals Iranians who demanded a say in the future of the state; with respect to the latter, the slogan was articulated by Iranians who resided both within and outside of the Islamic Republic. That slogan coincided with an echo of the resounding slogan of the 1979 Revolution from rooftops: *Allah-u Akbar* or "God is Great." Without reducing the Green Movement to an Islamic one, I suggest that the chant, "*Allah-u Akbar*" gestured to an *atomistic* conception of self-centered individuality that was co-determinately

mediated by the *democratic* conception of self-centered individuality in the demand for a vote. Though legible within the terms of reformist thought, 2009 opened the state to an exit from itself.

The original contamination of atomistic and democratic individualism in the self-centered demonstrations of 2009 intersected with and was buttressed by the digital space of Web 2.0. and the legibility of "social networks" therein. Digital space enacted conditions, furthermore, for "networked intimacy," which is both "a practice of *selective sociality*" and "a form of *social inclusion*."[306] In relations of networked intimacy, atomistic individuality, with its emphasis on "exclusiveness and privacy," and democratic individuality, with its emphasis on "social connectedness and sharing," are "fused and reflected in today's digitally mediated friendships."[307] Anxiety about the crisis of intimacy in digitally-mediated relationships has come off of the heels, moreover, of anxiety about a crisis of attention. Christian Marazzi describes the state of the economy of attention as constituted by an "information glut, of an excess, an overload, of information."[308] The information glut today has engendered a crisis in the attention economy, where attention, "a *scarce* and extremely *perishable good*," provides diminishing returns.[309] Thus, relations of networked intimacy are shaped and informed by practices of paying attention and demanding it, in the service of engendering publics of attention mediated by ties of intimacy, and, likewise, of practices of centering attention in the face of a condition in which it is scattered.

[306] Manolo Farci, Luca Rossi, Fabio Giglietti, Giovannia Boccia Artieri, "Networked Intimacy. Intimacy and Friendship Among Italian Facebook Users," *Communication & Society* (20), 2017, 795.

[307] Deborah Chambers, "Networked Intimacy: Algorithmic Friendship and Scalable Sociality," *European Journal of Communication* (32), 2007, 28.

[308] Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language: From the New Economy to the War Economy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 65.

[309] Marazzi, 66.

Relatedly, the Green Wave had the form of what Manuel Castells has described as a "networked social movement," assuming multiple forms online and on the ground, transforming urban space into a space of autonomy, simultaneously local and global, sparked by indignation, viral, leaderless, self-reflective, and for the most part lacking a formal program.[310] Operative as a dynamic in 2009 was a movement between the scattering and centering of attention, as a collective and public response to the information glut of digital life. The predominant slogan and chant on the streets and in digital space in 2009 was "Where is my vote?" The first-person possessive pronoun in the demand to be counted and heard mediated the paradox between exclusivity and privacy and social connectedness and sharing, or between atomistic and democratic individuality. It was self-centered, whereby the self of self-centered individuality was open to contestation. On June 20, 2009, when footage of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan went viral online, the otherwise scattered attention of witnesses was centered around her name, *neda* or "voice," and her life, creating a fictive sense of networked intimacy more real than the social relations of "real life."

In what follows, I first demonstrate that beginning in the 1980s, the Islamic Republic experienced a crisis of attention, in response to the scattering of attention in technologically mediated political spaces. I then locate theorization about self-centered individuality in the 1990s and the early 2000s within the crisis of attention: I reconstruct the neo-rationalist Abdolkarim Soroush's justification of democracy as the ideal Islamic government on grounds that individuals were the prophets of the times; I then turn my attention to the Sun Lady, one of the first women to blog in the Persian-language, who encountered first-hand the political quality of how and to what attention is centered, to suggest that Soroush, in concluding that everyone was the same, was unawake to difference. In the penultimate section, I reconstruct a debate between the Sun Lady

[310] Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Malden: Polity, 2015), 249-256.

and her interlocutors, in which elite who saw themselves as in touch evaluated whether and why most Iranians were out of touch, to theorize the "self" of self-centered individuality as a contested terrain in the ecology of attention. I conclude by suggesting that in 2009, the original contamination of atomistic and democratic individualism served as an open-ended point-of-departure for the enactment of a collective sense of common destiny, shaped and informed by networked intimacy.

I. A Crisis of Attention

In this section, I demonstrate that in the first decade of the Islamic Republic, the ecology of attention appeared as a terrain of contestation: individuals demanded attention or were denied it, in coincidence with material and physical processes in which individual Iranians were scattered. I propose that in the early 1990s with the importation and uptake of satellite television in the Islamic Republic, the contested terrain of attention became an object of deliberation among state officials who were paranoid that individual Iranians, no longer beholden to the restrictions of state television, were becoming distracted by foreign content and informed differently than ideally so. In the 1990s, when the courts deployed helicopters to scour rooftops for satellite dishes, they were responding to a real and perceived challenge to the integrity and stability of the order of the state. In Chapter III, I explained that for Ahmad Fardid "mass media" and television especially was a direct assault to the status quo insofar as it dispersed the spectacle of the so-called Imam Khomeini. Coinciding with Fardid's efforts to regulate the culture of spectacle in the Islamic Republic was an overlapping and intersecting site of contestation over the span and focus of collective attention.

In the first month after Khomeini returned to Tehran, thousands of demonstrators called upon state-run television to pay attention to their demands for employment and for equitable pay. On March 2, 1979, a small group of laid-off works gathered at the front of the Ministry of Labor in Tehran to voice their grievances in a protest movement that was already in the works from three

months prior to Khomeini's return.[311] Having failed to achieve concrete gains, unemployed workers returned with 2,000 members and returned five times after over the next two weeks demanding that national radio and television give them coverage. On March 17, three thousand unemployed laborers staged a sit-in in the ministry compound and soon after seven hundred laborers initiated a hunger strike. One of the women on strike Zahra Dorostka gave voice to the lack of coverage from national radio and television. "I want to know why radio and television do not broadcast our grievances to inform the world of our sufferings," she said, "and to make them appreciate how little [the authorities] are offering us." She continued: "If they broadcast this injustice, the people will no longer be misinformed [by the government] that pretends to give us our due."[312]

In contrast to the lack of attention paid to the unemployment movement, mass demonstrations beginning on International Women's Day on March 8 attracted the attention of puzzled spectators of the chaos in Iran following Muhammad Reza's departure. On February 26, Khomeini chiseled away at women's rights including the right to not be veiled from before 1979. Though Khomeini enforced the compulsory veil, Afsaneh Najmabadi notes that religious and secular critics of the state from both before and after the 1979 Revolution characterized the "super-westernized woman" as a woman who attracted too much attention in mode of presentation:

> She was identified with a woman who wore 'too much' make-up, 'too short' a skirt, 'too tight' a pair of pants, 'too low-cut' a shirt, who was 'too loose' in her relations with men, who laughed 'too loudly,' who smoked in public. Clearly, it signified a subjective judgment; at least to some extent it was defined in the eyes of the beholder…Yet, both felt comfortable in denouncing *gharbzadeh* and the *gharbzadeh* woman in a single voice.[313]

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[311] See Asef Bayat, "Workless Revolutionaries: The Unemployed Movement in Revolutionary Iran," *International Review of Social History* 42 (1997) for a thorough summarization of the unemployed movement.

[312] Bayat, 168.

[313] Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran," in *The Modern Middle East: A Reader* ed. Albert Hourani and Philip Shoukry Khouri (London: I.B. Taurus, 2004), 65.

On March 8, tens of thousands of women and men gathered on International Women's Day to protest Khomeini's decree that women veil themselves. On March 10 and 11, fifteen thousand women congregated in front of the Ministry of Justice, demanding that they receive equal pay relative to men and that they be able to not don the veil if they so desire.

The attention that women marching against Khomeini's decree and those marching on their behalf received came at a cost: when women participating in the demonstrations told reporters from abroad that they supported Khomeini and they were not antagonistic to the Islamic Republic, they were ignored, with headlines reading still, "Women March Against Khomeini."[314] Indicated therein was a problem that would become more intensely apparent six months later after a handful of Iranian students raided the US embassy in Tehran and took hostage diplomats: foregrounding the attention paid to popular movements within the Islamic Republic from the US and in the midst of the tendency to produce eye-catching news to draw consumers to the screen was a prevailing conception that those on the streets were positioned with "us" against "Islam." In 1980, Edward Said noted that of the roughly three hundred reporters sent to Tehran in the first days of the crisis, not one spoke Persian, remarking that "it was no wonder that all the media reports coming out of Iran repeated essentially the same threadbare accounts of what was taking place…."[315] "[I]n the meantime, of course," he continued, "other events and political processes in Iran that could not be characterized as instances of 'the Islamic mentality' or of 'anti-Americanism' went unnoticed."[316]

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[314] Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 146.

[315]Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), li.

[316] Said, lii.

An estimated three million people left Iran in the period between 1979 and 1985 in response to the 1979 Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. It would not be until the 1990s before the term "diaspora" was used to describe Iranians who were living abroad.[317] Up until then, there were many Iranians living abroad who "frequently compensated for their longing for the home country 'as they had known it' by nostalgically reproducing what they thought of as 'authentic' Iranian culture;" caught in between, they were torn between a "public persona" at odds with the "authentic person" that they were when at home.[318] In the decade after 1979, the exilic community of Iranians living in Los Angeles published periodicals, launched radio programs, organized film festivals, made and performed music and music videos, and broadcasted news and shows on television.[319] Exilic television in LA was dominated by the quest for "collective subjectivity:" television producers imagined that their audiences were "a mass of homogeneous exiles" and targeted "the entire family and community."[320] The producers of exilic television were also broadcasting in the Persian language and to a Persian community.[321] In turn, exiled individuals phoned-in to the television programs, transforming exilic television into a forum about the selfhood of Iran.

The terrain of audio-visual space within Iran experienced a qualitative transformation in the 1990s with the importation and uptake of satellite dishes. In October 1969, NIRT broadcast international news into Iran, including but not limited to the first moon landing, the Shah's visit to

[317] See Babak Elahi and Perseis M. Karim, "Introduction: Iranian Diaspora," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (2017), for an historical survey of the proliferation of term "diaspora" in scholarship about Iran, much of which has been published by Iranians living abroad.

[318] Resa Mohabat-Kar, "Introduction," in *Identity and Exile: The Iranian Diaspora Between Solidarity and Difference* (Berlin: Heinrich-Boll-Stiftung, 2015), 10-11.

[319] Hamid Naficy, *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 35-59.

[320] Naficy, 108.

[321] Naficy, 113.

President Nixon, and the heavyweight title match between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, from an earth station in the west of the country.[322] In October 1971, it broadcast the Shah's 2,500 year anniversary of the Persian Empire to an international audience by that means as well.[323] In 1993, satellite technology could be purchased by individuals in Iran. In May 1993, at the Sixth International Book Exhibition, there were monitors downloading broadcasts from BBC, CNN, and Asia TV which drew large audiences.[324] In the meanwhile, satellite dishes appeared on rooftops in affluent neighborhoods in Tehran. In July 1993, the Ministry of Guidance and Islamic Culture attempted to regulate and censor the satellite realm.[325] Satellite dishes appeared on rooftops in Tehran by 1991, moreover, during which time the state was initiating reconstructive programs to modernize and develop Iran in the wake of the destruction of the War.[326] By the late 1990s, the number of satellite dishes in Iran increased as they became smaller and cheaper. The satellite realm highlighted and exacerbated differences within official networks of the Islamic Republic.

Though in the 1980s, Khomeini, Ghotbzadeh, Hashemi, and others were committed to censoring audio-visual media and could do so since they controlled VVIR, in the 1990s, some prominent officials began to change their tune in part in response to their inability to control the use of satellite dishes and in part because of deep political differences that cut right to the heart of the foundations of the Islamic Republic. Notwithstanding, in 1994, Interior Minister Ali Besharati declared that satellite dishes were illegal though he did not have the authority to unilaterally do so.

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[322] Anabelle Sreberni-Mohammadi and Ali Sreberni-Mohammadi, *Small Media Big, Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 68.

[323] Sreberni-Mohammadi and Sreberni-Mohammadi, 68.

[324] Sreberni-Mohammadi and Sreberni-Mohammadi, 186.

[325] Sreberni-Mohammadi and Sreberni-Mohammadi, 187.

[326] Fardin Alikhah, "The Politics of Satellite Television in Iran," in *Media, Culture and Society: Living with Globalization and the Islamic State* ed. Mehdi Semati (New York: Routledge, 2008), 95.

Ayatollah Khamenei called for resistance against the "prospect of whole nations' mentalities and attitudes being shaped by a few broadcasting centers."[327] In conservative newspapers like *Jomhuri-e Islami* and *Kayhan*, editors claimed that because of satellite "the West is mourning that it no longer has any proper sons and daughters, no proper wives, no honour."[328] In July 1994, Parliament drafted legislation banning satellite television to be enforced in three years, which passed in January 1995. The Council of Guardians demanded that the three-year sunset clause be removed. In the same month, the government deployed airplanes to fly over the city to scout out dishes. The war within and against the satellite realm was a response to the scattering of the state from below.

In the section that follows, I demonstrate that the crisis of legitimacy that officials responded to as a matter concerning the collective attention of Iranians in debate over the form and content of satellite television was constituted in debate over individual self-expression after 1997. I examine the political thought of Abdolkarim Soroush who excavated the history and philosophy of Islam to anoint the individual as the prophet of the times, and thereafter reflect upon the writings of the Sun Lady, the first woman to blog in Persian, for whom attention to her individuality did not resolve the problem of social inequality, analogously to the trap of visibility that women demonstrating in March had experienced. Thereafter, I propose that the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction across lived experience and its materialization in digital space opened to deliberation the nature of the "self" of self-centered individuality by reconstructing a marginal debate among marginal voices that the Sun Lady broached when condescending seventy-percent of Iranians as being out of touch, in part in response to the scattering of collective attention

[327] S. Barraclough, "Satellite Television in Iran: Prohibition, Imitation, and Reform," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37 (2001), 31.

[328] Barraclough, 31.

across multi-mediated cultural domains. I thus propose the crisis of attention herein was a condition of possibility for the emergence of a self-centered collectivity, for better and for worse.

II. The Anarchy of Revelation

In 1983, the filmmaker Gholamhussein Sa'idi published "Metamorphosis and the Freedom of the Exiles" in the Paris-based weekly newspaper *Alefba* (*Alphabet*), diagnosing the condition of being exiled as the state of the *barzakh*. Sa'idi reconfigured the concept of the *barzakh* – the purgatorial condition of the soul dreaming in its sleep from Qur'anic history and philosophy – to capture the intermediary status of the exile as a self that is individuated out of nothing. "The person who is mired in the world of the *barzakh*," he wrote, "is an exile, yes, an exile, not a migrant."[329] The individual who is caught in the *barzakh*, the condition of "not going to a place," has "neither a way here, nor a way there."[330] In contrast to the migrant who is "hopeful," retains "the power of decision," and lives as if "every corner of the world is their homeland," the exile is "hopeless," does not have "the power to decide," and is moved by "force:"[331]

> Yes, for a while the exile does not recognize her left hand from her right hand since she has not settled into a place and has not become herself; in the wasteland of the *barzakh*, there is not a wellspring from which she can draw continuity and value and measure by measure to give an account of herself. The exilic world is one without borders, without an end. Death in the exilic world is death in the *barzakh*. The death of the exile is not even death. Rigor mortis and decomposition is not at work. If the exile is alive, she is also dead. The dead who comes and goes…The exile is afraid of sleep, is afraid of waking up. The death of the exile is death from exile, the shame of death. For a while, the exile is attached to the identity of her past, to her past spiritual and corporal identity.

The way out of purgatory is attention. "The locks must be taken from the lips [of the exiles]," he stated, "they must yell. The exiles must yell. The season has come when the exiles must now yell. If the exiles do not yell and do not shake the world, you will not receive even half a glance…."[332]

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[329] Gholamhussein Sa'idi, *Digar-disi va Raha'i-ye Avar-e-ha*, *Alefba* 2 (1983), 1.

[330] Sa'idi, 1.

[331] Sai'idi. 2.

[332] Sa'idi, 6.

In his 1983 essay, Sa'idi posed a direct relationship between the attention that individual Iranians were receiving who had been exiled from Iran and the "self" – or world – from which individual Iranians were discretely individuated. In contrast to Tocqueville, who observed an effect of individualism as the *ex nihilo* creation of associations, Sa'idi observed a mode of individuation that was mediated by and through a world that was strange for the exile in search of an identity. Yet if, on the one hand, the exile was subsumed as part of a *demos* that was not its own, neither could the exile merely take flight from the world as an atomistic individual alone with the alone. The exile, caught in the *barzakh* in which the reality to which they were awakened is in question, began from the original contamination of atomistic and democratic individualism. In the 1990s and the early 2000s within Iran, the crisis of attention and its implications for the identity of individuals was reconstituted in debate and deliberation over whether individuals were the same or different with respect to their capacity for reasoning and the differences that marked them.

In the section that follows, I compare the philosopher Abdolkarim Soroush who claimed that the conditions for democratic individualism had already been met on grounds that individuals were the prophets of the times with the Sun Lady, the first woman to blog in the Persian-language, who could not ignore her suspension in the *barzakh* of atomistic and democratic individualisms insofar as she was marked by the "visible identity" of gender.[333] Soroush proposed that he was awake to reason and thus had an enlightened conception of individuals as the same whereas the Sun Lady centered her body at the heart of her blogs, commanding the attention of her readers to awaken them to gender. The Sun Lady did not have the luxury to recede into the atomistic enactment of individualism that for Soroush was the point-of-departure towards being with others. In the comparison to follow, I propose that atomistic individualism is not a deceptive mode of

[333] I borrow this term from Linda Martin Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

being, in contrast to democratic individualism; rather, I propose that both individualisms are distinctions that are secondary to the original contamination of the one with the other. In the section that follows, I suggest that what mediates the moment of distinction is a sense of immediacy.

A. Soroush and the Revelation of the Same

On February 14, 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* against the British Indian novelist and literary critic Salman Rushdie shortly after he published *The Satanic Verses*. Khomeini called upon his potential audience to kill Rushdie. He did not explain his decision. It is not easy to assess if and whether the content of the plot of *The Satanic Verses* inspired so much resentment and rage among the few Muslims who protested it though as it stood its title spoke volumes. It was a reference to *qissat al gharaniq* (Story of the Cranes) when the Prophet Muhammad, hoping to be reconciled with the Quraysh tribe who had persecuted him, revealed Surat al-Najm to a Quraysh assembly. In the nineteenth verse of the surah, Muhammad asks the assembly who it is they think they are worshipping when they worship the deities al-Lat, al-'Uzza and Manat. However, at the end of the verse, Muhammad praised the deities, comparing them to "high-flying cranes" and stating that "their intercession (with God) is hoped for!" As the story goes, Satan was responsible for placing the final two verses in Muhammad's mind. The Quraysh prostrated themselves before Allah. Later, the Angel Gabriel informed Muhammad of Satan's deception and he rescinded the statements. In the Story of the Cranes, the prophet could err.

Critical of Khomeini's *fatwa* against Rushdie and in broader disagreement with Ahmad Fardid and his followers who were characterized as Heideggerians, in 1991, Soroush excavated the archive of Islamic philosophy in "Reason and Freedom," a lecture that he delivered at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran. Soroush set out to theorize "the kind of freedom that is required by

reason qua reason."[334] He claimed that the prophets predicated their freedom upon submission to reason qua reason and predicated their submission to reason qua reason upon their freedom to think. Though the seal of prophesy was closed after the death of Muhammad, Soroush claimed that "free societies," regardless of if and whether they are religious or not, "are closer to the prophets than the totalitarian ones," since everyone has the potential to submit to reason and to exercise their rational faculties towards the discovery of a higher order to which to submit.[335] By positing the idea of reason qua reason as the end of thinking, Soroush distributed the authority to exercise reason and to render judgments about social and political life across the body politic. His conception of a religious democracy was premised upon his democratized conception of prophecy.

Thus, in response again to the *fatwa* against Rushdie, Soroush extended upon his conception of what he described as democratic religious government in two lectures in 1991 and 1992, respectively delivered at the Human Rights Conference of the foreign ministry of Iran in Tehran and the Human Rights Conference at the Institute of Orientalism in Hamburg, Germany. Differentiating between religious and secular governments on the grounds that the former was not answerable to "the people," he claimed that a government would be "democratic" only insofar as it partook in "collective wisdom" and respected "human rights."[336] In contrast to Fardid, for whom the "barefoot" were objects of suspicion as potential embodiments of the *barzakhi* condition, Soroush called for the reconciliation of Islam and democracy on the premise of his conception of the ideal convergence of reason and revelation in the life and thought of prophets and his

[334] Abdolkarim Soroush, "Reason and Freedom," in *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam* ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 89.

[335] Soroush, 103.

[336] Soroush, "The Idea of Democratic Religious Government," in *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam* ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 126.

distribution of prophetic activity across the minds of individuals. "A combination of democracy and religion," he claimed, "would entail the convergence of reason [*'aql*] and revelation [*shar'*]."[337]

In 1994, in the pages of the journal *Kiyan* which he himself had launched, Soroush published, "Greater than Ideology," an essay roughly based on a lecture he had delivered the year prior, in which he compared his and Shariati's interpretation of the history and philosophy of Islam. Soroush centered his criticism of Shariati's Islam on the lecture series *Islamshenasi* or *Islamology* that Shariati had delivered at the Husseynie Ershad from February to November 1972, not long after which he would deliver "After Martyrdom" at the Narmaq Mosque, prompting the SAVAK to imprison him. "One of the most important objectives of the late Shariati," Soroush began, "was the transformation of religion and society into an ideology."[338] After Ashura 1971 when Shariati had his faith in the voice of the people restored by the collective sound of mourning, he attempted to orchestrate the collective revival and re-enactment of poetic world-making by Shi'as, in which he mapped the idea of a universal silence on the idea of the world as a unified totality or *tawhid*. Ideology, he claimed, referred to "belief" and the "knowledge of belief."[339] Thus, Islam was to be the name that referred to the collectivity that appeared around the idea of an unthinkable truth.

Soroush's departure from Shariati is notable, since, in his efforts to distinguish himself as a champion of democracy, he echoed the religious propagandists of time past, who, like the blind owl at the height of his mania, believed they were God, by centering the individual as uniquely responsible for reviving and re-enacting the prophetic tradition with reason. Soroush concluded

[337] Soroush, 126.

[338] Soroush, "*Farbe-tar az Ideoloji*," *Kiyan* 14 (1994), 2.

[339] Shariati, 42.

that by transforming religion into an ideology, Shariati had effectively called for the creation of "a closed society" with "closed borders and brainwashed minds."[340] What remained in the form of a question in *Islamshenasi* – of who would have authority to guide a community that appeared around the unthinkable – was presented in the form of the answer for Soroush that "leadership in an ideological society appears in the form of military commands…."[341] Soroush did not mince words, suggesting that his interlocutor had paved the way for "fascism." [342] For Shariati, he claimed, "it is possible that people will vote for someone who does not secure their happiness" and, as such, "the leader is not to take into account the desires of the people…."[343] To reason that the "desires of the people" secured "happiness," Soroush sutured desire to the truth, reconceiving the crowd as a medium of collective wisdom instead of, as with Fardid, of collective ignorance.

Soroush's efforts to distance himself from Shariati rested upon a retrojection of the conditions of possibility for democracy onto the arena of electoral politics before and after 1979. "It is possible that people will vote for someone who does not secure their happiness:" if Shariati suggested as much, he did so at time when elections were rigged. Listening to the silences, Shariati attempted to draw into the order of the audible the silenced voices of a collectivity that tacitly disagreed to the sovereign authority – of which Soroush was also a part – and displaced the idea of universal silence onto an inaudible and unthinkable source of authority. Aggressively denounced by clerical elite and persecuted by the Pahlavi State, Shariati died in exile, while Soroush, who not only remained but was readily accepted by Khomeini and took part in the

[340] Soroush, "*Farbe-tar az Ideoloji*," 10.

[341] Soroush, 12.

[342] Soroush, 12.

[343] Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion* trans. Nilou Mobasser (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 12.

Cultural Revolution, engaged in readily welcomed revisionism. After Khatami was elected to the presidency in 1997, Soroush began lecturing on a working theory of "the expansion of prophetic experience" as part of a broader project of conceiving a rational theology. In contrast to Fardid who heightened the contradiction of the impossibility of the modern Islamic state, Soroush, in attempting to resolve and to salvage it, dispersed its impossibility across the space of reasons.

With the Rushdie Affair in the background, Soroush broke with orthodoxy by looking to the Prophet Muhammad as "a mundane human being" who was "an extremely successful leader."[344] On the premise that Muhammad was a fallible human being, Soroush proposed that "revelation was under [the Prophet's] sway, not he, under the sway of revelation."[345] Muhammad, he maintained, was responsible for and had succeeded in exercising his rational faculties in a quest for truth to discover it in revelation. He went so far as to claim, in reference to the Angel Gabriel who delivered the message to the Prophet, that the Prophet "would make the Angel appear."[346] Soroush described the success of the Prophet in recovering and realizing the messenger, the message, and the truth as "the paradigm case of 'religious experience.'"[347] The "lowest level" of "prophetic experience" was "'truthful dreams'," after which are "mystical visions, raptures, and illuminations."[348] The Prophet's success was necessarily incomplete because he was fallible, could err, and yet, could have acquired greater knowledge were he to have lived longer. "Islam," he thus concluded, "is not a book or an aggregate of words; it is a historical movement and the history

[344] Soroush, 3.

[345] Soroush, 12.

[346] Soroush 12.

[347] Soroush, 4.

[348] Soroush, 7.

incarnate of a mission. It is the historical extension of a gradually-realized prophetic experience."[349]

Soroush conceived a narrative of progress that unfolded in a dialectic of awakening and falling to sleep in line with his claim that free societies are closer to the prophets. "[The prophets'] task was like trying to awaken sleeping people who believe themselves awake," he stated, "but who must in fact first be awakened before they can acknowledge that wakefulness is a good thing and that they had never been awake before."[350] The prophet "must first awaken people with *causes* so that they can then value wakefulness on the basis of *reasons*. Their cry of 'waken' first awakens the sleeping person like a cause and, having awakened, the person can then understand the cry."[351] In contrast to Fardid who conceived the Imam Khomeini as the end of the age of the *barzakh* and the beginning of the age of truth, the neo-rationalist Soroush conceived the *ummat* or the individuals who together comprise the community of the faithful as bearing that responsibility. Soroush had effectively dethroned Ayatollah Khamenei as the exceptional leader. However, by dispersing the site and source of truth-telling across the space of reasons and by conceiving the individual as the medium of truth, Soroush anointed the individual as the prophet of the times.

Soroush effectively conceptualized the act of election as the revival and re-enactment of the prophetic tradition. In contrast to Fardid who had attempted to resolve the impossibility of the Islamic Republic by looking hopefully towards the Imam Khomeini as the second coming of the Promised Imam, Soroush attempted to resolve its impossibility by centering authority on the rational individual. Like the Prophet in the Story of the Cranes, the rational individual was, though

[349] Soroush, 16.

[350] Soroush, 209.

[351] Soroush, 209.

erroneous, responsible for exercising reason to recover revealed truths. The dispersion of the site and source of veridiction across a mental space constituted by individuals found a material substratum in cyberspace. In January 1993, the director of the Institution for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics Mohammad-Javad Larijani sent an e-mail greeting administrators at the University of Vienna; by 2003, there were 1.2 million internet users in Iran and 1,500 Internet cafes in Tehran.[352] By 1994, commercial internet service providers (ISPs) created conditions for competition in the private sector, weakening the state's role in regulating internet access.[353] Clerical elite were at first enthused by its potential for propaganda, some of whom described it as a "gift to spread the word of the prophet" and as a useful instrument for "exporting the revolution."[354]

B. The Sun Lady and the Revelation of Difference

After 1997, reformists invested in liberalizing the Islamic Republic launched, edited, and wrote for newspapers like *Jame'eh*, *Neshat*, *Zanan*, *Khordad*, *Hoveyat-e Khish*, and *Salam*; dominated by conservatives, the judiciary exercised force to push back against the rising tide of reformism. In a single day in April 2000, it closed fourteen newspapers down. Though the Internet had been in Iran for seven years, dissidents there and abroad could not use it in part because Unicode – the uniform coding standard for character sets – did not support Persian.[355] On November 6, 2000, Hussein Derakhshan who would later blog as "Heydar" wrote a column for the reformist paper *Hayat-e Noh* praising Unicode and the potential it had for Persian-speaking

[352] Rahimi, 102.

[353] Babak Rahimi, "Cyberdissent: The Internet in Revolutionary Iran," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 7 (2003), 102.

[354] Rahimi, 106.

[355] Cyrus Farivar, *Internet of Elsewhere: Emergent Effects of a Wired World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 170.

Internet users.[356] He immigrated to Toronto by the end of the year. On September 7, 2001, a computer science student Salman Jariri coded and launched the first Persian-language blog, defining the "weblog" as "all personal writings…about an individual's interests and thoughts."[357] Derakhshan started his blog "Editor: Myself" three weeks later during which time the word "blog" entered the English lexicon.[358] Within the few months after the first blogs, journalists at *Hayat-e Noh* and other reformist publications blogged to bypass the ill-defined boundaries of state censorship.

Conceiving the mind of the individual as a medium of prophetic and religious experience, Soroush had effectively attempted to establish individuals as extensions of the same mind, as part of a broader intellectual project of justifying democracy on grounds of its proximity to the truth. On November 9, a twenty-four-year-old woman Saman Dolatshahi, who was planning on writing a thesis comparing Sadeq Hedayat's *Blind Owl* with William Faulkner and who was teaching English in Tehran, posted her first blog with the pseudonym *Khorshid Khanum* (The Sun Lady), in which she conceived cyberspace as an extension of the embodied materiality of the truth of Iran. On November 19, 2001, she conceived the blogger in a way analogous to Soroush's individual:

> I wanted to say that it is a wonderful feeling for a person to know that they are not alone and that amidst all of these computer wires and chips and buttons and numbers it is possible to find a host of friends. I wanted to say that I am an electric sun lady who is very happy. I feel that we were all long-lost pieces of one incredibly large reality and we are now all coming back together. When they place us all next to one another a picture appears of that which we all are. Perhaps in your opinion it is a joke, but I think that as of now these weblogs are a mirror held up against the social and human reality of Iran. The more weblogs appear the more of a reflection they will be. None of the weblogs are like each other, and yet, they all have one thing in common: they yell, for God's sake, enough is enough. Close the curtains on this foolishness. The Iranian is tired. The Iranian reads and thinks. The Iranian does not want to play. I hope that the number of weblogs reaches a thousand.[359]

[356] Farivar, 170.

[357] Farivar, 171.

[358] Farivar, 171.

[359] Khorshid Khanum, "Rastesho Bigam Emsal Tavalod Khayli," *Khorshid Khanum* (blog), November 11, 2001, http://khorshidkhanoom.com/2001/11/19/oeoeoeoeoeu_oeu/.

Like Sa'idi who expressed that the time had come for the exile to yell to leave the *barzakh*, Dolatshahi perceived the blogosphere as a world that had cohered around the cry for attention. Yet, if, on the one hand, she witnessed a commons appear around refusal and the appearance of a collective she could personify as "the Iranian," in the coming months, on the other hand, she witnessed in responses to public displays of her embodied experiences the problem of difference.

Soroush appealed to his readers to attend to the illumination of reason emanating from the individuations of the revelation of the truth, though did not attend to relations of force that constituted bodies differently in relation to one another. As Dolatshahi celebrated blogs with a language that resonated with Soroush, she did not begin her thinking as if Iranians were originally one, emphasizing the self-centeredness of the content of her blogs around the embodied experience of being a woman. On December 2, Dolatshahi responded to an email in which an anonymous critic had asked her to get married, to which she responded that she was married to her thesis. On December 12, she wrote a fictional dialogue between a man and a woman that began with dirty talk on the phone and ended with the woman a single mother. On December 14, Dolatshahi responded to a now inaccessible criticism of her blog by a blogger Heysar that she had become privy to by way of the blogger Neda who, on November 9, published her first post as "the first Iranian woman blogger." Until then, Dolatshahi had resolved to answer to criticisms by way of email; however, because Heysar's criticism of her blog was public, she responded publicly in turn.

Dolatshahi posed a relationship between attention and deception in the fictional dialogue she had written on December 12 – in which the young woman was led to believe that her suitor had her best interests in mind – to which, on December 14, she followed in response to her critics by emphasizing the political quality of the act of demanding, receiving, and paying attention. In response to Heysar and other men who had criticized her for distracting them and others from the

social and political issues that ostensibly really mattered, Dolatshahi placed her body at the center of an imbalanced economy of attention and its coincidence with the unequal distribution of justice, speaking a truth that she had access to by virtue of the revelations of a different lived experience:

> My dear gentleman, I, like you and many others, am concerned with the political issues of this country, with the mercilessness of prisons, and with many other injustices. If a person doesn't write about something on their weblog, that doesn't mean that they're indifferent about the matter…I can write about this country's existing political issues, yet, how can my writing, the writing of a twenty-four-year-old who may not know about many matters, be useful when there are two or three good weblogs that write on these grounds? I try to write about those things that I think I have adequate information about or that I have sensed that others may not write about. And if the content that I write is in your opinion…lacking in value and style, I have to say that in my opinion this isn't at all the case. We are right now precisely undergoing in this country the beginning of a renaissance. We can't stress upon some things and not do so with others. You can't pretend to be blind to the equal rights of half this country's population, meaning women, in respect to men. By posing that issue, I didn't even want, according to another dear blogger, to make public my complexes about virginity. I didn't even want to say that boys deceive naïve girls. I just wanted to voice my grievance about these wrongful social customs and to present existing two-facedness and dishonesty for criticism.[360]

Thus, in juxtaposition with Soroush's hope for the future convergence of reason and revelation, Dolatshahi, in publicizing the difference she embodied, rendered revelatory a crisis of legitimacy conceived as a loss of faith in the world that, since decades prior, had shown its face in the multiplicity of the spaces of reasons that rational-critical deliberation begged as its question.

Whereas Dolatshahi lamented that men "pretend[ed] to be blind to the equal rights of half this country's population," she also reckoned with the problem of unwanted attention, elaborating a dialectic of responsibility that unfolded in the three-fold of demanding, giving and receiving attention. On December 16, Dolatshahi responded to the Toronto-based blogger *Khurus-i Bi-mahal* (Homeless Rooster), who, three days prior, had indirectly responded to a post Dolatshahi had written in which she complained that some of her students had been ogling at her breasts and were

[360] Khorshid Khanum, "Az Ruy-e Veblog-e Neda Motavaje," *Khorshid Khanum* (blog), December 14, 2001, http://khorshidkhanoom.com/2001/12/14/oeoe_oeuu_uoeuo/.

distracted by her body. "Well, what of it," he wrote. "If you see a pretty sight, you look at it."[361] "This Homeless Rooster has fixated upon our breasts," Dolatshahi responded. She continued:

> First, I'm not actually discontented if someone is pleased by my breasts and, in my opinion, breasts are among one of the most beautiful of God's creations and it is even a sensitive body part that can be used instrumentally to deceive naïve men….I remember that in high school when I was on the school basketball team, I had a friend who'd always come and give us encouragement. Whenever he wanted to encourage me, he'd say, "CJ, you master of defense," and a hundred other things. (CJ you recall is the same CJ from Baywatch). And when I'd hear this nickname, I'd melt a little. But consider waking up at the crack of dawn and going before class, you're still waking up, and you're pulling teeth trying to beat into their heads the difference between "her" and "his" or "does" and "is," then you see some dude with unkempt hair full of dandruff, with side whiskers, an uneven beard, and wrinkled clothes looking not at the blackboard but at you. Doesn't that make you sick?[362]

In reflecting on the experience of receiving unwanted attention, Dolatshahi rendered visible the ethics of centering attention in a condition where attention was scattered and impoverished. The Homeless Rooster complained about being scattered even as he conflated a physical response to the object of attraction with this-worldly habituation. On December 16, he wrote that he had visited Derakhshan's blog and "his head began to hurt." "I too share the pain Neda feels," he continued. "I can't read every weblog. I've fallen out of step with my life and work. My daily routine has fallen apart. (It's been one or two months since my life has no routine)."[363]

In complaining that he had experienced an upheaval because of the sheer amount of attention he paid to blogs, the Homeless Rooster voiced a depiction of the order of things as an effect of rituals of attention. On December 22, Dolatshahi, fed up by the Homeless Rooster and men like him who had taken to harassing her online for her relationship to attention, flipped the script by accusing her critics of participating in "girl talk" in gossiping about trivialities:

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[361] Khorshid Khanum, "In Aghay-e Khurus 'Aziz Ham," *Khorshid Khanum* (blog), December 16, 2001, https://web.archive.org/web/20011216121314/http://www.khoroos.blogspot.com:80/.

[362] Khorshid Khanum, "In Aghay-e Khurus 'Aziz Ham."

[363] Khurus-e Bi-mahal, untitled, *Khurus-e Bi-mahal* (blog), December 16, 2001, https://web.archive.org/web/20011217185406/http://khoroos.blogspot.com:80/?/2001_12_16_khoroos_archive.html.

> I'm quite upset but this time because of craven behavior on the Internet. A few days ago, someone sent me a virus. Tonight, someone sent me an email and wrote, "You slut, though you're free to do anything and it's your right to do so, not to the extent that you propagate it online. It's not as if we live in Europe!!" A few days ago, they said I'd shamed all women. I was truly confused. I mean, what had I written? Some flowery turns of phrase that'd spilled from my heart. One word of it wasn't a lie and not a word of it was simply for the sake of getting attention or anything else. Someone says that I take pleasure from stimulating men with descriptions of my body. Someone else sent me an email saying that me and Neda are immodest. It's as if they're the ones doing girl talk.[364]

Dolatshahi asked why, instead of paying attention and experiencing a deficit of attention in their constant harassment of her, they did not follow their own advice and turn their eyes to the state:

> I've become upset by so many things. If you really have so much time and you care so much about the values of this society, do something worthwhile rather than sitting around and gossiping away sending me your fucking meaningless emails. I will write anything my heart desires until I extract every last drop of life straight from your ass…I don't know why some people take things so seriously. I mean, instead of verbally abusing me which doesn't change a thing in the world, go yell at those fuckers who bring children to life and then torture them when they're adults…All of society's problems remain unresolved, and it's the Sun Lady and Neda who are throwing to the wind religion and faith and bringing shame upon women and taking advantage of freedom….[365]

Dolatshahi at once demanded that men pay attention to women in the Islamic Republic instead of regarding demands for attention as a distraction of politics as such while demanding that they center their attention on the injustices of the state, instead of giving her unwanted attention. Dolatshahi was burdened with a problem that Soroush could ignore by virtue of his conception of error as a lapse in judgment not unlike the Prophet in the Story of the Cranes: for Dolatshahi, however, though attention was a condition of being in the world, in a world where difference was embodied, the mere act of attention was potentially a continuation of war by other means.

III. In and Out of Touch

In the previous section, I proposed that Dolatshahi's testimonies about her lived experience revealed the problem of the embodiment of difference in the state of the *barzakh* that Soroush had ignored in conceptualizing the act of ratiocination as a revelation of the same. Though in November

[364] Khorshid Khanum, "Delam Khayli Gerefte Vali Indaf'e," *Khorshid Khanum* (blog), December 22, 2001, http://khorshidkhanoom.com/2001/12/22/oeuu_oeuuu_uoeu/.

[365] Khorshid Khanum, "Delam Khayli Gerefte Vali Indaf'e."

and December, Dolatshahi found her footing in the apparent reality of her "spiritual and corporal identity" to give an account of herself, in January, she and other bloggers reckoned with and cast light upon the dispersion of sources and sites of veridiction across lived experience and by consequence the democratization of intellectual history and attendant claims about truth. Specifically, the community of bloggers that Dolatshahi was in conversation with looked upon themselves and other Iranians as subjects of attention, diagnosing the problems of the current state as an effect of the scattering of attention after the 1979 Revolution that state officials responded to by regulating the satellite realm and the emergence of different economies of attention. In this section, I propose that the nature of the "self" of self-centered individuality was implicated by the crisis of the *barzakh* in which the subject of attention is severed from the subject of truth, situating claims about truth premised on what can be felt within the crisis of attention in Iran.

It will be useful to reflect upon the longer history of the *barzakh* in the contemporary intellectual history of Iran. Recall that Hedayat diagnosed the condition of existence in his current day and age in his 1941 novel *Blind Owl* as *halat-e oghma' va barzakh* or the unconscious and liminal state, drawing on a concept of purgatory as the soul dreaming in its sleep. Hedayat introduced thereafter a narrative of decline in which modernity signaled the end of the prophetic tradition, insofar as he depicted the relationship of the mind to truth as unconditionally mediated. In the decades after as I elaborated upon in depth in Chapters II and III, the concept of the *barzakh* proliferated through intellectual culture, apparent in the works of Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Ali Shariati, and Ahmad Fardid. When, in 1983, Sa'idi described the exilic condition as the *barzakh*, he inscribed the narrative of decline after 1979 within the narrative of decline popularized after 1941, lamenting that Iranians who had been scattered abroad were severed from their place of origin and alienated and estranged from the historical and geographical domain of cultural authenticity. In

what follows, I propose that what Sa'idi had diagnosed as exceptional to Iranians abroad had become the rule for Iranians as such, insofar as being scattered was constitutive of being Iranian.

On January 20, Dolatshahi wrote a blogpost in which she claimed that the majority of Iranians were lacking in culture and taste, characterizing seventy-percent of Iranians with the term *javad*, that generated a debate over the course of a week about the perceived consumption habits of Iranians. The term *javad* is difficult to translate. Roughly speaking, *javad* refers to someone who is for the most part inside the social world of the individual who is rendering a judgment about a deficiency of character, specifically concerning whether or not the individual is in or out of touch. Complaining about the music she was hearing in taxis and in busses, Dolatshahi claimed that "if this revolution has done one good thing it was to get rid of these tasteless singers," in reference to what she deemed were the out-of-touch popular musicians of the 1960s and 1970s:

> But when I think about it, I see that around seventy percent of this nation listens to this kind of music. However much the rest protest, it doesn't matter. Seventy percent of this nation are *javads* (to the many people who are named Javad, especially the Imam Javad, my sincerest apologies). If you say that's not so, take a look at your surroundings. Look at how people dress, how they speak. If you look at the streets, you see *javads* are coming out of the woodwork…I think that before government and politics and anything else changes, the culture and tastes of the people have to change. It makes no difference if at the head of a nation of *javads* there is a Shah or the president of a democracy of a mullah. A *javad* is a *javad*. They're not privy to these things. Of course, I hope that nobody mistakes what I'm saying. In my opinion the worth and dignity of a *javadi* person is the same as a person who is not a *javad*. This isn't a debate of better or worse. What's important is that that specific tastes and culture change the destiny of a country.[366]

Dolatshahi transformed her blog into a forum to deliberate over the consumption habits of Iranians, reflecting upon the attention of her peers as a crucial operation in collective subject formation, and echoing, by way of her critical evaluation of the *javad*, the anxiety of officials that "the prospect of whole nations' mentalities and attitudes [were] being shaped by a few broadcasting centers."

[366] Khorshid Khanum, "In Ahangha-ye Hamira Dast Az," *Khorshid Khanum* (blog), January 20, 2002, http://khorshidkhanoom.com/2002/01/20/oeuu_oeuuuuoeu/.

On January 21, Dolatshahi derived the authority to evaluate Iranians as *javads* from lived experience. "But I think," she stated, "that I can fathom enough and that in my life I have experienced enough to render opinions, right or wrong, about thinks that I have felt from up close. It is perhaps that I am in part a sociologist! Is that a problem?"[367] On January 22, she posted a criticism from the blogger Sisyphus who confessed that he agreed with her, yet asked, "Is it really that every one of these people who we are speaking about who are apparently '*javads*' were born that way, or is it that circumstances have led them to become '*javads*'?"[368] He proposed a sociological explanation of the conditions in which he and Dolatshahi could see themselves as tasteful in contrast to the tasteless *javad*: "They say that people are able to attend to their 'human' needs (for example, culture), when their 'animal' needs have been satisfied," suggesting that "cultural poverty" is an indicator of "economic poverty."[369] "In any case," he concluded," I wanted to say that as much as we want to call this seventy percent '*javad*' or those who call us '*foofool*' (pretentious), the problem will not be resolved...and if we are not *javads*, our 'not being *javads*' is itself an issue…."[370]

In contrast to Dolatshahi, then, who trusted that her intimate proximity to the matter at hand buttressed her evaluation, Sisyphus employed sociological reasoning to suggest that self-centered experience was not adequate for understanding the phenomenon at hand. On the same day, the blogger Pedram offered another sociological explanation for why, after 1979, there was cultural

[367] Khorshid Khanum, "Man Fekr Nakonam Kesi Ba," *Khorshid Khanum* (blog), January 21, 2002, http://khorshidkhanoom.com/2002/01/21/uu_uuoe_uuuu_uo/.

[368] Khorshid Khanum, "Nazarhay-e Mokhtalefi Dar Mored-e," *Khorshid Khanum* (blog), January 22, 2002, http://khorshidkhanoom.com/2002/01/22/uoeoe_uoeu_uoeo/.

[369] Khorshid Khanum, "Nazarhay-e Mokhtalefi Dar Mored-e," http://khorshidkhanoom.com/2002/01/22/uoeoe_uoeu_uoeo/.

[370] Khorshid Khanum, "Nazarhay-e Mokhtalefi Dar Mored-e," http://khorshidkhanoom.com/2002/01/22/uoeoe_uoeu_uoeo/.

decay in Iran. Like Sisyphus, Pedram suggested that the appearance of the *javad* in Iran was indicative of a broader social and historical problem. He suggested that they were a symptom of the immigration of Iranians from Iran and economic and cultural crises within Iran: "First – a great deal of *rawshanfekr* (intellectual) persons who could have played a part in advancing contemporary culture immigrated from Iran (and continue to do so) by whim or by force and lumpens (in the form of the religious) were preoccupied in cultural works…Second – a class of people appeared who without much effort rode the wave of an economic crisis and became owners of wealth and property. This new class was mostly comprised of people who were lumpens…."[371] Though the intellectuals, according to Pedram, had left after 1979, he suggested that he and the other elite taste-makers had remained, relegated albeit in the subterranean spaces of cyberculture.

Later, on January 22, Dolatshahi openly admitted that she had perhaps been wrong "since eighty percent of the opinions in blogs and emails had differed," adding, "Yet, well, how good it is to debate the issue and to play the part if only a bit of the sociologist."[372] On January 23, the blogger Marjan touched upon an issue that neither Dolatshahi, Sisyphus, nor Pedram could resolve, whether, like Dolatshahi, they were relying upon what they had "felt from up close" or, like Sisyphus and Pedram, what depiction of reality an apparent objective observer position could offer. Striking at the heart of a crisis, Marjan was paranoid of what appearances would not reveal: "The *javadi* debate has really taken off and it is very interesting yet I am acquainted with another kind of person whose name is :: the hidden *javad* ::!!! Yet, just like a hidden camera and these kinds of things!!! This handful of people wear very nice clothes in appearance and listen to good music and

[371] Pedram SHB, Untitled, *Ye jure dig: Ye Webloge Khanevadegi* (blog), January 22, 2001, https://web.archive.org/web/20020123142548/http://pedrams.blogspot.com/.

[372] Khorshid Khanum, "In Bahs Baraye Man Khayli," *Khorshid Khanum* (blog), January 22, 2002, http://khorshidkhanoom.com/2002/01/22/oeuu_oeoeoe_oeo/.

have good tastes and are basically people who appear to have class and appear as respectable…."[373] Though her commentary was flippant, Marjan had, nonetheless, brought to the surface the problem of the unknowable that persisted as an issue for the few who claimed authority as awakened elite.

The problem of unknowability that Marjan gestured to in identifying the hidden *javad* was shaped and informed by the sheer amount of content that Iranians were apparently consuming and dovetailed with deliberation over the relationship of spectacle to truth that appeared as the stuff of political theorization over the status of Khomeini as the hidden Imam. Recall that Ahmad Fardid employed paranoid reasoning towards a hermeneutics of suspicion about the hidden counter-revolutionaries who crowded the image of the 1979 Revolution in the 1980s, periodizing the time before the so-called Imam Khomeini's return to Tehran as the time of the *barzakh*. Thus, during the Cultural Revolution, the likes of Fardid encountered the limits of knowledge derived from what they had "felt from up close" and what positivist scientific methods could render visible for them. Fardid condemned "mass media" as *fitnah* or sedition because it dispersed the concentrated spectacle of the Imam and posed a challenge to the integrity of the Islamic Republic. Here, amid the *javadi* debate in the nascent beginnings of Weblogistan, Marjan re-constituted the problem of the *barzakh* – of the soul dreaming in its sleep and for that reason unawake to the truth – to gesture to the necessity of a cultural revolution from below on the terrain of collective attention.

Like Marjan, Dolatshahi read the Persian-language as a potential indicator that the speaker may be a "hidden *javad*," looking westward as a place where "not being *javad*" was the norm. She was overwhelmed by the severity, intensity, and sheer number of responses that she received. Her inbox filled with hate mail and her name and original post linked to and commented upon by strangers, her exasperation was indicative of a higher order problem of the relationship between

[373] Marjan 'Alemi, Untitled, *Marmaru*, January 23, 2002, http://marjanalemi.blogspot.com/2002_01_20_marjanalemi_archive.html.

the speaker and her public in conditions in which the nature of the public is scattered and in which hidden *javads* loom in waiting. On January 24, she stated, to that end, in bold, "…a person must be very careful of what they say and if they speak in a way that is even a little indecisive, they're liable to the groans and anger of many people and what they say will be poorly understood."[374] Reflecting on the past three months, she concluded that "experience…had shown her that even in the freest place in the world meaning the weblog one cannot say everything" and decided, for that reason, "to soon create a weblog in the English language and to say there what I cannot say here."[375] In taking an exit from Weblogistan, Dolatshahi hoped for her words to be attended to as they were.

In the discussion above, Dolatshahi, Sisyphus, Pedram, and Marjan were enabled to practice sociological thinking and to occupy a place conventionally reserved for the intellectuals, to provide diagnoses of the relative acculturation of Iranians amidst the crisis of attention therein, deriving authority on the premise that they were habituated to attend to things worthy of attention. Their debate about the *javad* echoed yet was meaningfully different than the overlapping discourse about the *gharbzadeh* or the west-stricken individual – the object of suspicion in legal debates over satellite television – who, in outward appearance or inwardly, was a vehicle of the colonization of Iran. In contrast to Al-e Ahmad for whom the west-stricken individual was "standing on thin air" and who, by consequence, was free to become re-constituted and to thus become different than they are, for the participants in the *javadi* debate, the *javad* was an improper subject of attention, constituted by the crisis of attention and re-constituted in turn by unseemly rituals of attention. At

[374] Khorshid Khanum, "Man Hame Harfaton Ra Shenidam," *Khorshid Khanum* (blog), January 24, 2002, http://khorshidkhanoom.com/2002/01/24/uu_uuu_oeoeuoeo/.

[375] Khorshid Khanum, "Man Hame Harfaton Ra Shenidam," http://khorshidkhanoom.com/2002/01/24/uu_uuu_oeoeuoeo/.

stake in the marginal debate among marginal voices about the *javad* was the constitution of Iran, inflected albeit through the coherence of the self in conceptions of self-centered individuality. In a crisis of attention, the scattering of attention was an issue for collective subject formation.

Beginning in 2004, the conservative-dominated judiciary engaged in cyberwarfare, choking off access to digital life, filtering content it deemed propagandic, and arresting cyber dissidents. The dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction across digital space in the early 2000s continued to pose a threat to the authority of state officials to regulate the economy of attention. Cyber laws and press laws after 2000, moreover, were enforced against the spread of propaganda. Left undefined in penal code, the arbitrariness of the distinction between propaganda and the truth bore the mark of a longer history in which state officials presented as the prophets of the times. In disentangling prophecy from propaganda, Soroush had departed from a conception of propaganda as the revival and re-enactment of the prophetic tradition, relegating and circumscribing that conception around conservative apologia for the dominion of the one and the few. If so far, the concept of *tabligh* has been absent, the absence of its employment is significant. The bloggers I examined above, uninterested in propagandizing, resurfaced the loss of faith in the world that the *rawshanfekr* or "intellectual," who saw and knew the truth, was ostensibly to resolve.

IV. Prophecy Beyond Propaganda

On June 12, 2009, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected to the presidency, after four years of unraveling the gains that reformists had made when Khatami was in power. Millions of Iranians, donning green, joined in mass demonstrations challenging the legitimacy of the electoral process in what was soon to be named the Sea of Green or the Green Movement. The self-centered slogan, "Where is my Vote?" that was the rallying cry of the Green Movement enacted a conception of the subject of nationhood that was scattered in form and content. The mass

circulation of viral footage of the death of Neda-Agha Soltan in digital space appeared as a self-centered subject constellated around collective attention to her life. Invocations of her name, *Neda* or "Voice," resurfaced the anarchy of revelation that the prophets of the times cold not resolve. The configuration of the crisis of legitimacy in 2009 appeared as a terrain upon which a digitally-mediated collectivity inverted the conception that propaganda was after prophecy to gesture towards the enactment of prophecy beyond propaganda insofar as in mediating social relations the image of Soltan's death enacted conditions for a fictive sense of immediacy. The counter-part of the self-centered demand to have "my" vote counted was the centering of attention around the selfhood of Soltan, who appeared as a medium for witnesses to feel as though they were close.

In the first days of demonstrations, the hashtag #CNNfail trended on Twitter alongside #iranelection, criticizing CNN and mainstream media outlets more generally for failing to pay attention to the protests. In contrast to the unemployed movement in March 1979 in which demonstrators complained that they were not getting any attention, the figure of the "citizen journalist" who, in the words of Negar Mottahedeh, was "part flesh, part data," emerged in the Green Movement and was able to successfully mobilize "social media" to demand attention from a national and global audience.[376] The citizen journalist was an anonymous figure, without a face and a name, who was neither here nor there, navigating the world with one foot "in real life" and one foot in cyberspace. The Islamic Republic mobilized the arm of the state to detract attention from crisis. The aggregate of self-centered audio-visual images produced and circulated by citizen journalists scattered its self-image from below and disrupted the hegemonic order of attention.

The citizen journalist navigated a digital terrain that was not qualitatively different than the space that the Sun Lady, Neda, Pedram, and Marjan dwelled in the early 2000s. With the

[376] Negar Motahhedeh, #*iranelection*: *Hashtag Solidarity and the Transformation of Online Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 16.

emergence of websites like Wikipedia, YouTube, and Napster, the user was both enabled to produce and consume content online in what has sometimes been referred to as Web 2.0. During the Green Movement citizen journalists and otherwise engaged in a "trans-spatial" protest that was indexed to the novel configuration of space and time in digital space and that operated as a perceptual geography within which a global collectivity of Iranians could interact.[377] The predominant slogan of the Green Movement, "Where is my Vote?," was both circulated within the trans-spatiality of digital space and referred back to the figure of a collective digital body therein. Individuals both within the territorial boundaries of the Islamic Republic who were officially part of the electorate *and* those beyond its borders who were not demanded to have their vote counted, and in so doing unhinged the relation of necessity between the territorial and electoral body. The self-centered position implicit in the collective demand to have "my" vote counted mediated the reason and freedom of the individual and the cyber self of which they were a material extension.

The collective demand to have every vote counted doubled as a collective demand to have the voice heard. If in 1979, a collectivity appeared around its own unthinkability in invoking the idea of universal silence in the cry, "*Allah-u Akbar*" or "God is Great," in 2009, that cry was invoked again, differing insofar as "[the] chant finds its force in referencing the revolution as an ongoing event rather than as a past that has already ended," instead of the invocation of "an alternative divine against secular rule."[378] On June 19, 2009, a video began circulating on YouTube in which, from the darkness of the frame, voices chanting "God is Great" could be heard" – over which the voice a woman recited: "Tonight, the sound of *Allahu akbar* can be heard louder and

[377] Reza Masoudi Nejad, "Trans-spatial Public Action: The Geography of Iranian Post-Election Protests in the Age of Web 2.0," in *Social Media in Iran: Politics and Society after 2009* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 167.

[378] Sertrag Manoukian, "Were is this Place?: Crowds, Audio-vision, and Poetry in Postelection Iran," *Public Culture* 2 (2010), 245-246.

louder than previous nights/ Where is this place?/ Where is this place where everything has been closed down?," ending with the answer, "This is Iran. This is my land and yours."[379] The modification of perceptual habits to hear popular silence as tacit disagreement and to be ultimately attuned to the idea of universal silence enacted in 1978 was shaped and informed in 2009 by the trans-spatiality of digital space and the figure of a collective digital body, for which "my land" was secondary to the digital body, part flesh, part data, of the scattered subject of nationhood.

The coincidence of the invocation, "God is Great" and the slogan, "Where is my Vote?" was legible within the terms of debate between reformists and conservatives over the anarchy of revelation and opened for consideration to a global audience the haunting specter of "regime change." On January 25, 1980, CNN aired a segment on Seyyed Abolhassan Banisadr's election to the presidency in the first presidential election of the Islamic Republic:

> This election is not only the first time that Iran has elected a president. It's also the closest thing that Iran has ever had to a free election. How free? Well, we don't know for sure who will win, whereas back in the days of the Shah, there was little suspense at election time. There were no nation-wide candidates then and virtually all the candidates for parliament were on the Shah's team. But in the present contest for president, there were more than one hundred candidates and Iran's leader Ayatollah Khomeini endorsed none of them. Khomeini said that he did not want to interfere with the will of the people.[380]

Since Ayatollah Khamenei endorsed Ahmadinejad in contrast to Khomeini in 1980, the Green Movement was effectively a refusal of his authority to dictate the electoral process. Left uncertain was the positive content of the determinate negation of his apparent lie. The invocation of hope that "the will of the people" desired a transformation of Iran towards a "post-Islamist, postideological pluralist society" forced into submission the will to a future beheld by the prophet of the times, in the name of freedom. In other words, the anarchy of revelation that provided for

[379] Manoukian, 251.

[380] "1979 Iranian Revolution," YouTube Video, 6:02, January 18, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDeaOOmfxZ8.

Soroush a premise to justify the convergence of reason and revelation in democracy was taken to its conclusion in 2009 and the multiplicity of "voices" materialized in the informational maelstrom of digital space, bewildering spectators by the scattered horizon of a future space and time.

On June 20, a paramilitary soldier sniped Neda Agha-Soltan, a twenty-six-year-old student, in the chest while she had stepped out of her vehicle in traffic to cool off. Footage of Agha-Soltan bleeding out on the streets went viral in a matter of hours. Soltan quickly assumed the status of a martyr with emphasis placed on the significance her first name, *neda* or "voice." She was, in the words of Samira Rajabi, "the first real digital martyr of our time."[381] The mediation of her death in digital space and public reflection on the meaning of her life was cut across by overlapping, intersecting histories of the mediation of truth in the contemporary history of Iran and of the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction across literary, aural, and audio-visual space. In being described as "the voice of Iran," Agha-Soltan was situated at the point that severed the voices of Ayatollah Khamenei and the opposition to the Green Movement from the popular voice. In being raised to the status of a martyr, her image mediated the social relations of the witnesses, occupying a place legible within the history of the spectacle of martyrdom after the Iran-Iraq War. As both voice and martyr, Agha-Soltan appeared as a revelation immediately presenting the truth.

The significance of Agha-Soltan's name was located in-between the significance of the chant, "*Allah-u Akbar*" as the appeal to the idea of a universal silence and the slogan, "Where is my Vote?" as the will of all. Specific to the configuration of space and time in digital culture is the emphatic role of individuals where the anarchy of revelation and the materiality of cyberspace are interwoven. Mediating the abnegation of the individual in the former chant and the presupposition of self-possessive individuality in the latter slogan was the self-centered individual where the self

[381] See Samira Rajabi, "Political Memory and Social Media: The Case of Neda," in *Social Media in Iran: Politics and Society after 2009* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015).

was not necessarily conceived as an atomic, monadic and elementary particle. The enactments of self-centered individuality in the early Persian-language blogosphere, especially from the Sun Lady, occupied a similar space, foreshadowing the liminal space that Agha-Soltan was suspended within in footage of her death, between here and there. In contrast to the Sun Lady who, under a veil of anonymity, centered her account of life in Iran around herself, Agha-Soltan, rendered visible and identifiable, fleetingly became the center of attention of the life of Iran. Another self-centered slogan entered circulation and was popularized thereafter: "We are Neda."

At the height of a crisis of legitimacy in June 2009 over the precise count of votes that were cast was an overarching crisis in which self-centered individuality as such was in question. The slogans, "God is Great," "Where is my Vote?" and "We are Neda" shaped and informed each other, with the selfhood of the individual as an openly contested mediator of the general will and the will of all. They were articulated, moreover, in the context of the scattered constitution of the diaspora, in the attendant wake of the crisis of attention of the exile who is suspended in the *barzakh*, and amidst debate and deliberation over the improperly and properly attentive or scattered Iranian, echoed in the *javadi* debates from on low and that of *gharbzadegi* from on high. If at question in the *javadi* debate in 2002 was the practice of paying attention, in 2009, that practice was reconfigured in the ritual of bearing witness to the death of Neda and to the future taken from her, opening the horizon of possibility after June 20 beyond what future the ballot box could offer. In contrast to electoral politics where opinion was mediated from the truth, in becoming centered around the death of Neda, a collectivity of individuals cohered around a fiction of immediacy.

V. Conclusion

The Green Movement eventually receded to silence. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad assumed his status again as the president of the Islamic Republic, to govern for another four years. Khamenei

and the conservative-dominated judiciary began to swiftly arrest and imprison individuals who played a role in inciting the mass contestation to the legitimacy of the elections, placing notable members of the opposition under house arrest, some of whom are still restricted from being active in political life to this day. Notwithstanding, in 2017, the reformist politician Hassan Rouhani won the election, despite Ayatollah Khamanei's endorsement of the conservative Ebrahim Raisi. Underlying the official articulations of political disagreement in the Islamic Republic between and among reformists and conservatives, however, and at stake in the repetition of crises of legitimacy in the Islamic Republic, is the haunting specter of the outside, with respect to which Hedayat was, in 1941, all too aware of as a puncture in the space and time of the world, from which some dreams may reveal themselves that awaken the body from its slumber, rudely awakened to the precarious constitution of the order of things and the unignorable possibility that apocalypse is nigh.

Soroush both meditated directly upon the source of that crisis, locating its beginning and end in the intermediary space of alienation that places the self at odds with its individuation. However, he did not permit himself to inscribe the contours of legitimation crisis and its historicity in contemporary Iran upon the groundwork of his conception of democratization. The self-centered individual was constituted, in his conception of individuality, as always already the same, indexing the space of reasons generally to the specific spaces of deliberation in the Islamic Republic. The ideal-typical citizen therein centered her attention upon the state and was no more than its subject. He was, if unwittingly, continuing the work of propagandizing for the sake of safeguarding the integrity of Iran. In the Persian-language blogosphere, anonymous individuals revealed the differences he ignored, rendering legible the irreducibility of political thought to the hegemonic order of attention. To attend to what may appear as the most trivial of matters – of attention scattered and centered differently in ways that may appear as apathy, indifference, or a deficit of

attention – is to bear witness to the chasm between practices of attention and the demand for attention from on high, through which other worlds are possible, for better and for worse.

As a contribution to political theory, I have demonstrated herein through reflection on the crisis of attention beginning in the 1980s, the anarchy of revelation in the 1990s, and the relationship of the individual to truth in contemporary Iran thereafter, that self-centered individuality was not an obstacle to collective action, by theorizing the original contamination of atomistic and democratic individualisms therein. In conversation with Kateb and Turner and through a broader reflection on Tocqueville and critical evaluations of individuality, I propose that calling for an awakening to the *demos* as such overlooks the dynamics of power and the various opportunities of strategic inversion. In 2009, the self-centered individual was not a limit to collective action as such. She was its ferment. In enacting modes of individuality that refused entanglement with the world and in returning to the world anew as part of a *demos,* a self-centered collective appeared that mediated atomic and democratic individualism through a sense of intimacy or immediacy. In the midst of a crisis of legitimacy, those inescapable webs of inter-dependency that thread together the fabric of democratic life were not merely awakened to as they really were: they were dreamt anew in the collective act of self-fulfilling prophecy.

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Conclusion

In 1997, following the momentous election of Mahmoud Khatami to the presidency, Islamic Penal Code in the Islamic Republic was amended to include Article 500, specifically criminalizing *fa'aliyat-e tabligh-i-ye 'alay-he nizam* or "propagandic activity in opposition to order."[382] After the Green Movement in 2009, the conservative-dominated judiciary has arrested, brought to trial, and imprisoned numerous individuals who were in some way or another associated with the mass demonstrations protesting the elections, invoking the law against propaganda. *Propaganda after Prophecy* has provided the historical and theoretical backdrop to better understand the significance of the judiciary's invocation of Article 500: at stake in its perception of propagandic activity is not merely activity that is decreasing the reasonableness of society; it is activity that is reconstituting the space of reasons altogether, thereby enacting other orders – and other worlds – that exceed the dreams of state officials and otherwise invested in preserving the status quo. In light of a history in which propaganda was conceived as prophecy by other means, the criminalization of *tabligh* after 2009 is perhaps a response to a collective return to the potential for self-fulfilling prophecy beyond propaganda about the end of history, prying open the destiny of Iran, and conceptions of its temporal horizons, spatial boundaries, and spiritual unfolding.

Underlying the narrative of decline in which modernity ushered in the end of metaphysics and the death of god, I have recovered an alternative narrative of decline in which modernity was indicative of the culmination of the end of the prophetic tradition, rendering intelligible the radical contingency of the beginning and end of *tajaddod* or "modernization," and individuals, organizations, and movements that re-imagined the totality of Iran's social and historical reality. The coinciding proliferation of discourse about *tabligh* and the *barzakh* in the 1940s and after, in

[382] "Resolution on the Crime of Propagandic Activity against the Order of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Portal of the Human Sciences*, https://bit.ly/2IJEA7L, June 28, 2019.

light of the anarchy of epistemic authority captured by the pejorative *estabdad* or "arbitrary rule," was re-constituted, in the decades to come, in distinct mediascapes, centered about specific organs, and serving as the raw material of self-critical inquiry about different registers of the homeland. Specifically, propagandic activity in opposition to order was employed to re-imagine cartographic inscriptions of the territorial integrity of the Iranian homeland, conceptions of the silences that Iranians shared, the images of reality that mediated their social relations, and, finally, the networks of interdependency that shaped and informed self-centered individuality. I have sought to demonstrate, in turn, how propaganda was employed to enact subaltern counterpublics centered upon the imagined community, the popular voice, visions of the world, and collective destiny.

Though the distance in time between deliberation about the territorial integrity of Iran and deliberation about the affective bonds of networked intimacy in trans-national digital space spans over a century, punctuated by the invocation of a revolutionary subject unthinkable to itself and the attendant revolutionary state constituted upon its own impossibility, the afterlives of crises of legitimacy in contemporary Iranian history continue to haunt the Islamic Republic today. In 2013 and again in 2017, the reformist cleric Hasan Rouhani was elected to the presidency, in both elections stealing the seat of power from candidates tacitly backed by Ayatollah Khamenei. In June 2017, one month after his re-election, Rouhani publicly claimed that the legitimacy of a religious leader is derived from the "people's will and invitation," in direct contrast to Khamenei, who claimed that he derived his legitimacy from the rule of the Islamic jurist or *velayat-e faqih*.[383] The disagreement between Rouhani and Khamenei over the source of political legitimacy hearkens back to the disagreement between Khomeini and Fardid in the 1980s, the former insisting upon

[383] Saeed Kamali Dehgan, "Rift Between Iran's Ayatollah and Re-elected President Widens," *The Guardian*, June 22, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/22/rift-between-irans-ayatollah-and-re-elected-president-widens, accessed June 28, 2019.

the "barefoot" as the source of the Islamic Republic's legitimacy, the latter the Imam. In addition. to the presence of crisis in electoral politics, in late 2017, mass demonstrations emerged again.

On December 27, Vida Modahed stood upon a utility box in *Maydan-e Enghelab* or Revolution Square in Tehran, tying her white hijab to a stick, and waving it before a crowd, initiating public unveiling, presented for its future mass circulation online, as a tactic that dozens of women have employed since and is still employed to this day.[384] In addition to the tactic of public unveiling in protest of the compulsory hijab, a day later, on December 28, a protest appeared in Mashhad, in large part sparked by legitimate grievances about social and economic conditions, with accusations in the air that the ostensible trustees of the Islamic Republic were hoarding wealth for themselves while many Iranians went hungry. In just two weeks, the protests in Mashhad spread through over a hundred cities, in the largest mass demonstrations since the Green Wave just eight years prior. The rapid proliferation of the one protest in Mashhad to over a hundred in just fourteen days was in large part facilitated by the instant messaging application Telegram and Twitter.[385] Though just months prior, Rouhani and Khamenei were competing over who had a claim to political legitimacy, in late December, reformists and conservatives alike expressed surprise.

In the 2017-2018 demonstrations, the surprise that reformists and conservatives expressed was in part indicative of a conception that the mandate indicated by the popular voice could be mapped upon the territoriality of the Islamic Republic, reflecting the coherence, continuity, and seriality of its inhabitants, inflected through an imposed conceptual distinction between a

[384] Robin Wright, "Hijab Protests Expose Iran's Core Divide," *The New Yorker*, February 7, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/hijab-protests-expose-irans-core-divide, accessed June 28, 2019.

[385] "Iran Protests: Telegram Under Fire as Iran Clamps Down," *BBC News*, January 3, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42558317, accessed June 28, 2019.

centralized state and civil society, both of which ostensibly buttressed the other as immobile totalities. It was not that the demonstrations in hundreds of cities were irredentist by any means, as an afterlife of the movements for self-determination by Kurds and Azeris in 1945 and 1946. However, they rendered apparent the real and perceived geo-economic and geo-social fractures and fissures that compromised the stability and integrity of the fundaments of the Islamic Republic, as they were imagined from on high as the source of legitimacy in official political life, marked by the trace of the tragic disappointment of Ahmad Kasravi, for whom land unified life. Neither, however, was it that the mass demonstrations were protesting the Islamic Republic as such, as much as some outside observers of its domestic politics wishfully hoped were auguring, as in 2009, the imminent prospect of "regime change" in a civil war between "us" and "Islam," as though the collective invocation of mass disagreement was indicative of a shared silence that could be heard.

The circulation of news about the 2017-2018 protests shattered the image of reality of state officials, reconstituting the economy of attention. Likewise, the tactic of public unveiling that went viral at the same time shattered the image of reality that the moral police in the Islamic Republic diligently attempt to enforce with the compulsory veil, to aestheticize politics by preserving the moral purity of public space. They hearkened back to the mass demonstrations on International Women's Day in March 1979, when journalists from abroad interpreted the protests as if they were calling for the end of the new state, effectively silencing the voices of women on the streets who insisted that they were calling for reform, instead of revolution. They also hearkened back to the three-fold dynamic of paying, receiving, and demanding attention that the Sun Lady had reflected upon in the early 2000s, emphasizing the trap of visibility for women, for whom the act of receiving attention was a continuation of war by other means. In 2009, the risk assumed in demanding and receiving attention in digital space in a way that interrupts the order of things and

reconstitutes relations of networked intimacy was made evident on the streets with the death of Neda Agha-Soltan, with respect to which the publicity of her death became a center of attention.

From the nineteenth century, the "boundedness of [Iran's] geobody" was not only produced by way of maps of its territorial boundaries or by the frontier fictions in response to border wars; it was also, as Afsaneh Najmabadi observes, "envisaged as the outlines of a female body: one to love and be devoted to, to possess and protect, to kill and to die for."[386] By the turn of the twentieth century, the concept of *hubb al-watan* or "love of the homeland" was located within a "prophetic narrative" concerning the "love of Iran," its afterlife apparent in the Constitutionalist newspaper *Nida-yi Vatan* or the Voice of the Homeland.[387] In the meanwhile, during the Conference of Badasht, in which leaders of the Babi faith, in received memory, claimed that Babi law superseded Islamic law, the poet and theologian Tahereh unveiled herself before the men in the Conference, with sword brandished in hand. Some modernists, prompted by Tahereh, beheld the veil as a "sign of societal backwardness," responding with calls for the imposition of modern dress codes, unveiling included.[388] In so doing, however, they were not seeking to emancipate women, but to discipline them, by enforcing sexual difference, constituted upon and constituting a heterosocial world allergic to difference, inscribing, rather than unsettling, the heteronormativity of public space.[389]

Thus, the public acts of unveiling in December 2017 and after were not acts that were increasing the reasonableness of society, but were rather manifestations of a crisis of legitimacy,

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[386] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 98.

[387] Najmabadi, 107.

[388] Najmabadi, 134.

[389] Najmabadi, 150-151.

conceived not merely as a decline of trust in institutions but a loss of faith in the world, insofar as women have been and continue to hold their status as the real and perceived prime movers of the social reproduction of the Iranian homeland and its preservation as an integral whole. In forcing the truth, the act of unveiling reconstituted the space of reasons. December 27 and December 28 were not conceptually and historically exclusive acts of disagreement. They were meaningfully entangled, respective to a much longer history of individually and collectively mediated practices of freedom. They were shaped and informed by invocations of the world-making potential of self-fulfilling prophecy, rendered intelligible with the death of Neda, whereby the collective eulogizing of her life reverberated at the point at which autobiography and national history are intimately in touch. As such, the geography and history of self-determination in Iran and in the Islamic Republic today hinges around what the political theorist Lida Maxwell describes as "transformative truth-telling," whereby the truth-teller articulates herself as "a proper public speaker of truth."[390]

Recall that in 1967, when Muhammad Reza visited the White House, Lyndon B. Johnson stated, standing aside the Shah, that "[t]he people of the world cry out for progress, not for propaganda." From 1968 until his death in 1975, Shariati insisted upon the endless, unfolding movement of historical change and innovation that was safeguarded by the *barzakh*, the post-prophetic condition of the soul dreaming in its sleep. In the *barzakh*, as Shariati had noted at the Husseynie Ershad, propaganda was the rule, and not the exception, of political activity – a mode of communication that he could not ignore and overcome in favor of the pedagogical mode of the simple teacher. In contrast to Johnson who spoke in public as if the problem of facticity had been resolved, Shariati insisted upon the facticity of the land and life of Iran, calling upon his audiences to actively struggle towards the future silence that augured their freedom, engaging in propagandic

[390] Lida Maxwell, "Truth in Public: Chelsea Manning, Gender Identity, and the Politics of Truth-Telling," *Theory & Event* (18), 2015, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/566093, accessed June 28, 2019.

activity against order in a self-annihilating and -transformative return to the potential of self-fulling prophecy. Though legible with the geo-political discourse of the right to self-determination, Shariati inhabited its representation of the logic of historical progress towards national sovereignty and pushed it to its limits, where Iran was both dying to save itself, and living towards its self-sacrifice.

The mediated configurations of the empty signifier "Iran" in literary, sonic, audio-visual, and digital space in the past century have been attended by the dispersion of sites and sources of veridiction or, put otherwise, acts of transformative truth-telling. They have been mediums of the inscriptions of Iran's territorial integrity, the invocations of its shared silences, the revelations of its images of communion, and the synesthetic assemblages that web together the relations of networked intimacy that mediate the immediacy of its open-ended destiny. The aesthetic objects available, from distances in time and space, that are the raw material by and through which readers, listeners, and spectators apparently understand Iran shape and inform the dynamic relationship of truth and method, conditioned by the unresolved interplay of crisis and critique. By remembering Hedayat's place in the intellectual history of modern Iran, I have recovered the Qur'anic concept of the *barzakh*, the state of being after prophecy suspended between sleep and waking life. As an alternative light theory of media, the *barzakh* invites us to attend to the contingency and mobility of aesthetic objects, to resist the impulse to grasp them as necessary and immobile representations of Iran, and to instead interpret them as the dreams of living, breathing, and moving beings.

In light of calls for "regime change" from the United States, observers who fail to bear witness to Iran's place in the history of freedom dreams perhaps betray the limits of their own imagination; and more, their identical interests with state officials and otherwise within Iran who have a vested interest in the notion that the Islamic Republic is, at present, all that it can ever be.

They would do well to remember the potential for the return to self-fulfilling prophecy, beyond the comfort of the grounded disposition that is circulated by propaganda about the end of history.

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