Imagination, meaning and revolution: The sources of the revolutionary power of Islam in Iran
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Prologue

Imagination and Meaning

My aim in this work is to offer an alternative perspective from which to understand the phenomenon of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and its consequences. To do this, I shall proceed a threefold strategy consisting of theoretical, historical, and analytical components. At the theoretical level, I shall offer an account of the theory of imagination and the concept of *imaginary*, which links two traditions of thought, namely the traditions of hermeneutics and critical theory. I shall then argue for the real political force of the *imaginary* in motivating and mobilising collective political action, in this case the Islamic revolutionary movement in Iran. My theoretical discussion will also dwell on the concept of modernity and the tradition of critique of modernity. At the historical level, I shall use my theoretical framework to trace the historical development of the political philosophy of Shi‘i Islam in Iran in the context of the competition of various discourses of power, which put forward contesting truth claims based on various interpretations of the same religious tradition. And at the analytical level, I shall offer an interpretative-textual analysis of the development of the Islamic revolutionary ideology in the works of the main ideologues of the Islamic Revolution. This analysis will also deal with the new transformations in the Islamic revolutionary ideology in Iran of the post-revolution, which have given rise to an internal critique of the ideology of revolution and its political outcomes.

The underlying assumption of my thesis is that the Islamic political *imaginary* and the *meanings* that it generated were neither already there as a form of consciousness used for designing and organising political action, nor were they merely the products of the intellectual design of certain interest groups and individuals to secure their own political interests. Rather, they were the constructs of a sometimes conscious and sometimes non-conscious process of creative interpretation of a heritage of collective symbolic structures by a collective of people who were destined to reproduce the social and power relations that govern their life. The interpretation of the symbolic structures that form the basic elements of every culture is the process of production of meanings; meanings that, to use Emile Durkheim’s terminology, become part of the *collective conscience* of every community. In the case of Iran, the Islamic symbolic structures were the basic cultural source for the creation of meanings that motivated new imaginative variations of power through a revolution.

If not understood properly, such movements as the Islamic Revolution may be cursorily dismissed as *irrational* behaviour in the sense of being erratic, violent and destructive. What I propose here is that although such movements may seem *irrational* in terms of the violent aspects of their manifestation, they are perfectly rational in their content and could even be constructive as far as future social, political and economic developments are concerned.

Imagination and Violence

The source of violent political behaviour in the course of the Islamic Revolution and its aftermath is not to be found in *irrationalism* as such, but in the tendency of the political interest groups that emerged from the revolution to justify the use violence in order to secure their own political interests. In the Iranian Revolution,
like it was the case with many other great revolutions of the modern time, the obsessive use of coercion on the part of the main revolutionary forces to attain political hegemony, distorted the expression of the meaningful collective need to defend a cultural identity under siege, which was the main aim of the revolution. This is clearly evident in the case of certain factions of the clergy who ascended to power after the victory of the revolution. As a consequence, the fear of these interest groups from the threat of other contenders of power engulfed the movement in hatred and hostility toward its perceived enemies. The apparently erratic and violent behaviour of the revolutionary actors in Iran was thus a manifestation of something deeper than mere violence; something that can be understood through a hermeneutical analysis of the cultural traditions out of which Iranians created their powerful imaginary of revolution.

As such, violent collective action often conceals as much as it reveals. It conceals the layers of meaning lain dormant in the recesses of collective conscience of a cultural group, meanings that motivate and drive collective action. But it readily exposes the anger and frustration that the collective bearers of a culture under siege express in the defence of what they consider worth preserving at any cost. On the surface, these expressions are utilised by extremist forces in the society to intensify the collective compulsion to make enemies, or more accurately in the effort to paint the beleaguered culture as Good and its perceived enemies as Evil. But in depth, the compulsion to violence can be traced to what is called in psychoanalytic terminology the repression of desires and the displacement of repressed desires into the unconscious.

The psychoanalytical concept of the unconscious as developed by Sigmund Freud is used to signify the site of the desires that due to the constraints of social reality cannot be fulfilled and therefore have been repressed. I use this concept here to underscore the connection of collective cultural structures with collective psychic desires. This connection is complex and variegated; but it is fundamental to understanding the compulsion to violence in the collective search for meaning. According to Juliet Mitchell in her analysis of Freudian psychoanalysis: "the unconscious contains all that is repressed from consciousness, but it is not co-terminous with this." Hence, the discontinuity in the conscious psychic life of the human subject. It is arguable that where collective desire of a community for certain forms of cultural existence are repressed, this creates a gap, dissatisfaction or discontent in the conscious psychic life of that community, which will be deposited in the collective unconscious in the form of collective cultural fantasies. It is difficult if not impossible to understand the violence generated in the process of the expression of repressed cultural desires only in terms of social consciousness of one or another cultural group. Rather, this expression involves a combination of conscious and unconscious fantasies that seek fulfilment in the anticipation of the pleasure that such fulfilment will produce.

Just as psychosexual fantasy involves more than a simple expression of genital drive, cultural fantasy involves more than the expression of aggressive compulsions. It involves a range of emotions, excitements, pleasures and satisfactions that are beyond

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2 The term collective unconscious was used by Karl Gustav Jung (who initially worked with Freud) in order to explain the collective archetypes that recur in dreams of human beings across all cultures.
a basic need to express aggression. The search in cultural traditions for new meanings, which can be shared, may be conceived as a form of collective action that produces pleasure beyond the satisfaction of one or another biological need.

The appearance of violence in the quest for cultural survival may thus be understood as connected with the fact that unconscious processes do not follow the logic of consciousness. They are discontinuous, displaced, projected onto things other than themselves. This is why the direct access to these processes is difficult and maybe impossible. At the individual level, the access to the processes of the unconscious becomes possible through the interpretation of their manifestations in dream symbols, involuntary reactions, slips of the language, and in extreme cases in neurotic and psychotic states of behaviour. At the collective level, these processes could be understood through the symbolic structures, narratives, myths, cultural tropes, idioms, social utopias of a collectivity, and in extreme cases in violent collective action.

Psychoanalysis can therefore supplement hermeneutics in challenging the humanist assumptions that places the conscious subject at the centre of history, and in control of human action. In recognising that the human subject is constituted by language, which comes to him/her through the speech of the other, psychoanalysis can contribute to hermeneutics in confronting the text as more than the subjective intentions of the author. In this sense, the text can be understood as containing a message that should be deciphered in terms of the ways that human subjectivity and human action are constituted. (See Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion of hermeneutics of texts.)

The understanding of human subjectivity as the locus of conscious and unconscious desires, which are born within particular historical experiences, confronts the romantic element of the Western humanist ideology. Thus, as Jacques Lacan suggested, the desire of the human subject for a distinct identity is in truth the need for the creation of an image of the self that is shaped by another, and is therefore perpetually in need of recognition by the other. But at the same time, this desire is only felt insofar as it is repressed by the lack of the recognition it seeks. The repression of the desire to construct this imaginary self into the unconscious creates a tension that can never be settled completely.

At the conscious level, the subject seeks to assert its difference by trying to resist the repression of its desire for a distinct identity by another. But at the level of the unconscious, the need for this self-assertion owes its very existence to the lack of recognition by the other, which is the source of the repression. This means that the desire for self-assertion, which is perceived to oppose alienation can only exist by virtue of its alienation. In the language of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the desire for recognition has within its structure a primordial lack that prevents the complete satisfaction of this desire, because the desire itself arises in the first place out of the lack of this recognition.

This kind of reading of psychoanalysis can give hermeneutics the capacity to see in the struggle between the ideologies of domination and the utopias of resistance a dialectical relationship. In this sense, the struggle for recognition of difference goes on in the form of what Paul Ricoeur has termed “the dialectic of distanciation and belonging”. The critique of ideology is attempted by a utopia, which questions the function of ideology in justifying the existing authority through the repression of alternative claims to authority, and offers an imaginative variation of power. But the
Utopian mode of power can keep a distance with dissimulative functions of ideology insofar as it can distance itself from the repressive traditions to which it belongs. Yet the utopia can make sense to its adherents only insofar as it can offer a world that can be comprehensible by virtue of its belonging to the tradition that it had set out to alter. This dialectical interplay, which perpetuates the cycle of repression, is not necessarily a vicious circle of perpetuation of violence, because it can create something new. What it can achieve is to open up ever more possibilities for the critical interpretation of traditions with the potential to reduce the violence of traditions.

What I called earlier the compulsive action to make enemies can become a meaningful act of critique of the other if it can, at the same time, allow for its own internal critique. It is in the context of the dialect of distanciation and belonging that the critique, which always displaces repression but never ends it completely, can nonetheless reduce the coercive violence that is often associated with repression. This is analogous to the phenomenon of sexual repression where, as Michel Foucault suggested in *The History of Sexuality*, as a result of the modern critical discourse on sexuality, the repression of sexuality did not disappear; but it has certainly become less coercive.

The utopian desire of the intellectual proponents of sexual liberation like Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse for a totally permissive society has not materialised, and the sexual taboos are not likely to disappear in the foreseeable future. But what has been achieved in terms of the demands for the recognition of alternative forms of sexuality has been remarkable, although it has given rise to new forms of sexual repression. In the sphere of power too, the repressive nature of power has not ceased to exist as a result of the modern critique of the relations of power, because every critique is born to and constructed by one or another form of power relations. But where the modern critical discourse on power has been allowed to operate, its coercive tendencies have undoubtedly been reduced.

The prevalence of the dialectic of distanciation and belonging and the politics of recognition of difference is also evident both in the “West” and the “East” (if we need to use these terms to facilitate our discussion). It is evident in the tendency of conflicting cultures to distance themselves from one another by demonising the other as enemy, and in the struggle to assert one’s own collective identity through the demand for recognition by the other. I believe that in order to identify the meanings behind the Islamic Revolution, one needs to engage in a prolonged and patient effort at understanding others as different. I suggest that the Islamic movement in Iran, although it does not conform to what is considered to be the standard international norms of political behaviour, could nonetheless be understood as being meaningful in the context of the modern politics of recognition. It is this meaningfulness that has made the Islamic Revolution a culturally desirable, socially constitutive and politically stirring phenomenon for a large section of the population in Iran. And, it is in this context that some interest groups have claimed this revolution in order to legitimise their own version of power.

The Meaning of the Islamic Imaginary of Revolution

In order to search for the meaning of the imaginary of the Islamic Revolution, there is a need to study the political implications of this apparently irrational phenomenon not merely as pathological against normal but as ideal against real. Such
a study, while maintaining its scientific impartiality, should approach its object of study as a meaningful quest for difference, which has found its hopes frustrated. In designating the Islamic Revolution as a quest for difference, I am suggesting that this revolution should be viewed as a modern movement concerned with the demand for political recognition for Islamic Iran as a cultural collectivity. This demand has figured as a driving force in various political movements of our time from nationalist movements in search of political sovereignty to racial, ethnic or feminist movements pursuing political rights for minorities within larger communities.

In his essay “The Politics of Recognition”, Charles Taylor rightly referred to the demand for recognition as a “vital human need” linking it with the modern collective search for identity. In this sense, the identity of a cultural group can be damaged or distorted by the lack of recognition by others leading to a form of political oppression through misrepresentation of that group by the cultures that by virtue of their coercive power have attained political and cultural hegemony. Muslim nations along with other colonised societies have long suffered from the lack of recognition and misrepresentation of their identity by Western colonial powers, which portrayed them as “inferior” or “uncivilised”. This quest for recognition has in time gained a strong political overtone as it has become closely linked with the political struggle of Muslim nations in the modern time to achieve dignity through establishing a new self-image; an image that would denounce the politics of distortion and indignity.

As Taylor has argued in his reading of Hegel’s dialectic of the master and the slave, the main difference between the modern search for a dignified collective identity and the ancient struggles for prestige, honour and pride is the non-hierarchical nature of the modern politics of dignity. In his The Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel had already considered the need for recognition by others as a fundamental human need, a need in danger of distortion by the hierarchical relationship of the master and the slave. Whereas the victory of the master over the slave could win for the master the recognition of the slave, this recognition was fundamentally worthless, because it did not satisfy the mutual need for recognition that confronted the two parties in the first place. The slave could get no recognition because he lost his freedom and dignity in the process of confrontation. And the recognition of the master by the slave could not satisfy the master, because it did not come from a free subject at an equal level with the master. Therefore, “the struggle for recognition can find only one satisfactory solution, and that is a regime of reciprocal recognition among equals.”

The identification of equal dignity with the satisfactory fulfilment of the need for recognition was in fact the high achievement of the Western liberal ideology, which began with the philosophy of Enlightenment and particularly with Jean-Jacque Rousseau. Rousseau, as Taylor points out, was the first Western thinker to recognise the importance of “freedom-in-equality”. According to Rousseau, the esteem that one gains in the hierarchical notion of honour comes always at the cost of the shame of another; hence true dignity should be characterised by “equality, reciprocity, and unity of purpose”, which is achieved “under the aegis of the general will.” However,

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3 Ibid, p. 50
4 Ibid, pp. 48-49
Despite its aspiration for freedom and equality the Rousseauian model remained constrained by its intolerance of differentiation and its devotion to homogenisation.

In the further development of the liberal philosophy by Immanuel Kant, the lack of acknowledgement of the distinctness of particular cultural identities remained. The view that individual rights should take precedence over particular collective aspirations sought to overcome the evils of homogenisation that was perpetrated under the aegis of the general will, particularly as a consequence of the Jacobin terror in the French Revolution. To be sure, the individual rights perspective of liberalism, which became the feature of modern liberal philosophy in the West (and particularly in the “Anglo-American world”) views the issues of freedom and human dignity basically as a question of individual autonomy, or in other words, “the ability of each person to determine for himself or herself a view of the good life.”

Although the liberal societies have not failed to proclaim strong collective goals under the rubric of national interests (which are understood as fundamental overarching principles that can be evoked by the State at times of crisis to limit or even repress individual freedoms) individualism has remained the feature of liberal ideology.

Under the aegis of “difference-blind” individual rights, the liberal ideology has been largely intolerant of collective rights (particularly political rights) of the alternative cultural groups. Recognition of particular collective interests other than national interests has often been considered anathema to the principles of patriotism and uniform treatment of individuals. This has been the feature both in the case of minority rights within the Western societies, and the expressions of national identity based on religious belief at the international level. Ethnic and racial minorities in liberal societies have invariably had to fight repression for the recognition of their collective goals. And at international level, collective aspirations for national identity, particularly when inspired by religion, have often been contained due to their perceived threat to the principles of liberalism. This form of liberalism has thus become restrictive, even repressive, of the quest for recognition by collective cultural identities, particularly when this involves aspirations for political power. It is this form of liberalism that has given rise to what is called “the politics of difference” at both national and international levels.

The politics of difference may thus be conceived as deeply connected to the politics of recognition and the modern notion of identity. It basically flows from the notion of “politics of equal dignity”, which has established a universal recognition of equal rights. In conjunction with demands for equal dignity, “the politics of difference” seeks to establish the unique identity of a cultural group suffering from the lack of recognition of its distinct identity. According to Taylor: “The politics of difference grows organically out of the politics of universal dignity through one of those shifts with which we are long familiar, where a new understanding of the human social condition imparts a radically new meaning to an old principle.”

Like many other Muslim nations, the people of Iran, in demanding to be recognised as carriers of a dignified culture with a distinct identity, have perceived the push of the Western States, and particularly the United States, to create a uniform international political order to be antagonistic to their cause. This perception, regardless of its falsity or truth, is a continuation of the perceived image of the West of the colonial period. According to this perception, the West continues to seek world

1 Ibid., pp. 56-57
2 Ibid., p. 39
domination by creating a uniform political order, which would match the global capitalist economic order it has already imposed on the world. In this perception, the allegedly neutral principle inherent in the “difference-blind” liberal notion of “equal dignity” is in truth the justification of the global hegemony of the Western culture.\(^1\) This perception was politicised via certain ideological interpretations of the Islamic political philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s, and gained a dominant position in the formulation of the ideology of the Islamic Revolution.

The demand for being recognised as a collective culture with its distinct value has come into an apparent conflict with the Western liberal view that gives priority to individual rights over collective aspirations. As Taylor has pointed out, the “difference-blind liberalism” of the West cannot claim to be able to offer “a neutral ground” where all cultures can meet with equal dignity, because liberalism itself is “a fighting creed”.\(^2\) Thus, any serious effort for understanding the Islamic Revolution as a meaningful quest for politico-cultural recognition should pay attention to the alternative worldviews, which question the ideological principles of liberalism. It should be prepared to pay due recognition to the critique of the liberal notions of rationalism and universal progress, which these alternative worldviews offer. After all, it was under the ideological principles of liberalism that, since the Enlightenment, the Western military conquest and political hegemony have been justified in the name of the eventual homogenisation of cultural diversities into a progressive global political community.

It is therefore essential to take stock of the growing social, political and cultural evidence at the global level, which emphasises the need for positive acceptance of difference. Even in the sphere of the economy, there is growing evidence of the need to appreciate multiple forms of market economies rather than one global mode of capitalism. Hence, the need for the recognition of all human cultures as potentially indispensable. As Taylor has suggested: “cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time – that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable – are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject.”\(^3\)

My main argument in this regard is that a fuller understanding of such phenomena as the Islamic Revolution can be achieved by presenting it in terms of its imaginary cultural sources and by appeal to a hermeneutical understanding of these imaginaries. As a product of the collective imagination of a people in search of great ideals, this revolution and its political consequences will be given an opportunity to be viewed as natural phenomena with potentially positive aspects. They will thus be seen as vehicles for constituting alternative realities in contrast to the prevailing conventional realities. However, this by no means should imply that a hermeneutic understanding of the Islamic Revolution could not at the same time offer a critique of the violence and repression of the traditions to which this revolution belongs.

Consequently, the modern Iranian-Islamic political discourse, which has generated both domestic and international political action, and has inaccurately been taken as identical to a “fundamentalist threat”, will be seen in a new light. In this light, the radical challenge of the Islamic Revolution to the existing national and

\(^1\) Ibid, p. 43  
\(^2\) Ibid, p. 62  
\(^3\) Ibid, pp. 72-73
international political arrangements will be understood as primarily concerned with the position of Islam in Iran and in the world as an important cultural force. This picture naturally stands in defiance of the views that interpret the political resurgence of Islam as merely a sustained and sinister attempt to gain national and international political or military hegemony. But at the same time, this picture will reflect the dysfunction and distortion that is created by the rival ideologies in the clash of conflicting political cultures. It is the distorting and dissimulating function of rival ideologies that turn the legitimate contest for the moral validity of rival truth claims into a violent conflict. As a consequence, ideological obsession with the validity of one or another truth claim pushes the contesting truth claims to accept the repression of critical dialogue and justify the use of violence to prove their validity.

In appreciating the power of collective imagination in creating ideas that invoke belief in their own reality and motivate political action, I shall draw on a theory of imagination that takes account of both the object and subject of imagination. The object of imagination will be considered with respect to what Ricoeur has called its “presence and absence”, whereas the subject of imagination will be viewed with respect to its “fascination and criticalness”. In other words, what I shall consider is not only the real force of imagination in instigating social and political action, but also the judgement that is formed by those affected by this imagination about their own actions. My position is clearly meant not to be one of fascination with the power of the Islamic imaginary, but one that, while acknowledging its importance, undertakes to provide an internal critique of its violence and repression.

Unfortunately, in the existing writings about the Islamic Revolution, there has been little effort to seriously consider the possibility of offering a critique of the violent and repressive outcomes of this revolution from an internal perspective. I suggest that any serious critique of the ideology of the Islamic revolution must begin within the context of politico-religious discourses that in the form of creative interpretations of the religious texts are closely engaged in instigating a novel political-institutional reform in the Islamic political philosophy. Most of the external critiques of the current political developments in Iran are obsessed with questioning the integrity and legitimacy of these processes rather than trying to understand and appropriately respond to them. The main forces of opposition in exile, for example, have categorically dismissed the emergence of the revolutionary Islamic political culture as tantamount to political stagnation, violence and the suppression of democracy and political pluralism.

Most of the political groupings of the opposition-in-exile, mainly those belonging to pre-revolution Iranian society, refuse to accept the reality and relevance of current Iranian political structures. These groups - from the monarchists and nationalists to the socialists and liberals - are engaged in an incessant propaganda war to prove that the present political culture in Iran is one of monolithic absolutist theocracy, which does not allow for any democratic political process to operate. For understandable reasons, their opposition to the Islamic culture arises from their hostility to the Islamic Republic as the political outcome of the revolution. This opposition is not based on a critical dialogue, but on fierce emotional animosity. The

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1 In the same vein, the fear of Islamic threat to the West from other Islamic movements, such as those in Lebanon, Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Palestine, etc. may also be understood in terms of an Islamic politico-cultural defence, rather than in terms of terrorist or megalomaniac aggression.
revengeful and bloody conflicts, that marred the political scene in Iran immediately after the revolution, and have continued up to recent years, have but destroyed all trust between these groups and the Islamic Republic.

These groups are increasingly finding themselves in decline and in many cases disintegration, but continue to believe that their only chance to get back into political contention in Iran is to demand the total and violent overthrow of the Islamic government. This is perhaps why they have turned a blind eye to the development of a totally new political culture in Iran, which although Islamic in expression, contains the basic traits of the liberal and socialist opposition to the absolutist version of Islamic politics, which these groups once advocated.

Many secular intellectuals also follow the same line of thinking in their analysis of the Islamic Revolution and its outcomes. They are so appalled by the violence generated in the process of the militant expression of the Islamic politics that they are prepared to deny the positive potentials of the Islamic political culture altogether, and see the only hope for democracy in Iran in the destruction of this culture. Fierce animosity has particularly pushed the secular opposition groups in-exile toward a position of hostility toward the establishment of an Islamic political culture in Iran. The basic premise of the struggle of many of the secular opponents of the regime is to deny the potentials of Islam as a means to freedom and social justice in the context of current developments in Iran. They fear that the institution of a religious political culture would justify the institution of velayat-e-faqih (the governance of jurist) as the core of an autocratic and theocratic regime; and that this would kill the possibility of democratic reforms and creation of a civil society in Iran. Therefore, it is understandable that they find it impossible to favour the establishment of such a political culture in Iran.

Iranian social and political activists, authors and members of political organisations of liberal, nationalist and leftist persuasion, had long dreamed of a revolution of nationalist or socialist type against the Pahlavi dictatorship. The actual rise of the Iranian, or more accurately, Islamic Revolution had a decisive impact on the secular perceptions of religion and politics in Iran. Immediately before the revolution, there were mixed feelings about the political power of religion, which reflected the anxieties and fears of what was to come in the future. The repression and violence that followed the revolution forced some political groups, artists and social activists toward deeply pessimistic views of Iran under the Islamic regime that claimed to be the end result of the revolution. In this pessimistic view, fanaticism became the easy brand for the Islamic revolutionary zeal. More recently, however, a number of secular intellectuals and activists, both inside and outside Iran, have taken heed of certain positive developments in Iran inside and outside the government, which signal a desire for non-violence and attention to the needs of the people for political freedom, social justice and economic reform.

With the benefit of hindsight, one should acknowledge that the clerical leadership of the Islamic Revolution acted pragmatically rather than fanatically in taking certain political positions in important historical junctures before and after the

1 Among these one may name activists and authors like Taqi Erani, Ehsan Tabari, Bozorg Alavi and Ahmad Shamlu, and political organisations the Tudeh Party, National Front, Fada‘iyan and Mojahedin.
2 The authors and activist like Gholam-Hussein Sa‘edi, Ahmad Shamlu, and Sa‘id Sultanpour, and the leftist group Fada‘iyan- Khalq, were examples of this trend.
3 Here, I am particularly referring to Ervand Abrahamian views in his collection of essays entitled Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic (1993).
revolution. Hence, the hope that the new generation of political leaders in Iran could resist religious extremism and take a pragmatic course to address the present socio-political and socio-economic problems of Iran. But one should not expect that strictly pragmatic interests should be the primary concern of this leadership. On the contrary, one could claim that even the reform-minded politico-religious leaders in Iran at present are primarily motivated by the central concerns of Islam as a cultural tradition even if they choose to innovate certain religious doctrines for political purposes.

From the foreign reactions to the political developments in Iran, those of the Western governments and the scholarly communities in the West are significant. The reactions of the governments have generally consisted of the two approaches of the United States and Europe. The former has so far been a revengeful reaction sharing with the militant opposition in-exile in the desire to see the destruction of Islamic political culture even when it perpetuates violence, and the latter, a more calculated approach that advocates critical dialogue. The rationality of the former approach is being increasingly questioned under the pressure of recent developments in Iran in a way that it has led to a change of mood and rhetoric in the American foreign policy. Among Western scholars, there have also been two approaches to the current political developments in Iran. First is an approach that follows the United States foreign policy, and has so far expressed itself in sometimes active and sometimes passive animosity to the Islamic Revolution. And second is a more moderate or in other words rational approach, which proclaims to be willing to create a better understanding of Islamic politics through critical dialogue.

Those who have been trying to offer a critique of the pathological tendencies of the Islamic Revolution through dialogue rather than more violence, both at government and intellectual levels, have been at pains to find concrete evidence of positive developments in the Iranian politics that would indicate genuine moves away from political repression and toward democratic means of handling political power. I believe these critics of the Islamic militancy need to make a more serious effort to engage themselves in the religious, academic and civil political trends in today’s Iran toward democracy and pluralism; the trends that are rooted in the Iranian-Islamic tradition of philosophical mysticism (irfan).

The ideas and discourses that have emerged in post-revolutionary Iran in the context of Islamic political culture can become a point of departure for an internal critique of the repressive nature of the Islamic government. The very emergence of these ideas indicates that despite the protestations of the critics of religious political culture, the emergence of an Islamic political culture has not destroyed all hopes for political reform and democracy in Iran. Instead, the development of meaningful politico-philosophic movements, in itself, may have destroyed the validity of the theory of the total stagnation of politics in Iran. Once again the Iranian people have proved that they are able to find appropriate means for peaceful reform of their political structures - just as they had done throughout their history under repressive political conditions. Iranians have demonstrated that they care about individual and social freedoms - despite the claims that these notions were not on the political agenda in Iran. It appears, however, that Iranians have not opted for democracy in an anti-religious, or non-religious context, but for demanding their natural right to freedom

¹ For example, the innovative move of Ayatollah Khomeini to politicise the juridical concept of velayat-e faqih (the governance of the jurist) could be considered a pragmatic move in order to secure the interests of the Shi'i religious establishment through revolutionary seizure of political power.
within the context of creative interpretations of religion. The tradition of philosophical mysticism, as a tradition of critique of religious rigidity, offers a model for interpretations of religion that motivate and accelerate demands for freedom, justice and prosperity and rejection of aggression, violence and poverty.

The new imaginaries, which have motivated new movements for political and social reform in Iran, are based on invoking the Iranian-Islamic mystical and literary traditions in order to produce modern political discourses that allow creative interpretations of religion in favour of political and religious pluralism. In this sense, the religious reform movement in Iran resembles, to a certain extent, the reformation of religion in the West, whereby new understandings of the Christian religious tradition opened the horizon for the creation of new forms of economic organisation and political community. Just as in the West, the religious reform movement in Iran has inevitably created a strong impact on political developments, and consequently, the reactions to it has to follow suit.

Considering these arguments, I shall try to provide some preliminary observations about the imaginary sources of the rise of radical Islam as a collective political movement in Iran. (See also Chapters 2 & 3.) I shall develop a theoretical argument, which will outline the political power of imagination in creating the condition for projective interpretations of the sacred texts and literary narratives, and hence the condition in which meaningful political action could find its originary, its rationale for existence, its environment for survival. This theoretical structure is founded on the basis of two traditions of social thought.

First is the philosophical tradition beginning with Immanuel Kant, who was the first to thematise imagination. In his Critique of Pure Reason, Kant spoke of "transcendental imagination" as the source of the schematisation that gives shape to concepts and in turn makes knowledge possible. Although he drew from his concept of imagination conclusions, which were predominantly addressed to objective knowledge; nevertheless, his insights laid the foundation of the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It also contributed significantly to the hermeneutic tradition, which is continued by the likes of Hans Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor.

Second is the psychoanalytical tradition, which began with Freud, who developed the concept of the unconscious, and initiated a theoretical trend, which placed the psyche at the centre of any understanding of society. Apart from its development in the field of psychology the tradition of psychoanalysis has influenced modern philosophy as well as social and political theory. As such, it has been continued, for example, in the form of critical theory through the Frankfurt School by the likes of Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. Other theorists, such as Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jurgen Habermas and Cornelius Castoriadis have also enriched the psychoanalytic tradition in different, and some times opposite, directions.

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1 One may go as far as claiming that even the anti-religions discourse in current Iranian political context is loaded consciously or unconsciously with the basic elements of the Iranian-Islamic mystical heritage.
2 In pointing to the fundamental role of new religious understandings of the world in inspiring rationalism and secularism in the West, I am inspired by the work of Max Weber. In Protestantism, the Spirit of Capitalism, and other works, Weber argued that the source of the process of "démystification of the sacred", which played a vital role in the critique of religious dogma and the development of modern categories of knowledge and power, was located in religion itself.
The Issue of the Crisis of Modernity

The intellectual inquiry about the nature of the confrontation of the Islamic Revolution with the West is a main theme of this work. In this pursuit, I will follow the historical construction of the image of the West in the Iranian psyche since the advent of Western modernity in Iran. The West as a reference culture has fascinated a wide range of Iranian writers. But, my main concern in this work is with the issue of the crisis of modernity, and particularly the crisis of modernisation in Iran.

A central theme of the Islamic Revolution was the touchy relationship between Islam and Western modernity. This uneasy relationship was a legacy of the colonial period; but it was also loaded with the vestiges of the animosity between Islam and Christianity in the age of the Crusades. This legacy became the source of fresh hostility between Muslim nations and the West in the post-colonial period with the appearance of a deep crisis in the Western ideology of modernity in the process of modernisation of the non-Western societies. I shall therefore deal with the issue of the crisis of modernity, in general, and the crisis of modernisation in Iran, in particular.

According to an Iranian scholar, the modern Iranian intellectual confrontation with the West is a reaction to the perceived image of the West, which has developed into a kind of “Orientalism in reverse”.¹ In this sense, if we accept Edward Sa’id’s contention in his Orientalism that the Orient was built in the mind of the Occident, we should also appreciate that the Occident was constructed in the imagination of the Orient. Yet there has been a vast difference between these two processes of reciprocal image making. As Mehrzad Boroujerdi has suggested: “Despite its surreptitious retainment of much of the theoretical infrastructure of Orientalism, Orientalism in reverse does not constitute an exact antithesis of Orientalism.”² For one, the construction of the West in the imagination of the Orient was historically predicated upon the Western Orientalism, and as such took shape as a belated response to it. For another, whereas the Western imagination of the Orient has been equipped with the knowledge and power to dominate “the exotic other”, the “Orientalism in reverse” is devoid of such knowledge and power. “Like Orientalism, Orientalism in reverse is a discourse of power. Yet, instead of articulating the views of the victors, it claims, often successfully, to represent the aspirations as well as the frustrations of the disenfranchised.”³

For the West, the Muslim world was perceived as “the embodiment of all that was recently left behind”, as “an all-encompassing religion, political despotism, cultural stagnation, scientific ignorance, superstition, and so on.”⁴ Devoid of an academic and systematic knowledge of the West, the Islamic world lacked the objective coherence and the scientific articulation of its other, hence its claim to truth was “dispersed”, “fragmented” and “elusive”, based on “theology, mythology, mysticism, ethics, and poetry.”⁵ There are also warning sings due to the proclivity of “Orientalism in reverse” to further Orientalisation by reinforcing particularity, worshipping difference, and emphasising its “other-ness”⁶. As such, there is also the

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¹ Mehrzad Boroujerdi in his Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism (1996) has reflected on the issue of “Orientalism in Reverse” by studying the thought of Edward Said and his critique, the Syrian philosopher, Sadiq Jalal al-Azm.
³ Ibid, p. 13
⁴ Ibid, p. 7
⁵ Ibid, p. 13
⁶ Ibid, p. 14
danger of the plunge of the “Orientalism in reverse” into an intellectual “nativism”, which would lead to “compelling but demagogic assertions about a native past”, burdened with an “insular”, “nostalgic” and “conspiratorial” mentality.1

My motivation in dealing with the crisis of modernity arose from my conviction that globalisation for all its great promises posed a serious obligation upon modern humanity. This obligation demands that in politics, especially in dealing with those who are considered as international enemies, the modern States should develop alternative forms of understanding of the other. I subscribe to the idea that the need for understanding oneself as another is a basic human need. Thus, one needs to understand others just as one strives to understand oneself. One needs to understand that violence has been created by all and should be avoided by all.

No doubt, creating enemies as a mode of cultural defence, and forming collective identities on the basis of one group’s superiority over others, have deep historical roots. But it is becoming increasingly evident that alternative forms of being and existence in the sphere of global politics are potentially functional, rather than destructive. It is through acknowledging this evidence, I believe, that the neglect of the meanings behind such movements as the Islamic Revolution can be remedied.

A lack of understanding especially exists in foreign policy area between the Western and Islamic worlds, in general, and between the United States and countries, like Iran, in particular, and is especially significant in sustaining the present animosity between these countries. To the extent that there is any understanding in the West of certain aspects of deviance from international political norms by certain Islamic countries, it is unfortunately largely an understanding, which considers these deviances as pathologically irrational and hence in need of control and containment. Similarly, the Muslim understanding of the West is heavily burdened by a deep sense of suspicion and mistrust according to which the West has become the easy ploy to be blamed for all social, economic, cultural and political problems of the Muslim world in modern time.

I believe that the present animosity between the Islamic nations and the West is a continuation of the age-old tradition of enemy making in the atmosphere of the globalisation of the crisis of modernity. This process of making enemies is also a process of creating imaginaries, and producing meanings. But, the imaginary nature of enmification is often concealed, and hence the meanings that are produced around this imaginary do not always find rational expression. Rather, they operate, more often than not, under the guise of the fashionable emotional rhetoric used to brand alternative and often unyielding cultural forms as “undesirable”. It is often difficult, even unpleasant, for collectivities to admit the imaginary and ultimately arbitrary nature of the meanings of their actions, and hence the incessant effort to find ultimate meanings that find conscious expression in ultimate values. Therefore, the ultimate conscious aim in seeing others as enemies often appears in terms of cultural integrity, religious or national identity, and/or strategic interests. The Western politicians and media often brand their perceived enemies as “fanatic”, “destructive”, “terrorist” and “rogue”, attributes that - they can show - are in conflict with their own values and strategic interests. The Islamic activists and militants, in turn, often use such brands as “world-devouring”, “blood-sucking” and “criminal imperialist”, which reflect their

1 Ibid, p. 18
fear of the loss of culture, identity and national interests. Both sides consider the opposite side as irrational and destructive, insensitive and aggressive.

One should, therefore, take a fresh look at the concept of *irrational behaviour* trying to understand it more deeply than it is customary at the moment in the sphere of politics, and particularly in the international politics, where the questions of power and *realpolitik* are at issue. For instance, one should not lose sight of the fact that political *irrationalism* - in destructive and aggressive forms - rather than an occasional phenomenon, has been the feature of political practice not only in the "uncivilised" Islamic societies, but also in the "civilised" West. One should not, therefore, shy away, in a manner that may seem hypocritical, from the fact that the most horrific political disasters of the twentieth century have occurred among the nations that have developed and excelled in various trends of rational thinking. Nazism and fascism - which were by no means limited spatially and temporally to Germany and Italy, and the mid-twentieth century - occurred not against the background of a tradition of ignorance, fanaticism, backwardness and lack of civilisation. Rather, they occurred against a rich tradition of scientific, philosophical, religious, legal and literary excellence that had constituted the Western civilisation.

Considering the significance of the issue of the crisis of modernity, I will deal with the connection between the phenomenon of modernity and the *imaginary* of revolution (See also Chapter 4). There is a rich theoretical argument about the Western ideology of modernity and its crisis in our post-modern condition. In developing my arguments, I will rely on the various theorists, who have dealt with the theory of modernity and have emphasised the persistence of the social and political influence of ideologies and utopias, and particularly religious ideologies and utopias, in the modern world. Interestingly, the theoretical strands, which have emerged from both the Western and Oriental traditions from divergent philosophical worldviews, have expressed concerns that seem to be increasingly converging at a common point. This common concern is almost entirely addressed to the need for new modes of understanding the human agency in the face of the crisis of modernity.

Western thinkers, such as Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber, Edmund Husserl, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, George Rude, Anthony Giddens, Alain Touraine and others have addressed the problems of modernity and the role of ideology in forming the self and society from various perspectives of the Western thought. Husserl, for example, warned in the early twentieth century about the crisis of human sciences in the West, and emphasised the need for a transcendental-phenomenological knowledge of man. (I shall discuss in more detail some of the Western theories that have dealt with the issue of modernity in Chapter 4.)

In the Islamic philosophical tradition too various modern thinkers, such as Muhammad Iqbal, Ali Shari'ati, Morteza Motahhari, Fazlur Rahman, Seyyed Husse in Nasr, Muhammad Muijahid-Shabestari and Abdol-Karim Soroush have tackled the issue of the encounter of man with the modern world. (See Chapters 7 & 8 for more details.) Nasr, for example, in the tradition of Islamic contemplative philosophy, has used the symbol of the wheel to analyse the crisis of the modern man. According to this imagery, man stands on the "rim of the wheel of existence", oblivious to the

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centre of the wheel, which is also the centre of his own self. Nasr’s contention here is to criticise a science of man that urges modern humanity to remain oblivious of the “centre”; a science that in its “partial” objectivity prevents man from developing a more “profound” and “wholistic” knowledge of himself.

In the same Islamic tradition but from a different perspective, Fazlur Rahman has searched for an intrinsic Islamic modernism in order to tackle the crisis of modernity. In his major works, the Qur’an (1980) and Islam and Modernity (1982), he attempted to rationalise Islam through a critique of religious scholasticism, and by offering new interpretations of the sacred texts, which would emphasise rational and utilitarian ethics of Islam.

Conflict, Meaning and Symbols

Conflict conducive to violence is one important phenomenon that is normally considered as a source of destructiveness in politics, and hence in need of control and containment. Lewis Coser was one of the social theorists who observed in his study of social conflict and social change that apparently irrational behaviour, such as collective expression of aggression, may at times be found to be positively functional for collectivities as a mechanism for “conflict resolution”. It is particularly so where non-violent channels for the expression of the desires of repressed social groups are not socially available. In fact, the understanding of conflict as a functional rather than a destructive force began much earlier with Marx on whom Coser draws, and with the sociologist Georg Simmel who wrote: Conflict is “designed to resolve divergent dualisms; it is a way of achieving unity...”

What I propose, following previous attempts by others is that we would gain a deeper understanding of political conflict and violence if we looked at these issues in terms of their meaning structure rather than simply as containment. Our present understanding of the world should by no means be considered as some sort of permanent biological or psychological trait; as we can unlearn it just as we have learnt it via various religious and ideological imaginaries over the past centuries. There is evidence that modern humanity is capable of developing new modes of understanding others within national units as a result of the modern global phenomena of immigration and multiculturalism. We have, for instance, learnt new ways of dealing with the age-old problem of the generation gap by developing new modes of understanding our youth. We have learnt ways of tolerating others by accepting pluralism of ideas and expressions. We have also learnt to deal more tolerantly with various forms of social deviance, such as unconventional forms of sexual and psychological behaviour by means of developing new understandings of deviance. All this has become possible by our recognising that there may be value and potential in alternative understandings and variant cultural forms. Without this acceptance, perhaps, understanding as such would have been impossible.

The conceptual basis of the hostile understanding of variant cultures is the nominalist understanding of human creature. In the Western tradition, as Eugene Halton has suggested, the nominalist philosophy was most effectively developed out of the rationalist theology of Calvin and the mechanistic philosophy of Descartes.

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1 Nasr, S. H. “Between the Rim and the Axis”, Main Currents, 30, 85-91, JA-F 74
2 Coser, L. Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict, the Free Press, N. Y., 1967, p.93
3 Simmel, G. Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations, the Free Press, N.Y., 1955, p.13
This worldview has come to dominate Western social theory ever since, and has provided the idea of separation of nature and culture.

Out of this milieu arose concepts which came to haunt the Western mind and consequently the political behaviour of the West. In political theory, Thomas Hobbes was probably the foremost Western thinker after Aristotle to rationalise the division of culture and nature in politics. In his *Leviathan*, he saw in human nature the impulse to “war of all against all”, a selfish lust of competition, which was inherent in the state of nature. The violent human nature was thus to be tamed by a grand politico-cultural artefact, i.e. the social agreement to form a strong State. Rousseau also advocated the concept of “social contract”, but rather than expressing resentment about the state of nature, he was nostalgic about it. Nature had thus to be effectively repressed through a “social contract” and “general will” manifested in the State and nation, which would provide for a tamed and cultured humanity. This worldview has undeniably contributed to the repression of the natural sources of culture or what Halton has called “cultus” or the “spontaneous impulse to meaning.”

In effect, there emerged various binary imaginaries, which modern thinkers have variously conceptualised in terms of subject and object (Descartes), rationality and irrationality (Weber), reason and unreason (Foucault), thought and nature (Halton), etc. This has posed the major problematic of modern philosophy, which began with Descartes. Thinkers equipped with the dichotomous understanding of the world, which posed it in subject-object terms, have faced the problem of how to establish the validity of knowledge as objective where the only means for doing this is through human subjective consciousness. In other words, a philosophical approach characterised by a “binary opposition” of thought and nature sought to undermine the transcendental certainty about purpose in the world that the mythical phantasm and mystical religion had established through enchantment and revelation. This problematic “binary opposition” therefore, as Halton suggests, had to repress the natural or “cultic” roots of culture, elevating culture to the level of a cultivated thought and mastery over natural impulses and instincts.

My argument here is that human understanding of self, society and nature at the level of collective impulses, drives and actions, is achieved neither through the division of subject and object, nor through the separation of nature and culture, but through what Victor Frankl has termed “the spontaneous will to meaning”. My contention is that this meaning is established via images, which form in the mind via interpretation of cultural symbolic structures, and which undermine the arbitrary division of the subject and object by directly connecting culture and nature. However, the relationship between cultural symbolic structures and objects is extremely ambiguous and complicated.

There is no doubt that symbols are signs in the sense that they stand to represent something beyond themselves. But, whereas in the case of conventional

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1 Although Western thought excelled in developing a philosophical basis for this worldview, the view of the division of culture and nature was not a peculiarly Western tradition. Long before Hobbes and Rousseau, the eleventh century Iranian Muslim hakim (sage) and vizier (chancellor), Khadjeh Nezam al-Mulk, provided a similar view in his *Siyasatnameh* (The Book of Politics).


3 Ibid, p. 40

4 It is also arguable that even scientific understanding is achieved via signs and symbols. But in this case the relationship between conventional signs and objects are clear representations of the signified by the signifier.
signs this something has to be concrete in order to make a positive and objective knowledge possible, in the case of symbols, this represented something conceals in itself something apart from itself, something, which can only be communicated via interpretation of the symbols. Or, as Ricœur has put it: “In distinction to technical signs which are perfectly transparent, and say only what they mean by positing the signified, symbolic signs are opaque...(and point beyond themselves) to a certain situation of man in the sacred, ... to something which is like a stain, like a deviation, like a burden.”

In other words, whereas all human perception is achieved, as Ernst Cassirer contends, through the construction of systems of signs and symbols (e.g. language), which mediate between mind and nature, these perceptions are of two different categories. The category of “conventional meaning”, which may be defined as containing the emotionally neutral representations of the signified by signifier, and the category of “symbolic meaning”, which contains emotionally loaded representations of human drives and impulses.

As Zdzisław Mach has argued: “A symbol... is a very special category of sign, intriguing, thought provoking, stirring emotions, opaque, and ambiguous.” These characteristics of symbols enable them to represent what cannot be represented in the ordinary language, such as the subtle aesthetic aspects of art, or highly ecstatic religious experiences, or high values such as love, morality and group identity. Mach has suggested that symbols have also to do with the maintenance of social order or providing a vehicle for social change: “Ritual, myth, ideology are all symbolic structures, as well as magic and all systems of belief in general.”

It is in this context, that I shall proceed with my argument about the understanding of the imaginary of the Islamic Revolution. From my future arguments, it will become clear that the imaginary of the Islamic Revolution was closely connected with a powerful kind of emotional and passionate, and yet very real, collective symbolic action.

\section*{From Collective Meaning to Collective Action}

The early arguments about the connection of collective political action with \textit{meaning} were generated by the symbolic action theories. The symbolic understanding of the world and the action that follows from this understanding are particularly important in illuminating how the collective \textit{imaginary} and the collective \textit{meanings} created by it motivated the Islamic Revolution. In fact, symbolic action theories provide a basis for any argument about the internal connection between symbolism, \textit{imaginary}, \textit{meaning} and action. On this basis, I shall develop my argument that the \textit{imaginary} of revolution becomes conducive to collective political action where the appropriate interpretations of cultural symbolic structures are able to provide the social actors with meaningful motivations.

One basic premise of the symbolic action theories is that \textit{meaning} motivates human behaviour. This follows from the views of George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer on the role of language and construction of \textit{meaning} in motivating behaviour. According to Blumer: “Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that

\begin{itemize}
\item[1] Ricœur, P. \textit{Conflict of Interpretations}, Evanstone, Northwest university Press, 1974, PP. 289-290
\item[3] Ibid, P. 34
\end{itemize}
things have for them.”¹ Blumer has also asserted that “meanings are a product of social interaction in human society”, and that meanings are “modified and handled through an interpretative process that is used by each individual in dealing with the signs (and symbols) he/she encounters.”²

Basic to the development of the theories of symbolic action are the works of William James, Charles Cooley, and John Dewey. These theorists generally believed that the behaviour of individuals was a consequence of a reflective encounter with and interpretations derived from internal and external stimuli such as instincts, drives and needs, on the one hand, and social forces such as the cultural symbolic structures, on the other.³

Cooley, for example, proposed a method of attempting to tap into the meanings behind the actions of social actors, rather than just settling for their external observation, a method, which he called “sympathetic introspection.”⁴ He posed the relationship between the social and individual as the relationship of the “objective” and the “subjective”. In this context, the development of the individual identity is seen as the process of development of the child through his/her social experiences until he/she is shaped into a moral entity and thus is invested with a conception of the self. Thus, “the identity is obtained, when the child becomes aware of the fact that the picture of who he/she is reflects the imagination of others concerning him/her.”⁵ For Cooley, then, self exists in the minds of the members of society and hence constitutes an “imaginative fact”.

In the same tradition, George Herbert Mead formulated his concept of the self in terms of the development of awareness of others before awareness of own self.⁶ For Mead too, social conduct is mediated by the “stimulation” of others. And as many of these “stimulations” come from the past, the way we interpret them in the present becomes significant in motivating our actions. Mead states that the world that comes to us from the past “possesses” and “controls” us whereas we possess and control the world that we discover and invent in the present.⁷ In other words, the social world of human beings is determined by past structures as “inherited”, as well as by present intervention which is “emergent”. Reality in this sense is an emergent phenomenon determined by a particular present. In other words, the past is not a fixed entity but one, which is mediated by a particular interpretation, which takes place in a particular present.⁸

For social construction of reality, then, a shared interpretation of the past is required, which emerges either, as Herbert Blumer has suggested, through “processual and voluntaristic interaction entailing a dialogue between impulses and social definitions”, or, as Erwin Goffman has suggested, through “ceremony and ritual” in human social life.⁹ On the basis of symbolic interaction, therefore, a new concept of society emerges. One that is not based on the assumption that society is an aggregation of individuals held together only because of external physical and economic pressures and limitations, as

² Ibid, p. 1
³ Ibid, P. 2
⁴ Ibid, p.10
⁵ Ibid, p.13
⁶ Ibid, p.14. (also see Habermas’s The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2)
⁷ Ibid, p.39
⁸ Ibid, p.38
⁹ Ibid, pp. 67-68
Hobbes had suggested. But one that is based on the understanding that society is constituted by meanings, which that have emerged from the interpretation of the shared memories of the past.

From a totally different perspective, the Muslim philosopher Seyyed Hussein Nasr has offered a mystical account of the development of the self, which locates the source of the self within the individual rather than the social. According to Nasr, who follows the tradition of the illuminationist (ishraqi) philosophy of Ibn-e-Sina (Avicenna), Shahab-ad-Din Sohrevardi and Mulla Sadra, man’s “inner being” is concealed, covered in “sheaths” of multiple selves, and could only be recovered in the lifecycle of the individual through spiritual discipline. The inner self, or the true source of full awareness, is thus already there within man and needs to be recovered not constructed. It is therefore through man’s perpetual endeavour to discover the meaning of cosmological symbolism that he learns to master his inner desires and conduct a transcendental and illuminated social life. And it is through this endeavour that the outer layers of the inner self are to be cast aside in order to recover the “ultimate self” and achieve complete “self-awareness”.

Through this awareness then, the individual can establish a more meaningful and profound relationship with the social and natural world. Here too, external and internal stimuli affect the social conduct in constituting man as a moral entity, but the spiritual discipline rises the individual above the external and internal influences. The self-disciplined individual thus passes through these influences as stages of recovering the “ultimate self”. But this “ultimate self” becomes meaningful at present only if it can act to recover the meaning of being and existence by interpreting the received traditions of the past. Action is thus symbolically mediated and invested with meaning through the act of interpretation, and as such it is inevitably collective.

Abner Cohen has connected symbols through sentiments and emotions to social action. Hence, he has emphasised that symbols by organising human feelings and imaginations, and transforming them into action, present themselves as going beyond mere symbolic representations of things, and thus provide a basis for creating new realities and hence, become vital ingredients of the social process. And Mach has noted referring to Cohen: “a conceptual, symbolically expressed model of the world serves as the general framework in which people organise their perceptions of the natural and social environment and which determines their action.”

Within a given collectivity, these symbolic structures form the internal channels of communication, which enable the collectivity to reiterate its values, beliefs and principles, hence reconstituting the important aspects that form the basis of its specific identity as different from others. This process inevitably involves a degree of mystification of objective realities, particularly those, which belong to the domain of history. Memory, revitalised by imagination, plays an important part in this mystifying process or, in many cases, invention of realities. Yet, this mystification is not necessarily detrimental to the cause of social integration. On the contrary, this mystification, which takes place through ideological formulations, is vital to the integration of the sense of society and the maintenance of political order. As Cohen has suggested: “There can be no social order without the mystification of symbolism ...

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emblems, slogans, banners, mass parades, titles, patriotic music and sounds ... and a host of other symbols of all sorts play their part in the maintenance of the political order.”

It is in this manner that an imagined model of the world based on meaningful interpretations of symbolic structures, inherited from the past, becomes the real director of collective action in the present. The objective world might have existed for the proto-human in the state of nature; for the social human, though, the existence is expressed in modes of representation, which define social relations on the basis of subjective, rather than objective facts. As Edward Said contends in his *Culture and Imperialism*, the past in fact is never completely passed. Taking Said’s argument further, one may argue that the past continues in the present in two imaginary forms: in the form of history and in the form of myth. Historiography claims a factual insight into the past. Mythology, however, is basically fictional and imaginary, but in terms of motivating action, no less real.

History has played the critical role of rendering myths unreal, but in the process itself has become fictional. Since social behaviour in day to day life is basically informed by imagery, myths have survived in powerful ways. Instead, it is history that has had to drop its total claims to objective validity. Falsity and truth are no longer, and perhaps have never been, the practical issues in history. Rather, the real influence of the past comes into play when it is reinvented mythically or ideologically in the present. Appropriate images of the present have to be constituted on the basis of selected facts and figures from the past. This process has the effect of rendering the past meaningful in the present by making it relevant to the current situation.

But in doing this, people derive meanings from mythical or ideological structures, which are purely symbolic and hence imaginary. “Facts happened and people lived in the past in a given space and time; but at present they exist only in the memory of contemporary people in their present reading of historical texts. They acquire a symbolic value and join the cultural model of the world of the living communities.”

Mythical ideologies have been particularly significant in the development of political conflict and political change in the process of the Islamic Revolution of Iran. The mythical versions of Islamic and Shi’i history have often been presented in the form of fiction with the major function of transmitting cultural identity. But these fictions have been skilfully turned into history.

Characters of mythical proportions, the founding figures and war heroes of Islam, like Muhammad, Ali, Hussein, Salman, Belal, Malek, etc. were turned historical, but, not by historians, rather, by the narrators and interpreters of the their traditions. The significant events of the past were also made part of history, events such as ghazawat (the wars led by the Prophet himself), and the battles led by Ali and Hussein, such as Saffain, and Karbala. But, they were made historical not through rigorous methods of historical authentication, but through the authentication of the hadith (oral traditions) by the mohaddethin (the collectors and interpreters of hadith). Nonetheless, this interpretative process of invention and creation has performed a

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2. Mach, Z. 1993, P. 64
3. Roland Barthes has offered in his *Mythologies* examples of powerful display of mythologies and ideologies in modern advertising.
legitimating function, which has been the basis of cultural reproduction of the Muslim community.

The creation of “illogical” or non-conventional characters and events also informed the impulse to creativity and change. Just as in Greek or Christian mythology, non-existent creatures and events were invented in the Islamic tradition. Parallels were made, for example, for the myths of “virgin mothers”, “half gods-half human beings”, which were created on non-logical principles.\footnote{Cited in Mach, Z. 1993. pp. 58-59} It is in this context, that Islamic myths, such as the story of Abraham’s wife Hajar and the magical flow of a spring in the middle of desert under her feet, the overnight ascendancy of the Prophet Muhammad to heavens (\textit{mi’raj}), or the miracle of the disappearance of the twelfth Imam (\textit{ghaybat}), could become comprehensible. These archetypes acted as the very links between the people and their cultural or rather “cultic” origins. In the case of the Islamic Revolution, creative interpretations of such myths were instrumental in motivating revolutionary action, which required great sacrifices and unprecedented heroism from the population.

This is of course a universal phenomenon. As Mercea Eliade has suggested, myths provide the vehicle for going beyond the framework of the historical reality in a nostalgic search for lost paradises whose restoration would re-establish the absolute unity of the man and the sacred.\footnote{Ibid. p.61} Myth, religion and ideology provide the certainty in ultimate conditions. Hope as a means to withstand the uncertainty of life - which imposes itself in the form of death - is provided through mythical, religious and ideological experience. So is the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, which inform the unity of a people as a collective: “Every nation and ethnic group, and every community, possesses a mythology, which describes its origins, its relations to other groups, justifies its rights to certain territories, and to dominate other groups.”\footnote{Ibid, p.62}

It is not difficult to identify the imaginary justifications, which formed the backbone of the Western colonial expansion in the nineteenth century and the world dominance by the United States in the twentieth century. Here, we are concerned with the Islamic imaginary, which inspired a rebellion against the Western dominance in Iran and in the Muslim world in general in the late twentieth century.

Mythical justifications also outlined the criteria of social order in Iran after the victory of the Islamic Revolution by reference to various symbolic structures such as “God’s will”, or “Divine intervention”, or “supreme religious values”. By contrast, in industrial democracies, the symbolic structure of the vote of majority and the ethical value of the social contract provide the cement of social integration.\footnote{See Habermas, J. The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume I, Beacon Press, U.S.A., 1984. pp. 243-273}

**The Concept of Imaginary and the Symbolism of Dream**

A significant aspect of imagination seems to be its capacity to be perceived devoid of judgement, whereas reality always has to be judged to establish its falsity or truth. Although we may always refer to imagination as false, this attribute is really irrelevant in the context that we usually deal with pure imagination, because in pure imagination, we are not really concerned with the actual existence of things, but only with their possibility.
This argument implies that there is difficulty in evaluating the imaginary. It is definitely not possible to evaluate it in its own terms. Perhaps this was why Descartes questioned, in his philosophical meditations, the taken-for-granted distinction between false and true, which was conventionally made between thoughts in awareness and those that occurred in dreams. As it seemed to him, there were no certain indications for establishing such a distinction except through objective measurement.

The question is then: how could one possibly make an objective measurement of the imaginary? In the case of the imaginary of the Islamic Revolution, for instance, I certainly find it absurd to engage in a pure empirical measurement of the political and economic parameters of the imaginary itself. Instead, I shall try to develop an evaluation of the imaginary of the revolution on the basis of an interpretative or hermeneutic understanding of the revolution in the context of the development of the Shi'i political philosophy. To do this, I shall consider in the following chapters the symbolic meanings, which motivated the revolution and then established themselves as the intended outcome of the struggles of the revolutionary actors.

I believe the imaginary, which motivated the Islamic Revolution, should be differentiated from its outcome. The significance of this differentiation is that it will enable us to appreciate the emancipatory values, which were inherent in the essence of the revolution without having to appreciate the values of its outcomes uncritically. If we accept that revolutions are motivated by the dream of a better world, we will not be able to deny the assertions of Mannheim, Jung, and Marcuse and others that a society without such dreams is a dead society. Searching for the symbolism of the dream of the Iranian Revolution is therefore what has to be taken up first.

In recognising the strictly non-objective nature of the imaginary, one has thus to acknowledge that to study the imaginary objectively, it is impossible to take a strictly experimental approach. My interpretative approach to the concept of the imaginary is largely inspired by the approach of Freud to the interpretation of dreams, that of Clifford Geertz to the interpretation of cultures, and that of Paul Ricoeur to the interpretation of texts. Geertz’s assertion that the analysis of culture was not “an experiential science in search of laws but an interpretative one in search of meaning” is of critical import in my arguments on the cultural foundations of the imaginary of the Islamic revolution.

Geertz’s interpretative understanding, or “thick description” of culture, aimed at discovering the meanings behind the specific modes of social relations. However, one has to acknowledge from the outset that this interpretative process is inherently problematic. It is deeply subjective in character whichever standpoint is taken, whether it is the standpoint of social actors or that of the observer. Yet, this should not deter us from recognising the objective value of the hermeneutic knowledge of culture, which is gained through the interpretative process.

The interpretative process is also contextually bound, and it is difficult to form logical generalisations from it. The core of the problem of cultural hermeneutics is that one cannot move too far in his/her analysis unless one accepts the mutual inclusiveness of understanding and belief, and that they cannot stand sufficiently supported on their own. This is best put in terms of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic circle: “You must understand in order to believe, but you must believe in order to understand.”

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2 Cited in Mach, Z. 1993, p. 47
Nor is the interpretative process the exclusive domain of the scholar. It is part of the “life-world” of every community and individual to which the scholar too can make a contribution. Within the context of social life, it provides the basis for reasserting or reproducing conventional realities as well as for inventing new realities. The interpretative understanding of culture questions the basis of the “nominalist ethos” developed in the West with the “disenchantment of magic”, the “rationalisation of religion” and the ascendancy of objective science since the Renaissance.

The interpretative or hermeneutic understanding of the imaginary will thus take stock from the phenomenological methods of understanding cultures. But, as I mentioned earlier, understanding collective imaginaries also partakes from the psychoanalytical methods of interpreting the dreams. For Freud, the imagery of dreams was a kind of language with a special symbolism to express, albeit in a distorted manner, what the censorship of social morality would not allow to be expressed in normal conversation. Yet Freud, in his The Interpretation of Dreams, warned that the symbolism of dreams was not identical to the symbolism of the ordinary language. In other words, because a significant part of the dream symbols were connected to the unconscious, they would not be readily understood within the framework of the linguistic symbols, which was supposed to be predominantly connected to human consciousness.

Lacan reformulated Freud by asserting that linguistic symbolic systems were also part of the unconscious. Accordingly, the symbolism of dream in the last analysis would reproduce the social reality in ever-repressive forms under the dominance of the arbitrary rule of the linguistic structures, from which there could only be a flight to fantasy. As Juliet Mitchell has argued in his analysis of Lacan: “The human animal is born into language and it is within the terms of language that the human subject is constructed. Language does not arise from within the individual, it is always out there in the world outside, lying in wait for the neonate.”

In the Marxist tradition, Althusser used the Lacanian psychoanalysis to formulate a new theory of ideology, which would save Marxism from narrow economic understandings. (See Chapter 4 for more discussion on the Althusserian concept of ideology.) From a different perspective, Jung emphasised repeated appearances of certain archetypes in dreams, which impressed upon the unconscious a shared typical experience. As the source of collective memory, he attributed to the collective unconscious a system of shared “archetypes” or “primordial images” that he assumed to be “deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity.” “The archetype”, according to Jung, was “a kind of readiness to produce over and over again the same or similar mythical ideas.”

In the Frankfurt School and the tradition of critical theory, Herbert Marcuse elaborated on the psychoanalytic tradition to stress the emancipatory potentials of the psyche in the modern world. According to Marcuse, the modern world has brought about the conditions in which freedom from repressive social order is a real possibility through a reawakening of the utopian dreams. He thus warned against the turning of modern society to a “one-dimensional” society, where collective dreams and aspirations for utopia were lost. Such a society, he wrote, was “irrational” in a “destructive” sense. “Its productivity is destructive of the free development of human needs.

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3 Ibid, p. 70
and faculties, its peace maintained by the constant threat of war, its growth dependent on the repression of the real possibilities for pacifying the struggle for existence.”

For Marcuse, the potential of resistance against the totalitarian tendencies of the “one-dimensional” society was of an order different from the order of the existing “universe of discourse and action”. And its realisation involved “subversion of the established order”. He thus advocated the liberation of the imagination through utopian dreams so that “it can be given all its means of expression”. Utopia, in this sense, is not merely a fantasy but a vehicle for building a desirable future via “phantasy”. Marcuse’s concept of “phantasy”, as Anthony Elliott has suggested, “is at once a kind of negation of the repressiveness of the social world and somehow also prefigures new possibilities for the world.” Marcuse sees in “phantasy” the power of the unconscious imagination of a utopia, which would resist “dissimulation within the repressive social conditions.” “Phantasy” thus keeps the dream of freedom alive.

According to Marcuse: “Phantasy plays a most decisive function in the total mental structure. It links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest products of consciousness, the dream with the reality. It preserves the archetypes of the genus, the perpetual but repressed ideas of the collective and individual memory, the tabooed images of freedom.” Marcuse used the concept of “phantasy” as equivalent to imagination in order to argue that it retained the tendencies of the psyche before its organisation by the “reality principle”. He wrote: “Imagination preserves the memory of the sub-historical past when life of the individual was the life of the genus, the image of the immediate unity between the universal and the particular under the rule of the pleasure principle.”

We also know from mythologies that “there are dreams that precede, announce, command and finally constitute a reality that without them would only have been a latent possibility.” There are also numerous examples of the real value attributed to dreams by tribal magicians, astrologers, theologians and also political leaders. Henri Desroche has linked dreams with hope by quoting Aristotle in an answer to the question: What is hope? “The dream of an awakened man,” Aristotle had answered. Desroche, following Durkheim, has also stressed the social functions of dreams in primitive societies, as against the repression of these functions in modern societies.

The primitive societies used these functions in various ways such as “medical diagnosis, reception of a message from the hereafter, in initiation rites”, and more significantly in the “genesis of certain messianic movements.” Desroche has criticised the “arrogance” of the Western science in the study of such categories as dreams and utopias. He wrote: “The dream, the trance, indeed even madness, and in any case myths as well as utopias acquire the density of proceedings, which, although they are ... irrational, are nonetheless human proceedings, which in the end come from another type of rationality and science.”

The Islamic Revolution, which some observers have attributed to a moment of madness in the Iranian history, was experienced as a dream-come-true for Iranians as

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1 Marcuse, H. One Dimensional Man, Sphere Books, UK, 1970, p. 9
2 Ibid. p. 111
3 Ibid. p. 196
5 Ibid, p. 93
7 Ibid, p. 109.
9 Ibid. p. 15
10 Ibid, p. 23
a repressed cultural group. The mystical interaction of the primitive ecstasy of popular religion, and the peculiar rationalism of Islam as a field of knowledge of the world, made this spontaneous eruption possible. The Islamic Revolution, in this sense, confirmed the essential link between imagination and collective action, which was established through symbolism of dream, myth, religious experience and modern revolution.

Rituals are rich sources of symbolism, which have the potential to be tapped into by a collectivity to feed its guiding imaginaries. Yet, whereas the cultural symbolism of the rituals in the primitive societies predominantly connected these societies to various kinds of natural religions, rational religion and science in early modern and modern societies have endeavoured to detach culture from its natural origins and associate it with cultivation and civilisation. It is at the moments of breach of this dissociation of nature and culture, that revolutions, as connections of rationalism and ecstatic energies of life, find a chance of emergence.

Rationalist Muslim scholars have often represented Islam as a rational religion; a religion based on a certain level of abstraction, and a religion capable of regulating life in this world through upholding rituals of public piety, and through regulation of personal practices from praying to sexuality to economic transactions. On a different note, the tradition of mysticism has presented Islam as a religion capable of providing for a transcendent existence in this world, an existence free from scholastic discipline and norms of public piety. It was through this type of existence that it was possible to experience freedom from the bondage of social structures through ecstatic elevation of the soul. Islam has thus presented capacities of both a this-worldly and an other-worldly religion.

The scholasticism of the Islamic jurists originally sought to repress the ecstasy of the popular religions that arose in Iran after the Islamic conquest. Islamic scholasticism presented Islam as a religion, which would decisively disengage its believers from their natural roots. Using the Qur'anic verse: “we have come from Him and we will return to Him,” it located the origin and destiny of the believers in the heavens, rather than on the earth. By contrast, the mystical tradition tried to use the same Qur'anic verse to emphasise the cyclic nature of movement of the human soul. And hence, it asserted that it was possible for the earthly individuals to transcend social and political disciplines to become God.

The rise of mystical Shi'ism in Iran, despite the attempts to reassert the scholasticism of the Shi'i jurisprudence, opened the way for the emergence of a powerful mystical-philosophical tradition with Shi'i flavour. It was the parallel development of the rational theology and mystical philosophy, which gave Shi'ism the power to both sensitise the social consciousness of Iranians, and use the symbolic structures of the popular narratives to tap into the deep layers of their collective unconscious.
As such, the critical interaction of the discipline of the religious sciences and the ecstatic creativity of the mystical experience provided the potential ground for the emergence of a new collective *imaginary* of an ideal future. But this ideal future could be built on earth only by the transcending power of revolution, which would take the society beyond its existing cultural and political structures, and by the utopia of a modern future. In the following chapters, I shall discuss in more detail the rationalisation of religion, the emergence of a modern ideology of revolution and the formation of the utopia of a modern civil society in Iran.

**Cultural Symbols: Representations of the Imaginary**

The dissociation of culture from its lower natural origins in Islam has produced serious political implications for the modern Islamic societies. In Iran, it furnished the Muslim thinkers with an opportunity to offer transcendental arguments, arguments that went beyond the existing interpretations of the faith in an attempt to reconstitute an imagined glorified past in the present. These arguments made it also possible to project a promised idealised future, which the present society has a duty to establish. The mystical cultural heritage of abstraction of thought, combined with rationalisation of religion and development of science, was put into action by Muslim ideologues in utilising the popular narratives and rituals in order to instigate social change. Hence, the development of the *imaginaries* that read into symbolic structures meanings, which took them beyond mere structures, and connected them to the living organism of human culture as a source of aspiration to a higher order of existence.

The richness of religious symbolism and the symbolism of popular culture made it possible for the Muslim ideologues to prepare the ground for the Islamic Revolution; their *imaginaries* were thus an essentially social and hence collective phenomena capable of producing emotions and ideas. It will follow from this that through ideas, thoughts and emotions, which were generated by such thinkers as Jalal Al-Ahmad, Ali Shari'ati, Ruhollah Khomeini, Mahmud Taleqani and Morteza Motahhari in the 1960s and 1970s, a creative process was put in motion, which led to the rise of the revolutionary power of Islam in Iran with both constructive and destructive potentials. (I shall discuss the views of some of these ideologues in detail in Chapter 7.) Such a generative process can be conceived in terms of what Geertz called a process, which would lead to social action in general and political action in particular.¹

In the case of Iran, the understanding of the significance of symbols in motivating social and political action is achieved through the understanding of the Islamic and specifically Iranian *Shi'i* culture as a vast domain in the context of which the events were acted out. (See particularly Chapters 5 and 6 for details.) The *Shi'i* culture, in this sense, could be conceived as an environment with the potential to set the boundary and agenda of social and political action. And yet, it was constantly changing and getting modified by the interactions that were going on within its own boundaries. Therefore, the *Shi'i* Islamic culture should be taken as the fabric of Iranian life or an interpretative background against which the roles and situations were played out, and not as a monolithic tradition of thought shaped by the *Shi'i* jurists and theologians.

¹ Geertz, C. 1975, P.5
The Islamic culture was, in this sense, similar to the Judaic or Christian cultures in its role of providing its adherents with a significance, which made their lives meaningful beyond mere material existence. It could potentially inspire self-knowledge, contemplation and sublime transcendence as well as prejudice, intolerance and violence. No matter what potentials became actualised, there was virtually no way for a total exit from the cultural domain. As such, the Islamic culture complied with Geertz's metaphoric definition whereby culture was conceived as the webs of significance in which the human animal was suspended.

Habermas' understanding of culture is also useful in portraying the operation of the Islamic culture in Iran. Extending Habermas' arguments, the Islamic culture could be conceived as the essential component of the “life-world”, which as an all-pervasive stock of knowledge supplied the social actors “with unproblematic, common background conditions that (were) assumed to be guaranteed.” The Shi'i popular culture thus provided Iranians with a common background against which their collective actions became meaningful and as such imminent.

In understanding cultural domain as the provider of mutual understanding and agreement over a guiding common imaginary, I am thus emphasising the importance of reaching understanding and agreement in terms that are not strictly objective in the empirical sense, but nonetheless real in terms of its social influence. A case in point is the institution of law, which is based on interpretative understanding of collective agreements, which could take account of empirical sciences but is of a different order. One may even go further to suggest that the interpretative nature of the operation of the law in maintaining social and political order is connected with the arbitrary nature of the terms of this original agreement. The efficacy of the interpretative understanding of preceding social agreement in the maintenance of order, although aspires to scientific clarity, but is in fact founded in the concealment of the arbitrariness of the preceding agreements. In fact, the survival of a society as a meaningful entity is as much connected to its economic, political and scientific advancement as to the concealment of the arbitrariness of the sources of social and political order, which is achieved through religious or ideological belief. No amount of economic, political or scientific failure can result in complete social disintegration as long as a collective religious or ideological bond can preserve the core of the social agreement as fundamental and worthy of preservation, not arbitrary and questionable.

However, once the core constituency of a society loses the sense of social agreement, the ideological justifications would no longer be able to conceal the arbitrary nature of the existing order. It is the recognition of the arbitrary nature of its political order that makes the society aware of the undesirability of its present order of existence in economic and political terms. And it is in this recognition that the conditions for the emergence of revolution and the disintegration of the old order can arise. This is so because collective agreement provides for a sense of belonging and common purpose within which economic and political interests become meaningful. Paradoxically, this agreement also provides for the formation of conflicting imaginaries, which guide one culture in dehumanising and consequently hating another, hence the parallel existence of constructive and destructive tendencies within a cultural self-understanding.

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The Development of the Shi’i Political Imaginary

A serious understanding of the intellectual development of the Shi’i Islamic political imaginary requires a historical review of this development from the beginning to the Islamic Revolution. (See Chapters 5 & 6.) In this historical analysis, it will be seen that a politico-religious dispute over the succession of the Prophet Muhammad a millennia and a half ago grew into a sectarian religious movement, which throughout the Middle Ages underwent drastic developments. From the early modern period, religious sectarianism was repressed by a strong central State, which prepared the ground for the rise of Shi’ism as a national religion. This national religion was then transformed into a nationalist ideology in the face of the Western colonial and post-colonial expansion, and gradually developed into an ideology of a politico-religious revolution and utopia of a religious government in our post-modern condition. I shall conduct this historical analysis using the existing analytical texts on the development of religion and politics in the Iranian history. These texts include but are not limited to those of Hamid Algar, Ann Lambton, Montgomery-Watt, Amir Arjomand, Ervand Abrahamian, Michael Fischer, Mohsen Milani, Hamid Dabashi, and Mansour Moaddel.

In the last two chapters of the thesis (Chapters 7 & 8), I shall concentrate on the theoretical analysis of the political-ideological and religious-philosophical discourses, which were constituted by the Islamic imaginary and in turn constituted the conceptual and practical fundaments of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic government. I shall also analyse the post-revolution discourses, which have continued to influence the political life of Iranians. In this respect, I shall critically discuss the texts of the modern Muslim theologians, philosophers and ideologues. These thinkers include the ideologues of the Islamic Revolution, like Ruhollah Khomeini, Morteza Motahhari and Ali Shar’iati, as well as the post-revolution ideologues and theorists, such as Abdol-Karim Soroush, Muhammad Mujtahid-Shabestari and Ahmad Azari-Qomi.

The principle method used here in developing arguments about the imaginary of the Islamic Revolution is to develop a theoretical framework based on the existing phenomenological, hermeneutical and psychoanalytical theories of collective imagination. It is against this theoretical background that I will offer my own interpretation of the rise of revolutionary power of Islam in Iran in the context of modernity. I shall particularly use the work of theorists like Paul Ricoeur and Cornelius Castoriadis, who have argued for the socially constitutive role of social imaginary significations, such as sacred and literary texts, cultural symbolism and rituals. Emphasis will be placed on the ideological and utopian interpretations of these significations, which are not only tools for transmitting meanings as the shadow of reality, but also constructs of the social imaginary that constitute reality itself. I shall also draw on the critical views on modernity, such as those of Alain Touraine, in order to highlight the role of the crisis of modernisation in creating the condition for the rise of revolutionary imagination in Iran. The significant political implications, which I shall consider in this light, are both the potential for political emancipation through revolutionary imagination, and the tendency to institutionalise this imagination in the form of new relations of domination.

It should become clear that my thesis does not dismiss the need to establish the socio-economic preconditions of revolutions, but to develop a concept of imagination
that would help illuminate certain aspects of revolutions that escape the empirical analysis of socio-economic factors. In other words, I shall argue that collective imagination cannot be reduced to socio-economic factors, but can turn such factors into meaningful ingredients of collective action. My approach is thus not to examine the dependence of the imaginary of revolution on socio-economic conditions - which could lead to yet another conventional account of revolutions - but to demonstrate how these conditions become intelligible to revolutionary actors in terms of a political imaginary that motivates revolutionary action.

I believe it is important to overcome the relative neglect of collective imagination in the current conventional trends of understanding the phenomenon of revolution, because this neglect has left vague the aspects of revolution that are crucial for understanding the impulses, emotions and motivations behind revolutionary action. It is in the domain of productive imagination that the motivations for political action in pursuit of specific ends are constituted and become meaningful to the political actors. My emphasis on the concept of imagination would not dismiss the existing conceptualisations of revolutions, but would hopefully enrich them. For instance, attention to the power of imagination could enhance the account of revolutions as a result of mobilisation of resources and organised action of certain social groups or classes in the context of significant changes in socio-economic structures of each society or in the world economy. It can also connect the social-psychological accounts of revolutions, which are based on reflexes, such as frustration and aggression, with the role of the interpretations of symbolic structures in instigating collective psychic energies. The sociological approaches that have emphasised social-structural dysfunction as the driving force of revolutionary change can also gain form the concept of imagination.

Most of the current accounts of revolutionary action do not deal with motivational forces that drive revolutions as objective forces in their own right. I propose that for the socio-economic factors to become translated into particular forms of awareness of interests and powerful drives for revolutionary action meaningful interpretations of the world, existence and purpose of existence - which would justify action and make it acceptable and desirable would be objectively indispensable. Moreover, revolutionary action gets actually underway when such interpretations has already been collectively agreed upon in a mixture of conscious and non-conscious perception of a given situation by a collective of people. This collective agreement is itself constituted through social production of the imaginary of revolution and the dream of a desired political community. Collective action is therefore driven by the impulses and emotions that flow from the non-conscious energies of the psyche and tend to upset the existing order, and the conscious desires and plans for the construction of a desired order. Only with the successful completion of the revolutionary project will the imaginary become part of the collective consciousness. In other words, the radical imaginary of revolution constitutes the forces that form the collective “myth of revolution”: a myth that moves the collectivity towards action, action that pushes the boundaries of the existing social and political order.

1 I am referring here, in particular, to Charles Tilly’s From Mobilisation to Revolution (1981) and Theda Skocpol’s States and Social Revolutions (1979).
2 Here, I am particularly referring to Ted Gurr’s Why Men Rebel (1975).
3 One may take, for example, Chalmers Johnson’s Revolutionary Change (1978).
But once the existing order is transcended, the imaginary will not only become the main force in institutionalising the new order, but also will provide for its critique. This argument, I propose, can be used to explain why in Iran, where revolutionary action was sustained for long years without serious decline in the revolutionary values, there has also been a strong push for opening up the possibility of the critique of the revolution. This is perhaps because the sustenance of Islamic revolutionary spirit in Iran was not due only to effective suppression of all forms of alternative thinking; but also due to the capacity of the Islamic imaginary to provide new challenging alternatives to monolithic understandings of the revolution within the Islamic tradition.

By the same token, the breakout of the revolution had a lot to with the capacity of the Islamic imaginary to offer alternatives to the monarchical rule of the Pahlavi dynasty. The Islamic Revolution of Iran thus ran its course not merely because of the seriousness of socio-economic crisis under the Pahlavi regime, an opinion that many analysts of the revolution have agreed on. Rather, the revolution was strengthened and sustained because of the success of the leaders of the revolution to offer a mobilising interpretation of the social, political, economic and cultural situation in Iran. This was perhaps the reason why most of the so-called Iran experts of pre-revolution Iran failed to predict massive revolutionary movement, which was underway. For them, the politico-economic conditions, which would be essential for the sustenance of a revolutionary action, were still missing in Iran.¹ (I shall argue this issue later in the text.)

As such, the Islamic Revolution of Iran should be considered as a new social movement, which has offered an alternative to the previous politico-cultural order in Iran and hopes to challenge the international order as well; but in the course of institutionalisation, it has also created its own anti-thesis. It would be thus necessary to identify the imaginary of the Islamic Revolution as a repository of meanings, and the actions that followed from it as the representations of this imaginary. It will be argued that the conditions of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, was constituted by interpretative understanding of the Islamic politico-cultural traditions, gradually developed by the discourse of Ayatollah Khomeini and other Muslim revolutionary ideologues, such as Shari’ati and Motahhari. These new interpretations came out of the founding political utopias of the Shi‘i Islam, the teachings of religious scriptures, the emotions of religious rituals, the dreams of popular narratives, the aspirations of mystical traditions, the myth of modern revolutions and the high promises of science and technology.

The role of the Islamic ideological discourses in shaping the imaginary of the Islamic Revolution comprehensible to the population via innovative interpretations of the received memories, narratives, texts and symbolic structures was central in the actualisation of the revolution. These discourses provided certain interpretations of the

¹ Almost none of the accounts of the socio-economic and socio-political developments of Iran before the Revolution hinted at the possibility of the occurrence of the huge revolutionary movement, which was already underway. On the contrary, both the liberal and Marxist analysts saw Iran as a country moving away from the possibility of a significant socio-political change. Analysts like Leonard Binder and James Bill as well as the Soviet experts and particularly the leftist and nationalist intellectuals in Iran, albeit from opposite standpoints, relied on the economic and political indices to describe Iran as not ready for revolution due to the existing economic growth and political order. Interestingly, the current development in Iran toward political pluralism and civil society has also gone unnoticed by most of the analysts, and will probably take them by surprise again.
traditional texts, narratives and symbolic structures, which would project an alternative reality in opposition to the existing socio-political reality under the monarchical regime. This new condition or alternative reality may be conceived as the environment in which the revolutionary action was played out and from which new forms of political thinking emerged. It was through these discourses and in this constituted environment that the revolutionary actors made sense of their own actions and saw them as meaningful and desirable. It is also through these discourses that new trends of opposition to the limitations of Islamic revolutionary discourse are currently taking shape.

To this end, I shall review the main Islamic revolutionary discourses, which were involved in constructing the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, as well as the post-revolution political discourses that are providing a critique of the revolutionary ideology. The Khomeini discourse, which was seen initially at worst as madness and at best as a utopian desire, was especially significant in shaping the imaginary of the Revolution. It tended to overcome the barriers between imaginary and real, making thinking of an Islamic alternative to the ancient system of Iranian monarchy both possible and urgent; and as such, it eventually established itself as the new conventional reality in Iran.

Khomeini’s discourse also provided for the rationale of emergence of a whole new range of possibilities, for example the possibility of constituting a new type of State backed by political, legal and economic institutions, which had not been conceived of before. It played a vital legitimating role in the construction of Islamic revolutionary institutions on the basis of the imaginary of the Islamic Revolution and the utopia of an ideal society. But it had a jaundiced face, in that in some cases it performed a socially integrative role; and in other instances it led to destructive and violent tendencies that violated the emancipatory aspirations of the revolution. For example, it offered certain interpretations of religious texts that would support the notion that the Islamic economic system should develop around the principle of social justice. Its rhetoric encouraged economic development, emphasised the needs of the disinherited (mostaz’afin) and advocated the elimination of the possibility of the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few (takasor). It even went as far as abolishing the notion of interest (rebh) in the banking system. In practice though, it created real obstacles in achieving social justice and failed to offer significant economic benefits for the lower classes.

In the legal system, it promoted the Islamic law (Shari’at) emphasising the notion of Islamic retribution (qesas) in order to simplify the practice of law and guarantee the equality of everyone before the law. In practice, it became entangled in the rigidity of literal interpretations of the Shari’at and gave way to the resurgence of outmoded and cruel forms of punishment against those who were found in breach of narrow interpretations of Islamic moral and political codes. And most importantly, it established that the Islamic political system was to be built on the notion of the governance of jurist (velayat-e faqih), purportedly in order to combat the despotic nature of the Iranian monarchy. But in the process, it gave rise to the possibility of the establishment of a theocratic regime that would replace the old dictatorial relations of power with a new system of domination that would be no less autocratic.

As for the post-revolution and particularly post-Khomeini political discourse, I shall discuss the new intellectual ideas whose main characteristics is their engagement in interpreting the same cultural symbolic structures used by the Islamic revolutionary
ideologues in order to offer a new understanding of politics in a deeply religious cultural context. This new reform movement, which has gone almost unnoticed by the Iranian political groups in exile and many of the Western analysts and governments, includes religious intellectuals, the reformist thinkers, various politico-religious organisations and individual writers and activists contributing to various philosophical and literary publications. Philosophers and intellectuals, such as Soroush, and Shabestari, and politico-religious organisations, such as the Nehzat-e Azadi-e Iran (the Liberation Movement of Iran), belong to this movement, despite vast disagreements and differences between them.

This new political discourse is significant due to its manifest attempt to use cultural imaginaries (symbols, narratives and rituals) to develop a peculiar type of secular understanding of politics through a critique of Shi'i Islam as a political ideology. This movement is particularly important in its critique of the theory of velayat-e faqih, as proposed by the late Ayatollah Khomeini and officially interpreted by the clergy in power as a blueprint for instituting an absolutist theocratic State. Against the attempts of the official clergy to suppress dissent among the ranks of the believers by issuing accusations of heresy, the new Shi'i intellectuals, in the tradition of the Persian mystical philosophers, offer interpretative readings of the Shi'i political philosophy that challenge the current official interpretations of it.

A Hermeneutic Understanding of the Iranian Revolution

In light of the shortcomings of most of the existing interpretations of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, I suggest that a hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of this revolution is necessary in order to reveal many mysteries of this massive social and political movement. Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi’s attempt, in their Debating Muslims, to offer such a hermeneutic understanding of the cultural transformation of Iran since the Islamic Revolution is a prelude to further productive work in this direction. They describe as the task of their work a “renewed attention” to the need “to make use of cultural idioms, concepts, tropes and discourse styles as epistemological guides”, rather than as mere ethnographic data reduced to objects of formal categorisations. They pay attention particularly to various genres of narration of stories and other forms of religious oral discourses.

A hermeneutic understanding of Islamic culture is of highest political significance in any meaningful resolution of the politico-cultural conflict between the Islamic world and the West. In light of such understanding, this conflict could be turned into a dialectical rather than military confrontation. In order to adequately understand this conflict one should avoid reducing the highly productive interactions of Islam and the West to either the destructive tradition of the Crusades or the politics of domination of the modern time. Religious hatred of the crusades and “anti-imperialist” (and one may add anti-terrorist) rhetoric of today, as Fischer has suggested, is “not just a lamentable display of historical ignorance, but (also) blocks access to rebuilding grounds for understanding, by essentialising, cartoonising, and distancing.”

At a philosophical level, the interest among the Muslim thinkers in establishing dialogue with their Western counterparts has deep historical roots going back to the medieval time. But in modern time, this interest partakes from the modern

1 Fischer, M. & Abedi, M. Debating Muslims, the University of Wisconsin Press, USA, 1990, pp. 93-150
2 Ibid. p. xxii
hermeneutic tradition of the Western philosophy. For example, philosophers with “Judeo-Muslim” sensitivities, such as Derrida and Levinas have already engaged in a dialogue with the likes of Heidegger and Gadamer, who “would construct modern philosophy on the ruins of Christian Hermeneutics.” Such traditions may well be extended to enrich the dialogue between the philosophers of Christian and Jewish background on the one hand, and the Islamic philosophers on the other, leading to a deeper mutual understanding of these cultures, which have all originated from the same source. No doubt, there is much work yet to be done to extend this tradition in order to enrich the relationship between the Western and Islamic worlds.

At a sociological level as well, contemporary Muslim intellectuals should take stock of the thought of Western thinkers like Jürgen Habermas and John Searle who have attempted to formulate new theories in search for the meanings of social action, and for reaching understanding between opposing claims to validity within the Western tradition. As Fischer has suggested, the juxtaposition of native Islamic hermeneutics with Western discourses “can lead ideally to a kind of critical hermeneutics.” This critical dialogue must take place with the view of enhancing the mutual understanding of the other, and therefore its point is not “to unpack in ever greater detail a given cultural system, but rather to create through juxtaposition a space for comparison and critical evaluation.” Fischer is concerned with what he calls the “interference”, “transference” and “interdependence” of cultures in order to elicit “alternative meaning structures or interpretation of rituals, myths, tropes, dialogic moves and connections between stories.” He thus rightfully claims that as long as Jews, Christians and Muslims invoke the same biblical stories to validate their own claims to authenticity, “their interpretations form families of resemblances.”

It is essential to recognise that within the Islamic hermeneutic discourse there is a rich tradition of “dialectical disputation”, which is capable of being used to contest the theocratic agenda of the current ruling elite in Iran. A concrete form of this contest has been launched by the religious modernists, such as Abdol-Karim Soroush and reform-minded ulama such as Muhammad Mujtahid-Shabestari. (See Chapter 8.)

Without reducing the rich multiplicity of cultures to one form of cultural existence, it is therefore valid to pinpoint the universal attempt of human societies to utilise their particular collective imaginaries in order to model their future. These collective imaginations, which are reflected in various symbolic structures, myths, stories, scriptures, etc, are used to model the future in terms of the changes to the perceived past. As such, one may note that every society embarks on change within a given tradition, which it both criticises and admires, and which it both changes and preserves.

In rejecting attempts to reduce all traditions to one, one may also validly question both the attempts of the West at cultural dominance, and the particularism of the Islamic Republic. The Western attempt presents Iranian culture as “fanatic” and “terrorist”, and the Islamic particularism tends to isolate the Iranian society from the world under the pretext of preservation of “cultural purity”.

Western writers are right in criticising the anti-Western rhetoric of what they call “Islamic fundamentalism” in stereotyping the people of the Western world as soulless individuals totally overtaken by consumerism. They are also right to note that

1 Ibid, p. xxiii
2 Ibid, p. xxiv
3 Ibid, p. xxiv
this anti-Western rhetoric expresses at a deeper level the envy of Muslim militants of
the Western advancements in science and technology, and their fear of subordination
to the West.¹ But one should not remain silent about the attempts of the Western neo-
colonisers, and particularly the subtle attempts of the Western media, in stereotyping
Muslims as “backward”, “fanatic” and “terrorist”. Such a silence will inadvertently
confirm the existing stereotypes. This situation has become even more unfortunate as
some of the secular intellectuals of the Muslim world also accuse Muslims of
historical ignorance and of needing liberation by the West. Nonetheless, there are
voices emerging not only in the Islamic world, but also in the West, which blame the
cultural conservatives on both sides for their anxiety and fear of difference. There
could be little doubt that the fear of difference has made the conservative forces
oblivious not only to the values of other cultures, but also to alternative interpretations
available in their own cultures.

Cultural Difference: A Source of Political Antagonism

Being oblivious to alternative interpretations of cultural traditions may lead to
situations where the undesirability of alternative cultural forms would seem to one as
natural as the desirability of one’s own culture. In other words, a given collectivity
may attach ultimate meaningfulness to its own action within the limited context of its
own culture, but remain totally ignorant of the fact that other forms of action may also
operate meaningfully within different cultural contexts. This ignorance of the cultural
values of the actions of others is based largely on the underlying assumption that
when action is taken beyond the horizon of a desirable cultural situation, it falls in a
cultural void, and not in another cultural context, which immediately defines the new
domain of action. Hence, the absurd tendencies prevailing especially in the modern
international relations to deny the meaningfulness of the actions that do not fit into the
existing conventions by ignoring their different cultural contexts.

According to a phenomenological understanding of culture, cultural patterns
potentially provide resources for reaching understanding of and consensus over
something in the world. “It is only in those rare moments when culture and language fail as
resources that they develop the peculiar resistance we experience in situations of disturbed
mutual understanding.”² Part and parcel of what is called “the crisis of modernity” is the
failure to overcome or reverse the outmoded prejudices that prevent the extension of
the understanding that develops between members of one culture to other cultures.
This issue has become critical in the modern time with the rise global patterns of
economic and political interaction, particularly immigration and multiculturalism.
This situation is probably a major factor in instigating mutual animosity and justifying
violent conflict in the world today both within national units and between nations. The
most acute form of this animosity, of course, occurs when the diversity of political
cultures is not mutually recognised.

Even in liberal democracies of the West, where cultural differences are
acknowledged and accorded equal civil rights at home, there is this persistent denial of
the political aspirations of various cultural representations. This is particularly
evident in the struggle of ethnic minorities in the Western countries to win recognition

¹ Ibid, p.xxi
² Mach, Z. 1993, p. 134
for their political rights.¹ This tendency to depoliticise culture and reduce it to hollow ritual acts or different linguistic forms without political history seems to be at the root of the resort to violence in settling political disputes between nations of divergent political cultures. And perhaps, it is also the same tendency that leads to violence within one society between migrant and ethnic communities and the dominant political culture.

On the global level, for instance, the development of an understanding between divergent political cultures in the Western Europe, the United States and certain Asian States, such as Japan, since World War II, has virtually eliminated the possibility of war between these nations. But this new environment of political understanding between the “core” capitalist countries has not been extended to the countries in the “periphery” of the “world-system”.² The divergent trends of development of political culture in many so-called Third World countries, particularly the Islamic countries, have made the outbreak of violent antagonism between these nations and the Western States all the more customary.

There have been numerous instances of emergence of substantial political and economic differences between the Western European nations, or between the United States and Europe or Japan. The differences between the European nations on the form and pace of political and economic rearrangement in Europe in the context of the European Union, for example, or the differences between the United States and Japan over trade issues, are of the order of problems that led to the eruption of war in the first half of this century. However, all of these issues have been disputed without even a threat of violence, owing to the new climate of political understanding between the core capitalist societies. On the other hand, there have been an equally high number of instances in which the disputes between the West and a nation of an incompatible political culture, like Iran, Iraq or Libya, have quickly degenerated into serious conflict and war or threat of war.

This does not mean that the differences of political culture between the European nations or between the United States and Japan have disappeared. Far from it the difference between the Europeans over the nature and shape of political authority in Europe is more acute than ever, and the dispute between the United States and Japan over trade imbalance is far from over. It only means that the Western nations and Japan have mutually recognised their different political cultures and have bound themselves to a mutual commitment in this recognition. By contrast, the emotionally charged distrust between the Islamic political culture and the Western democracies pushes them to military hostility over any political and economic dispute. The present conflict between the United States and Iran is to be understood in this cultural context, rather than in the strategic context of moral or technical superiority of one side over the other.

It is easy for the Western governments to accuse the unyielding Islamic States of building weapons of mass destruction, sponsoring terrorism and violating human rights. Yet no Islamic State is denying the advantages of disarmament and non-violence as the principle form of international political development. Nor are they devaluing the merits of civil society and human rights as the appropriate context for individual and social autonomy. The principles of peace, justice and freedom are well

² I have borrowed the terminology of “core”, “Periphery” and “world-system” from Immanuel Wallerstein.
recognised in the Islamic culture. But still, it is possible for the Muslims to question the commitment of the West to the principles it preaches. Here, it is easy for the Islamic States, considered “undesirable” by the West, to question the Western sincerity on the issues of human rights, State terrorism or weapons of mass destruction as long as they can refer to clear instances of the Western double standard in the international arena. These instances provide ample supply for domestic redemption of the “undesirable” regimes in the Muslim world.

For example, the Iranian State media had no difficulty to highlight the disregard of the United States for civilian lives when one of its battleships shot down an Iranian passenger plane over the Persian Gulf during the dying days of the Iran-Iraq war in the late 1980s. Although the United States paid compensation to the families of the victims of what it called an accident after lengthy court proceedings, Iranians remained suspicious of the goodwill of the United States because they never received a formal apology from the U.S. government. Suspicion turned into fury when Iranians learnt that the naval commander responsible for shooting down the passenger plane received decoration from the U.S. government for his heroism. It was just as easy, if not easier, for Iranians to accuse the United States of hypocrisy where it could be shown by evidence that during the Iran-Iraq war the United States clearly sided with Saddam Hussein to defeat Iran, ignoring the use of chemical and biological weapons against Iranians.

The Iranian government and media have also been able to refer to clear instances of American double standards elsewhere in the Muslim world. The perfect example in this regard is the American policies favouring Israel as against the Muslim nations and particularly the Palestinians. Iran has thus constantly criticised the American military push and economic sanctions against Muslim countries, causing death and hardship of the innocent civilians, while condoning the Israeli atrocities against Muslims, and remaining silent about Israel’s accumulation of weapons of mass destruction and sponsorship of State terrorism.

The Iranian media have also had ample supply of evidence to claim that the military build-up in the Persian Gulf, and the hostile approach to national aspirations and cultural sensitivities of the Muslim people, are not part of the Western crusade for the cause of humanity. Rather, they have depicted these moves as the continuation of Western push to dominate the economically and strategically important Islamic lands. They have been particularly quick to note the U.S. intolerance of all the States that it considers undesirable, emphasising that the U.S. hostile approach is not limited to the Muslim countries, and is extended to others, such as Cuba and North Korea.

By the same token, it is not difficult for the United States to accuse Iran for its ignorance of human rights and civil liberties. But to make its accusations stick, the U.S. needs to make the Iranian people understand that America is really concerned about their liberties, and not merely about its own economic and strategic interests. It is equally important for the Iranian government to make the average American understand that the militancy of Iran is motivated by a search for legitimate rights of a people with a variant cultural tradition. In this regard contributions of the analysts of the Iranian Revolution becomes vital in clearing the atmosphere of blind hostility by pinpointing the real issues of conflict between Iran and the United States.

For example, on the issue of historical roots of the hostility between Iran and the United States, one has to agree with Nikki Keddie, who demonstrated the lack of historical rationale behind American hostility toward Iran. Considering numerous
instances of American involvement in betraying the legitimate humanistic and democratic aspirations of the Iranian people, she has argued that the hostile behaviour of Iranians toward the United States, which has been expressed emphatically since the Islamic Revolution, has not been “irrational” even when violent. Referring to instances, such as the 1953 coup d’état, which was conducted by the CIA to overthrow the legitimate and democratic government of Dr. Muhammad Mossadeq, she has even tried to establish a rationale for the militant posture of Iran with respect to the United States. By contrast, she argues that there had been almost no historical instance of Iranian hostility toward the United States prior to clear American moves against Iran’s national and cultural interests. She thus concludes that it is the American hostility against Iran that is “irrational” by the virtue of the fact that it lacks any substantial historical precedent, and that it is heavily burdened by the cold war mentality and lack of understanding.

It can thus be argued that while there is a push by the Islamic regime in Iran to suppress difference in search for national uniformity, as Fischer and Abbadi have suggested in their Debating Muslims; there could also be an argument for the intolerance on the part of the United States for difference at the international level. The quest for difference in Iran, as elsewhere in the world, is expressed in various forms of cultural, social and political demands for recognition and has already given rise to important dissent movements. The quest for difference on the part of Iran as a national entity though is expressed in the form of challenge to existing arrangement of global power relations. In fact, a large part of the propaganda, launched by the Islamic Republic in order to justify its intolerance for domestic dissent, is fuelled by the intransigence of the United States against this “international renegade”. The same could be said about the accusations of terrorism; it is only fair when people say out of common sense: “one’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter”.

The Structure of the Chapters

This work is presented in eight chapters, an introduction and an epilogue. In Chapter 1, I shall deal with the analytical writings of political and scholarly nature, which have striven to shed light on various aspects of this revolution and its consequences. In this chapter, I shall emphasise the relative lack of attention in most of these works to the fundamental role of the modern interpretations of cultural signification - symbols, narratives and rituals - in precipitating the Islamic Revolution.

In Chapter 2, I shall discuss the hermeneutical theory of imagination with the view to demonstrate the role of imaginative interpretations of past traditions: collective myths, histories, and religious and poetic narratives in creating models for building future. In this chapter, I shall review the traditions of hermeneutics, relying mainly on the work of Paul Ricoeur, in order to discuss the construction of ideologies and utopias as imaginary models based on past memories. In this context, it will become clear how revolutionary actors in Iran made collective sense of their situation, validated their position and became motivated to take political action.

2 Ibid, pp. 29-54
In Chapter 3, I shall further elaborate on the concept of *imaginary* by making reference to the tradition of psychoanalysis, relying mainly on the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, in order to demonstrate the role of the psychic energies in social and political action. It will be argued that the politico-cultural functions of the *imaginary* could also be connected to the operations of the psyche as a generic human faculty.

In Chapter 4, I shall portray the Islamic Revolution as a moment in the global post-modern condition. I shall particularly focus on Alain Touraine’s *Critique of Modernity* in order to discuss the gradual formation of an Islamic revolutionary discourse as a form of modern critical ideology out of innovative interpretations of selective politico-theological doctrines of *Shi‘i* Islam.

In Chapter 5, I shall present a historical review of the development of the *Shi‘i* political ideology from a sectarian religious movement to the status of a national political ideology in the early twentieth century. In this chapter, I shall particularly discuss the significance of rationalisation of religion and the transformation of *Shi‘i* Islam from a sectarian faith to the level of national political ideology.

In Chapter 6, this historical review will continue to cover the politico-religious developments on social and intellectual level from the rise of the modern State until the rise of the revolutionary power of Islam in Iran. In this chapter particular attention will be given to modernisation of Iran by the *Pahlavi* dynasty and the unexpected eruption of the Islamic Revolution.

In Chapter 7, I shall discuss the process of the construction of the ideology of the Islamic Revolution and the utopia of Islamic Government through creative adaptation of the Islamic political traditions contained in religious and literary texts. In this chapter, it will be argued that the political success of the Islamic revolutionary discourse was due to its ability to address the two most important crises of the modern Iran, namely the crisis of cultural identity and the crisis of political economy.

In Chapter 8, I shall analyse the post-revolution and particularly the post-Khomeini political discourses, which are currently playing a significant role in mapping the future political, social and cultural development of Iran. In this chapter, I shall emphasise the dynamism of these discourses in providing ever-new interpretations of the Iranian/Islamic traditions in order to push the boundaries of politics beyond the limitations of a mere theocratic understanding of politics.

And finally, the Epilogue will re-emphasise the importance of a hermeneutic understanding of politico-religious developments in Iran. This understanding will portray the new developments in Iran not simply along the pessimistic accounts of their critics, but in terms of their promise to instigate the much needed cultural transformation, which would hopefully return this great nation to a confident and proud position among the community of nations.