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

Revolution and Modernity

Introduction

Previously, I offered a discussion of the theory of text and theory of imagination in order to explore new ways of looking the Islamic Revolution of Iran and its aftermath. In this chapter, I shall try to formulate my views on the Islamic Revolution as a new social movement in the context of the global post-modern condition.

By post-modern here, I understand the a social, political and cultural condition that can be described in terms of a field of individual and collective action where modernity is broken into pieces and then recovered in fragments. This field encompasses all the individual and collective actions that try piece together the “fragments of modernity”, but lack a “central principle” with which to form these fragments into one or another total structure. This social, political and cultural condition seems to be torn in various directions, but has somehow managed to bring together a variety of conflicting tendencies. This condition is not a typically Western phenomenon since it is being shaped all over the globe in various social and cultural forms. Its being global is inevitable due to the existence of the “world capitalist system”. Its origins, however, were undoubtedly Western as it began with the Western obsession to build the world in its own modern image in the colonial and post-colonial periods.

This condition involves a diversity of cultural identities and demands for recognition. It is also marked with the burgeoning of new modes of intellectual, aesthetic, leisure and sexual orientations, which also demand recognition. But at the same time, the post-modern condition is dominated by political, economic and social patterns that run against the demands for recognition of distinct collective identities. This is the case both at the level of local cultures, religions and nationalities, as well as at the international level, where patterns of production and consumption tend to undermine collective cultural, national and religious identities. This is, no doubt, a product of the crisis of the Western ideology of modernity. And it is in response to this crisis that the movements such as the Islamic Revolution find a post-modern rather than a fundamentalist or traditionalist meaning.

Here, my discussion will be focused on developing a theoretical argument upon which an understanding of the sources of the Islamic Revolution of Iran as a moment in the post-modern condition can be attempted. These sources, I argue, are primarily global rather than local, and as such have the imprint of the present-day global culture on the local cultures. Nonetheless, the Islamic Revolution has not appeared as merely a reflexive reaction to or a mimetic imitation of the Western cultural, political and social developments. Rather, it has developed in the form of modern adaptations of the indigenous traditions and discourses in the process of the life and death struggle of the Iranian people with the push of Western capitalism to homogenise the world not only economically, but also politically and culturally.

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1 My definition of the post-modern condition is inspired by Touraine, A. Critique of Modernity, Basil Blackwell, UK, 1995, p. 95.
In developing my arguments, I shall employ some of the existing concepts of modernity, which I find credible, in order to form an understanding of the development of politics in Iran in its present shape. In this light, it will hopefully become clear that the new political interpretations of the collective memories of the past have taken their present shape in Iran in the context of the global crisis of modernity. Hence, the rise of ideologies and utopias, which appear to some as fundamentalist, and to others as traditionalist, but are in fact part and parcel of the post-modern condition. My effort here is aimed at making these processes intelligible to myself, and to the interested others.

The fundamental issue to consider in order to develop any understanding of the post-modern nature of the revolution in Iran is the issue of the confrontation of Iran and Islam with the phenomenon of the Western modernity. Modernity, as conceptualised by Western scientific epistemology, was itself constructed in the context of the Western Christian tradition in terms of what Weber called secularisation and disenchantment, which meant rationality, administration and bureaucracy. Modernity, in this sense, may be seen as the process of construction of a super ideology, or a modern religion, which in its manifestation has produced, among other things, its own antithesis in the liberal and socialist ideologies. This super ideology or, more accurately, grand formulation of a religion of humanity in the utopia of a universal form of human cultural, political and economic existence is what Alain Touraine, in his book *Critique of Modernity*, has called “the Western ideology of modernity”. Here, I shall rely on Touraine’s work in order to develop my argument about the crisis of modernisation in the non-Western societies like Iran.

**The Anti-Modern Message of Post-Modernism**

To be sure, there was a liberating force to modernity as a source of enlightenment when what it saw as medieval darkness still enveloped Europe. However, the ideology of Enlightenment, which in time was connected intricately with an instrumental concept of reason, gradually lost much of its liberatory moment. As Touraine has hinted, in a world characterised by the explosion of light and sound, and mass production and consumption, reason itself often appears as a shackle to be liberated from. The modernist rationalism in the West was a Utopian dream of a universal humanity at a time when humanity needed to rebel against ignorance and subordination to the arbitrary rule of the despot. But it has turned into a nightmare in the age of modern modes of global administration, where the autonomy of the people has often been destroyed; and where people increasingly suffer from a sense of decline in the quality of their lives. In the affluent West, this decline is felt in the form of a moral crisis, which is a consequence of the intensification of inequality, discrimination, violence and mental disorder. In the larger part of the globe, where there is less material affluence and more poverty, moral and economic standards of life are both in decline. In these parts of the world, people are often forced to labour under conditions that disregard human needs, and that are claimed to be scientific nonetheless.

This subversion of reason through the distortion and repression of the emancipatory capacities of modernity has created various intellectual reactions. Weber, an observer of the late nineteenth century industrialisation and bureaucratisation, expressed one type of this intellectual reaction in light of the fear of

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1. Ibid, p. 91
“an iron cage”. In the twentieth century, there were the warnings of Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and others in the Frankfurt School about the loss of reason and meaning of life, and the rise of a totally administered society. The Frankfurt School was faced with the acute irrationalism that had been bequeathed by the crisis of modernity. It had to face the irrational and senseless reality of the horrors of Nazism and fascism against the background of the claims of modernity to reason. It also witnessed the partition of Europe by the “iron curtain”, and the repressive rule of total order in the name of reason and freedom. It thus saw the source of the problem in the loss of reason, and attempted to restore to modern life the rationality that had been lost.

Others like Marx, Nietzsche and Freud had already offered a more meaningful understanding of the crisis of modernity. Their understanding was to be carried over by a generation of their followers and critics to our post-modern time in the form of protest against the morality and legitimacy of the relations of power, which had trapped the world in the grip of “instrumental rationalism”. They did not do this by recourse to rationalism of the Renaissance; on the contrary, they set out to debase the whole concept of rationality, which had dominated human thought since the Renaissance.

Touraine is right in claiming that “the surest sign of modernity is the anti-modern message that it sends.” This message, which is voiced in the form of various internal critiques of the Western modernity, may be understood in terms of a social, political and cultural crisis that has resulted in the separation of human action from its meaning, and the split between cultural life and economic rationalism. In the case of the countries of the so-called Third World, and particularly in the case of the Muslim countries, the crisis of modernity and the ensuing anti-modern tendencies have brought about a nostalgic desire for meaning. This desire seeks to reconnect the economy and culture, and put meaning back into life and existence through collective action.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran should be understood as a moment in this post-modern culture where the collective nostalgia for meaning created a force for social and political change. In the invocation of past traditions, the actors of this revolution tried to question and renew their cultural traditions in the hope that this renewal would save them from total enslavement by an imperilled global culture. In their painful encounter with modernity, they thus perceived the modern world as a threat to the nostalgic meaning of life. Iran of the post-modern era is a collectivity that has only lately felt the modern sense of nationhood in its experience of the imposing presence of a modern State. Its sense of nationality though has been deeply affected by the crisis of modernity; a crisis that has torn apart the traditional cultural fabric by rapid modernisation and creating an economy, which tends to break apart from the authority of the moral order of this traditional culture. It was in this context that the actors of the Islamic Revolution sought to rescue their newly found sense of nationalism from crisis by reconnecting it with the past memories. In their return to traditions, they sought to make their historical experience an intelligible and meaningful part of their present identity. In this fashion, they embraced a religious sense of nationality that would seek to grow out of crisis by becoming intelligible to those who had deeply felt it, but could not perceive its meaning.

The Pahlavi State tried to create an ideology of modernisation in order to inspire a new nationalism. However, this effort could only make sense to the people

\[\text{Ibid. pp. 99-100}\]
when put in the language of tradition, and hence the futile attempts of the State to invoke the memories of the pre-Islamic glory. In its project to create a nation, the modern Pahlavi State faced a fundamental dilemma, the dilemma of connecting the State and the nation in order to form a nation-State. This dilemma had also been experienced in the West. But there, the modern State - itself a product of revolution - triumphed in a tormented struggle to identify itself with the nation by allowing the development of civil society, and by thus keeping the religious origins of nationality in the private sphere.

In Iran, however, this tormented struggle was between a State that had not come out of a revolution (although it had meekly tried to forge a revolution and a rebirth) and a nation that sought a truly revolutionary rebirth. The nostalgia for a revolutionary rebirth had created over the decades before the Islamic Revolution a kind of social and political fantasy through which the people anticipated their national liberation in the idea of a total revolution. The anticipation for a great revolution, that would totally transform Iran into a desirable nation, had taken concrete shape particularly under the influence of the modern concept of revolution, which had penetrated Iran through a generation of Iranian socialist and liberal intellectuals and activists. But this new concept of revolution became a real political force only when appropriated by religious intellectuals and activist in creating the Islamic revolutionary ideology. What the secular intellectuals lacked in popularising their versions of revolution was the ability to connect themselves with Iranian-Islamic traditions, a lack that the religious intellectuals were well equipped to remedy. With the rise of the Islamic revolutionary ideology, the people began to feel strong about a new sense of nationhood with a religious fervour, which they found worthy of construction through a modern revolution. This was perhaps a consequence of the failure of the Pahlavi State to allow for the creation of a sense of civil society in modern Iranian nationalism, whereby the nation, while still identifying itself with the State, could gain some sense of autonomy with respect to the State. This condition inevitably led to the acute antagonism between the nation and the State under the Pahlavi monarchy. (See Chapter 6 for more detail.)

In the formation of civil society in the nations at the very centre of the “world-system”, the citizens gained a sense of power vis-à-vis the State in their right of protest, and above all in their ability to secure a private and public sphere, relatively autonomous from the State. Private and public religious and cultural experiences, such as masses, rituals and carnivals, were allowed. And private and public domains, such as the family, the sectarian churches, the private business, the local municipalities, the academia, and the volunteer organisations, which were sanctioned by the laws, helped the public to feel a semblance of freedom from the all-encompassing power of the State. In Iran, however, the civil society and the sense of freedom that goes with it, were not materialised. There, religion, and not the State, was identified with revolution and freedom.

Unlike in the Western nations, in Iran Shi’ism since the Safavid period had but eliminated sectarian differences. It also had occupied through elitist Sufism and popular mysticism the domain of the public sphere. (See Chapter 5 for more detail.) The ritual and carnival atmosphere as well as the atmosphere of religious congregations had come under the dominant authority of one religion. In asserting its modern sense of nationhood, therefore, the Iranian nation connected itself with its religious roots, which were deep and strong, rather than with its modern State, which was seen as a minor player in the modern world, stricken by social and economic crisis.
The nation tried to overcome the division between meaning and action on the one hand, and between economy and culture on the other. It sought to do so by rejecting the modern State in crisis, and by asserting itself in a revolution driven by a new, post-modern ideological construct, which was deeply rooted in a political tradition opposite to the tradition that the State invoked to legitimise itself.

The main difference of this post-modern revolution to the modern Western revolutions was that, like other revolutions in the periphery of the world-system, was not directed against the ancien regime; it was in fact attacking a modernising regime; yet a regime that was ridden by the crisis of modernisation. Nonetheless, the Iranian nation, in asserting its nationhood in a religious revolution, created a stronger State, which has presented a strong drive to replace the monarchical absolutism of the past with a new religious absolutism. But the experience of the revolution has also created a new generation that seeks to assert its rights to freedom and privacy against the State. This situation has given rise to an internal conflict, which has manifested itself in the international arena in the confused and in a sense irrational behaviour of the Islamic Republic, the major political outcome of the revolution. The main problem of the Islamic Republic is perhaps that it cannot appear simply as another modern nation-State. Rather, as the product of a post-modern movement, it is faced with a fundamental dilemma. Either, it has to accept that in order to survive politically it must allow for the creation of a civil society at the domestic level, and at the same time seek to assert itself at the international level as the political expression of Iranians as a modern nation. Or alternatively, it can commit political suicide by continuing to repress the expression of desire for freedom domestically, and appear as a pariah State internationally.

As a modern national movement then, the Islamic Revolution attempts to reach its end in the form of a stable society and a political order at the national level, and as such cannot operate in the fragmented mode of social movements in the West. However, the Islamic State, as the outcome of the revolution, cannot overcome this problem through repressive means. In fact, the absolutist determination of the militant Shi'i jurists, which has so far denied the desire of the nation for political pluralism and a civil society, has presently intensified the conflict of the nation with the State. The international dilemma of the Islamic State is no less intense thanks to its defiant appearance in the international arena. Its militancy has undoubtedly been detrimental to its chances of asserting itself as a different political order. The “world-system”, with pain, only allows political pluralism within national boundaries. A true political pluralism on a global scale is still to be worked for and dreamed of, and the confrontation of Iran with the West would not help this process at all.

Understanding the Islamic Revolution as a post-modern movement though requires a deeper understanding of the transition of modernity from its original emancipatory promises to its present state of crisis. But, in tracing the course of rise and decline of modernity, it is essential to trace the development of the intellectual centrepiece of modernity, or as I have called it the ideology of modernity.

**The Ideology of Modernity**

The original theme of modernity was basically to rationalise the medieval Christianity, but with the industrial revolution, its task was reformulated in an ideology that sought to bring science, instead of God, to the centre of the society, and all but relegate religion to the private sphere. Through science, the ideology of modernity took upon itself to demystify the sacred and dispel the enchantment of
religion. The fact that modernity has not been seen as a concrete ideology, such as liberalism or socialism, is due, ironically, to its power of enchantment, which has mystified it into a neutral, intellectual enterprise dedicated to universalism of science, insulated from cultural particularism, and devoid of religious prejudice. Rather than religious belief and political prejudice, it claimed that it represented humanity; and as such, it advocated the impartiality of the law, the separation of public from private life, religion from politics, and State from society.

Rationalisation has been the principal instrument of this enterprise. Around the concept of rationalisation, a new mode of understanding the past has developed. And around this new mode of understanding the past, a new form of society has been organised. The main project of this understanding has been to rely on scientific and technical knowledge in order to take control of the interpretation of the human historical experience, and thus shape and control human life at present and future. Once rationalisation and secularisation gave centrality in social life to human reason and non-existence of “ultimate ends”, it was easy to create new paradigms of understanding the past in order to build the future. Hence, various imaginaries of social and political order began to shape. As Touraine has suggested: “at times, society was imagined to be an order or an architecture based upon computation; at other times, reason became an instrument of individual interests and pleasure.” And at yet other times, reason was presented in the emancipatory role of ridding the “human nature” from the shackles of religious ignorance.

The mystifying and enchanting powers of the ideology of modernity was most pronounced in its relative success in the West – via the discourse of the Enlightenment philosophers in the eighteenth century – to replace what it saw as traditional cultural and religious sectarianism with the general categories of reason and history. It was this original success that was built upon during the nineteenth century in order to spread this ideology of reason across the globe via the concepts of colonisation of the non-West. And it was still this ideology, which was used in the post-industrial world to pave the path of scientific reason in world politics and economy by crushing the defences of the minor cultures, politics and economies under the rubric of modernisation.

In a sense, the ultimate purpose of the Western rationalist and scientific endeavours has been to create the security and predictability, required for the expansion of the businesses in the core countries of the “world-system”. However, the success of the West to enchant the world by its ideology, which reached its height toward the end of the nineteenth century, came up against great difficulties in the twentieth century. And particularly since the 1960s, the process of the unravelling of this enchantment has become more acute.

In the light of new movements in the West itself, as well as those in the former colonies and peripheral societies of the “world-economy”, it has become possible to seriously examine where and why the ideology of modernity failed to achieve its ends with success. In general terms, this failure may be attributed to the incompatibility of the homogenising tendencies of the ideology of modernity with the real historical experience in the Western societies. In these real experiences, as Touraine has noted: “religious movements, the glory of the king, the defence of the family and the spirit of conquest, financial speculation and social critique (have) played as important a role as technical progress and the diffusion of knowledge.”

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1 Ibid, p. 10
2 Ibid, p. 11
Surely, modernity has created a sense of rationality in the administration of orderly life of the society. But, in situations of crisis, it has invariably given rise to strictly non-rationalist forces and energies, such as revolutionary zeal, nationalist fervour, religious conviction and cultural particularism, which run against the universalist, secularist and rationalist ideals of modernity. This difficulty has been more critical in the peripheral societies, where modernity has not even produced rationalisation in the orderly operation of the social and political life. Here, the ideology of modernity has often appeared not as a liberating or egalitarian force, but basically as a structure of domination from which to be liberated.

The ideology of modernity, despite its origin in religious rationalisation, has become obsessed with interpretation of nature and history by means of scientific knowledge, and with liberation of humanity by means of scientific revolution. From this perspective, the traditional society had enslaved man by means of ignorance, irrationalism and fear associated with belief in God and religion. And despotic monarchies had imposed on man social inequality, political servitude and economic misery by means of their religiously ordained absolutism. Science as the knowledge of the laws of nature would salvage man from religious ignorance and irrational fears; and revolution based on the knowledge of history would provide man with freedom and equality. The central role of reason in the ideology of modernity thus went hand in hand with its revolutionary and emancipating image. However, “this project was to lead revolutionaries to create a new society and a new man, and to impose, in the name of reason, much greater constraints than those imposed by absolute monarchies.”

Even the totalitarian forms of polity in their, fascist, communist and military-industrial forms appealed to the modern ideology of reason. This failure of modernity to deliver on its promises was already apparent in the aftermath of the Great French Revolution, where the zeal of the revolutionaries to construct an absolute rational power, despite all hopes for its universal acceptance, came up against serious difficulties. In France, the sentiments against absolutist monarchy and its religious legitimacy had been strongly expressed by the likes of Rousseau, Diderot and Voltaire. The difficulties that arose with the French Revolution had to do with the elimination of the diversity of opinions about the nature and form of the universal laws, which were to legitimise the political power that came out of the revolution. After all, these laws were not supposed to be accepted as a religious revelation; rather, they had to be developed by the people according to the diverse tastes and perceptions of human beings. The difficult question was; how could diversity of opinions and tastes - an indubitable part of individual freedom - be reconciled with the uniformity that reason was determined to impose on the path to progress? If Rousseau and other philosophers of the eighteenth century played with the idea of education as the means of social inculcation of the universal reason among free individuals, the Jacobin revolutionaries embarked on the literal inculcation of the virtues of progress by means of the violence of terror.

In England things went slightly differently. There, the acceptance for the laws of nature was sought through a philosophy that linked these laws with human nature. According to Locke, for example, the link between nature and laws would by nature lead to the elimination of conflict among human beings, and to harmony between society and nature. Locke attempted to overcome the Cartesian dualism of body and soul by eliminating the idea of God as the essence of the soul, and replacing it with the reflective powers of man, which would enable him to see himself as a unitary identity consisting of a body and a consciousness. As such, he defined reason as an

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1 Ibid. pp. 12-13
instrument, which through senses would reveal the laws of nature for the humans to follow and gain happiness.

Thus, in England – where following the Puritan and Glorious Revolutions of the seventeenth century a constitutional monarchy and a bill of rights had come into existence - the stress was more on building social and political institutions, and constituting laws, which would guarantee order. In this sense, the revolution of modernity in France was more violent, and more emphatic on nation building; whereas in England, it was bent on an economic and scientific revolution, which would bring nature under man’s control.

The Crisis of Modernity

Whether through social revolution and national identity, or through industrial revolution and accumulation of wealth, the ideology of modernity remained - untrue to its original pledge - irrational. It heralded the natural goodness of humanity, which, equipped with instrumental reason, would bring happiness and harmony. Instead, the experience of humanity ever since has involved numerous crises where tragedy, rather than happiness, has been the feature. In the domain of power relations, wars and violent revolutions have continued to mark human history in even larger scales than before under the banner of nationalism and defence of humanity. And in the domain of economy, affluence and abundance has not resulted in reduction of human misery, but to ever growing mass consumption in the nations of the centre of the world-system, and the continued low of living standards in many of those of the periphery.

Nature, despite the expectations of the philosophers of Enlightenment, was not to be the source of eternal truths. Nor was history to reveal its secret to the intellectual excellence and the human virtue of the proponents of instrumental reason. The society was freed from the religiously sanctified despotism, but it did not give up religion all together. The Protestant Reformation and, in Weber’s term, the shift from “other-worldly” to “this-worldly” asceticism meant that religion would remain strong in providing for the sense of community between the free individuals, who had now turned into citizens of the civil society. But religion was to be removed from a direct involvement in the State.

In the seventeenth century, Hobbes had already criticised the religious intervention in politics. He had defined the origin of political power in terms of the agreement of individuals, in the state of war and in fear of death, to accept the sovereignty of an absolute but legal power - distinct from the Divine - that would institute social peace. Hobbes’s notion of surrender to the power of Leviathan excluded from political philosophy the role of God and religion. In this, he anticipated Rousseau and his notion of general will. Accordingly, the sovereignty of the general will would be brought about by a social contract, which was based on human reason and man’s free will to enter a collective agreement.

These concepts of modernity have been so enduring that they have even formed the foundation of modern disciplines of social and political science. For example, sociology, as Touraine has noted, has incorporated the ideas that “human beings are no longer created in God’s image” but are “social actors defined by roles”. The ideology of modernity tried to present itself as a philosophy of progress denying the intervention of the Divine. In truth, “it was a philosophy of order, which combined classical and Christian thought.” The religious element, although it was not explicitly

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1 Ibid, p. 23
articulated, found its expression in the notions of “the unity of man and the universe”, and “sovereignty of reason and general will”, notions that have their roots in religious mysticism and cosmology.

Even the irreligion of the ideology of modernity came from transformations that occurred in man’s religious consciousness. As Weber argued in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the puritanical Calvinism became the source of religious “disenchantment”, “rationalisation” of economy and “secularisation” of society. But this “rationalisation” and “disenchantment” was never total; and thus it did not correspond to an “ideal type”. The process of rationalisation did not remain bound with religious values, nor with an evolutionary progress under the ever-increasing powers of the bureaucratic State. As Weber foresaw, social action would take a complex course, whereby there would be no clear correspondence between beliefs and commitments on the one hand, and rationalisation and development on the other. Capitalism would be inspired both by economic rationalism and religious emotionalism. It would follow both the universal laws of the market and the cultural particularisms of human behaviour. Social action would not be totally divorced from worldviews and belief systems; nor would it be totally governed by the “instrumental rationalism”.

Thus, the Western ideology of modernity inadvertently entangled modern humanity in a problematic situation, which was the natural result of the impossibility of the idealist desire of modernity to make history completely predictable. On the one hand, the early idealism of modernity demanded the modern society to surrender to “instrumental rationalism” in order to improve the mode of its material well being, and maintain an impersonal legal and ethical authority. And on the other, it could not deny the human need for meaning and certainty, which, as Weber suggested, would have to come from surges of one or other form of religious conviction and ecstatic indulgence, as well as from the rise of charismatic figures.

The post-modern critique of modernity may be conceived as the realisation that the claims of the ideology of modernity to the complete triumph of “reason”, “liberation” and “revolution” had been impossible claims. The educationalists and revolutionaries of the eighteenth century had attempted an impossible task when they set out to do away completely with “traditions, taboos and privileges”. Humanity would remain tied to traditions, prejudices and cultural closures. Just the same, the idealist industrialists and the proletarian revolutionaries of the nineteenth century had attempted an impossible task when they embarked on getting rid of cultural and differences and human divisions. Although they hoped that their attempt at organising labour and trade into rational structures would do away with alienation and inequality, the economy and labour relations would remain strewn with division, specialisation and inequality. The revolutionaries of the nineteenth century tried to gain power for the civil society at the expense of the State; but in practice, the State took power at the expense of society by incorporating the concept of nation and by “national modernisation”.

As a consequence, the contemporary social movements have arisen to engage in struggles against universalism, and in support of the rights and liberation of diversity. But the barriers between cultures have remained ever high. As Touraine has put it succinctly: “The attempt to construct a rationalised society ended in failure, primarily because the idea that the rational administration of things can replace the government of men is tragically mistaken. And because, social life, far from being transparent and governed by rational choices, proved to be full of powers and conflicts... The increasing divorce between modernity and modernisation, and between capitalism and nationalism, destroyed the dream
of a modern society defined by the triumph of reason. It paved the way for the invasion of the classical order of modernity by the violence of power and the diversity of needs.¹

Nationalisms in Europe were much less inspired by the spirit of science, technological development and economic modernisation, than by religious emotions and convictions, and tendency to violence. This was the case, although, the modern age of instrumental rationality was predicated by religious knowledge and beliefs. Luther, for example, in distinction from both “Enlightenment rationalism”, and “Christian-inspired humanism”, had initiated “an intellectual tradition”, which had sought to rationally justify, in the name of meaning, the surrender of man to a Being above him.² Luther’s and Calvin’s “otherworldly” aspirations became the core of an ethical-communal understanding of human relations in Western Europe, which was to be expressed in both “revolutionary messianisms” and nationalisms, affected by, but distinct from, the revolutions inspired by the ideology of modernity.

The enterprise of religious rationalism may thus be understood as the reflection of a theory of modernity, which comes closest to display the complex nature of the historical course of the phenomenon of modernity. As such, the real course of the modern history - particularly since the Renaissance - should not be reduced to a simple process of struggle of progress against tradition. A more complex picture reveals that the history of modernity has involved the painful interaction of the forces, which have tried to bring happiness to the tragic nature of human life via building an elaborate structure, which combines, belief in God, Nature, and Society. From the millenarian revolutions of the Middle Ages, to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, to the social movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one can trace this historical progress of modernity.

However, one should not be deceived by this progressive picture, since in our post-modern condition, we are suddenly faced with a resurgence of aspects of all these movements in a way that no line of progress, or no simple categorisation may be able to reflect its entirety. Millenarianisms, messianisms and mysticisms of the past are being expressed sometimes in concert, and sometimes in conflict, with the most novel and sophisticated forms of ideological, organisational, institutional and technological innovations. Intense struggles have begun in various cultural forms against both the tendencies to take humanity back to cultural parochialism and communal fanaticism, as well as against the forces, which push for the extreme forms of utilitarianism and pursuit of personal and group interest in the markets.

Our post-modern condition has privileged us to see the course of modernity as “a constant dialogue between rationalisation and subjection”.³ This dialogue, which began in Western Christianity with St. Augustine’s Confessions, and continued through Lutherans and Calvinists to influence modern humanist philosophers has created, albeit unintentionally, a resistance to the total control of human existence by one or another form of ideology. This process is also discernible in the modern resistance of Islamic political philosophy against modern relations of domination. Such a resistance has become possible only by occasional recourses to utopia through new interpretations of traditions. It is true that this dialogue has enhanced human socialisation and integration by giving rise to ever-more sophisticated ideologies and collective forms of consciousness; but it is also true that it has always created equally sophisticated counter-ideologies or utopias to remove the legitimacy of the dominant ideologies. And that is why “the appeal to God”, which was debased by the

¹ Ibid, p. 31
² Ibid, p.37
³ Ibid, p. 38
philosophers of Enlightenment for its subjugation of man to divinity, has returned in the philosophical expressions of meaning, which locate God within man, and man within God.

Modernity and Religious Resurgence

I have already argued that the resurgence of religious movements, such as the Islamic Revolution, in our post-modern condition must be understood within the context of new and selective interpretations of the old religious and literary texts and narratives. Interestingly, within these modern religious movements, there are appeals both to individual freedom and to communitarian beliefs. This is consistent with the teaching of all great religions, where emphasis on the individual freedom in search of truth in various mystical traditions, has existed along with stress on the necessity of the subordination of ordinary believers to the established beliefs and traditions.

Touraine has seen the return of “religious-inspired ethics” in our time as “the community’s revenge on modern individualism, and as “the individual’s revenge on the social and political mobilisation associated with modernisation.” One may argue that continuation of the struggles for individual freedom and cultural diversity has been the manifestation of this historical revenge. Modern individualism is perhaps the heir of the religious resistance against the normalising force of the instrumental reason, which have been systematically exerted via the political power of centralised and bureaucratic State, and the economic power of social stratification and division of labour. The inherent “dualisms” of religion, which give rise to “cosmological worldviews” in which “the omnipotence and goodness of God” is always mediated by the resistance of some form of evil, are capable of being interpreted in emancipatory terms. The fall of Adam from Eden, for example, may be interpreted as a consequence of the original sin, and alternatively as man’s emancipation from the total but passionless perfection of Paradise. The confrontation of the Satan with God on the issue of prostration to man is also subject to dualist interpretations.

These dualisms have affected modern thought by creating the possibility for questioning the claims that identify traditional thought with the loss of humanity and the modern thought with its rise. This is perhaps why many contemporary social movements, such as the Islamic Revolution, have tried to address the issues of domination, exploitation and alienation by recourse to religious tradition. In many cases, these movements have approached the question of freedom from a religious perspective. The will to freedom, as originally inspired by religion, has thus become an inspiration for the contemporary Islamic movements but also for other movements that identify themselves as movement of liberation. These movements seek to resist the tendency of the existing power structures at global and local levels to establish totally administered societies; and as such, they tend to transform societies.

The religious nature of the thought of Pascal and Descartes - who laid the foundation of modern rationalist knowledge - questions the “identification of rationalism with an anti-religion mode of thought.” A mode of thought that, According to Touraine, “all too easily moves from being a social critique of the Church and religious practices to being a materialism, which fails to see that the religious Subject has been transformed into a human Subject.”

In the apparent anti-religion of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau also, one may trace the religious influences, which justify protest and rebellion in the name of peace,

1 Ibid, p. 41
2 Ibid, p. 46
protection by laws, and the defence of community. In their rejection of the role of God in politics, they were in fact rejecting the pretensions of the political power to be ordained by the Divine Grace. But when new political powers, needless of religious legitimacy, established their absolute powers, it was still the recourse to religious concept of freedom that could provide for avenues of protest. As Touraine holds, therefore: “The revolutions that did away with the absolute monarchy in England, in the former English colonies that became the United States of America, and in France, were defined by an overlap between Enlightenment thought, and Cartesian and Christian dualism.”

The same spirit of religion is present in the Islamic movements of our time with various degrees of articulation. Just as Judaism and Christianity, Islam in modern time has been affected by and interacted with the modern ideology of instrumental reason. The early influence of the Aristotelian rationalism on Islam had created a reaction, which sought to preserve the esoteric meaning of the Revealed Word by recourse to mysticism, contemplative philosophy and reunion with God. Just the same, the modern philosophical rationalism has created in modern Islamic thought new mysticisms of dissent, which have attempted to reinterpret the absolute Truth.

These new interpretations have also been expressed in various forms of recovering the meaning of life in the idea of God and the love of unity with Him, and in individual and collective freedom, which makes this transcendence possible. As such, these dissent movements may well be revolutionary and violent, although more often than not, they tend to be inward looking and isolationist. Whether in this or that form, these movements should be seen as a quest for freedom for man from the power imposed by man against man through ideological hegemony in the name of faith. These movements tend to harness the forces of reason, human dignity and religious vitality, but are not necessarily conducive to political or religious repression, although such a danger is always potentially present.

Regrettably, there has been little appreciation of new religious movements, such as the Islamic Revolution, as genuine forms of political and social protest with demands for recognition of difference. The main obstacle to this understanding has been the deep root that the iron law of progress has spread in our modern consciousness by the ideology of liberalism. The liberal ideology has gained a huge success in inducing us to believe that the advance of reason is possible only through positive, rational and scientific thought. However, this modern metaphysics has more successfully displaced the religious metaphysics in the Western world - the rising ground of the ideology of modernity - than it did in the non-Western world. And this may be seen as the reason for the infatuation with scientism in Europe in the wake of the Renaissance.

Although exogenous to the non-West, nevertheless, the modern liberal metaphysics penetrated these parts of the globe on the back of the Western colonial expansion. It was radically questioned though since the nineteenth century in the writings of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, Weber, Durkheim and Heidegger, but its influence and power was not significantly reduced until the 1960s and 1970s. According to this modern metaphysics, positive science, in parallel with its achievement of what was seen as technological advancement to subordinate nature to human will, would also succeed in creating the technology of wilful advancement of human spirit, reason, justice and freedom. This technology was to be perfected in the construction of the modern State, and in the invention of the national imaginary.

The Marxist critique of the liberal ideology, while exposing various mythical suppositions that predicated the idealist understandings of State and Society, could not

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1 Ibid, p. 55
free itself totally from the fundamental assumptions of modernity. It produced its own metaphysics by introducing a deterministic understanding of economic infrastructure as the foundation of all forms of cultural life, including all forms of political expression. This form of thought that had its roots in Hegel’s historicism, was responsible for the belief in economic modernisation, and the advancement of technological culture as the source of a social and political revolution, which would clear the way for the end of “pre-history”. It was also responsible for the theoretical justification of a new paradigm of understanding the human history; a paradigm that was defined in terms of traditional-modern dichotomy, and was gradually understood as a fact of nature. Thus the Marxist critique of modernity was in fact the continuation of the nostalgia for meaning, inherited from the religious tradition. However, in light of modernity, it was expressed in terms of the belief that history had a meaning, and that this meaning was to be discovered in its progressive and directional pattern, which had to be, in turn, invented.

The belief that society is a historical arena of the battle of rational forces of production against the irrational forces of profit meant that only economic development would bring about the conditions of this triumph. And the belief that this battle would end unquestionably in the triumph of the rational forces of historical evolution, made the industrial proletariat into the strongest force to implement the will of history. Of course, this historicist dichotomy of modern versus tradition has been more prominent in the Communist States, which tried to cling into a literal interpretation of historical materialism. But, this does not mean that the same paradigm did not remain the foundation of understanding of history and its mission in the Western democracies. It was the Western democracies that, since the colonial period, have spread this concept across the globe through direct rule, and indirectly through the writings of the philosophers of Enlightenment and the fantastic literary works of the nineteenth century, particularly the novel.

The evolutionary concept of history could be crudely summarised in terms of the imaginary of progress, which would transfer humanity from traditional superstitious life to the modern scientific world. A progress, which was inevitably accompanied by economic growth, which was, in turn, possible only through nation-building and development of the feeling of belonging to a nation. At a deeper level, it was already evident from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century literature that this progress involved the danger of loss of meaning to the rush for total technicisation and administration of life.

Although the influence of the philosophy of Enlightenment was vital in creating the imaginary of progress in terms of the triumph of instrumental reason and positivist scientism, it was the French Revolution that introduced the idea of “a historical actor”. The idea that “the individuals and social categories had a rendezvous with destiny or a historical necessity.” It was the French Revolution that, with resort to collective action, tried to enact the imaginaries of “religion of humanity” and “progress of reason” in terms of nation-building and economic modernisation. Accordingly, the forces of modernity ought to be liberated from the tyranny of the ancien régime, and a national will had to be forged in the form of a strong State, which would modernise life universally by marginalising, or if necessary destroying, “local traditions and loyalties”.

In our post-modern time, this nostalgia for national will and strong State has subsided in the countries at the very centre of the world capitalist system, where it has

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1 Ibid, p. 64
become possible “to dream of the withering away of the State”. But, it has gained strength in the countries away from the centre. In the so-called Third World, we can see two main trends, both of which are bent on building strong States. One is intent on using the strong State to create a national renaissance, and gain independence through modernisation. And the other aspires to a strong State in order to reject modernisation as such, as the source of dependence and a hindrance to a true renaissance, which is perceived to be cultural and religious. It is in this latter type of recourse to modernity that we can hear the echo of Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America*, who saw the popular attraction to modern revolutions more in terms of “the irrepressible human need for hope”, than in terms of economic and political modernisation.

Even in the Europe of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this bent on human spiritual and emotional need for meaning and hope, that was to be expressed in collective action, was somewhat evident. This essentially religious nostalgia for freedom in community was characterised by Hegel in his *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here, the great thinker searched for the meaning of the Self, and cherished the hope of becoming Other. And in an effort to distinguish self from the subject, he identified spirit with “self-knowledge” in the face of the alienation of the Self, and with “Being” that, for him, was the essence of “retaining identity with self in its Otherness”.

**Modernity and the Concept of Collective Identity**

With Hegel, the ideology of modernity made a return to collective identity. Collective life and particularly the collective spirit of the great religions were identified as the ultimate determining forces of human development, and not the abstract subject. The subject itself was thus seen as a product of collective achievements of humanity throughout history. Hegel thus attempted to overcome the Cartesian dualism of the mind and body and the Kantian dualism of subject and object. His was a revolutionary attempt to transform political philosophy into a totally new metaphysical universe. He thus transformed the philosophical foundation of modernity from one to which reason was central to one in which history was fundamental.

Hegel criticised Kant’s notion of abstract morality, and instead connected morality deeply with the ethics of institutions, and active participation in gaining freedom. To him being a citizen was important not because it recognised individual freedom; it was important because it identified the citizen with the civil society, and through that provided him with a social freedom. This social freedom, which was to be realised by the State, was of more substance than the abstract freedom of the individual. Hegel’s turn to the State was in fact a return to Rousseau. But it was only a partial return, as it was also a partial return to Locke, whereby freedom was identified with obeying the State laws as long as they did not violate the right of the citizen to protest. These partial returns to the past meant that Hegel was forging his own creative interpretation of the past traditions in order to offer new paths to the future. His creation was a new philosophy of history, which was to dominate political philosophy for a long time in both its theist and atheist traditions. Both the Marxist philosophical tradition and the tradition of transcendental philosophy have been influenced by Hegel’s philosophy of history.

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1 Ibid, p. 65
2 Cited in ibid, p. 76
3 Ibid, p. 77
Hegel’s *imaginary* of history was much more complex than his predecessors. For Hegel, history was not only a one-way linear course through which humanity was progressing on a path of evolution. It was “a sequence of emblematic figures and cultures”, which represented “the action of the universal”.¹ The universal was thus placed within history in the form of a finality, which was defined as spirit. According to Hegel, this spirit had been objectified throughout history in great figures and events; the figure of Christ and the event of French Revolution are examples of objective spirit. But the universal spirit-in-history was to be objectified at an individual level only in figures such as Christ, who could transcend the social to become one with God in the realisation of their destiny in death. On a social level, the objective spirit is to be manifested in a supra-individual entity called the State.²

Hegel thus created a kind of mysticism that preserved religion as a private experience of faith, but left the preservation of social morality to the State. For Hegel, freedom was an ethical and, hence, a social phenomena, rather than an intellectual issue concerning the individual’s natural rights. As Touraine has pointed out, Hegel, in succeeding both Herder and Luther, was anticipating “the culturalists who reject the abstract universalism of reason.”¹ He thus considered every culture to have the capacity and right to “participate in the progress of reason”. Hegel was fundamental to the post-modern tradition of thought in his attempt to reconcile the two modernist intellectual traditions, namely the Cartesian religious spirituality, and the Enlightenment’s religion of humanity.

In a study which deals with the relation of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right with modern revolutions and the classical tradition of political thought in Europe, Manfred Riedel has suggested that Hegel should be read in the context of Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Politics*, Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*.² Riedel has rejected a conception of Hegel, popularised by Karl Popper, in which he is presented as a precursor of later totalitarian ideologues. Riedel emphasises the connection of the principle of freedom with the philosophy of right in Hegel’s understanding of revolution. Accordingly, this connection was established in order to defend a concept of freedom that motivated the French Revolution to rise against the “old scaffolding of injustice”, which held up the “feudal regimes” of Europe in the eighteenth century. Thus, Hegel should be understood as a philosopher of revolution who tried to rationalise the need for social and political change.³

Hegel’s concept of society was of critical import for the political theory because it created an awareness of the “historical result of the modern revolutions”, which was the formation of a “civil society”. A form of social organisation that rested primarily on the political concept of “freedom and equality of the individuals”, but in the wake of the industrial revolution was increasingly depoliticised in the sense of seeking autonomy with respect to the State.

Hegel’s philosophical achievement was evident above all in his formulation of a new social and political theory, according to which individual freedom was “publicly mediated”.⁴ Thus he offered his philosophy of history in his critique of the philosophy of natural right. In the light of this new theory, a new interpretation of the history of civil society was already in the making. Civil society henceforth could not be viewed simply as a product of a social contract agreed between “rational, articulate individual agents”, but as a “network of relations” formed over time between social actors, resulting from their needs. These needs included not only the need to

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¹ Ibid, p. 76
² Interestingly, this aspect of Hegel’s philosophy was to find wide reception among modernist Muslim theologians like Morteza Motahhari, and was used in philosophising the idea of an Islamic revolution.
reproduce economic life and labour relations to survive physically, but also the human need for recognition in the process of reproduction of social life in ever-new cultural and political forms.

But Hegel’s heritage, as carried over by Marx, exposed the fundamental contradiction that was still inherent in Hegel’s vision of historical reality; namely the belief that the process of achievement of emancipation of the individual had to go through his subjugation to a strong revolutionary State. Inspired by Hegel, Marx criticised the rule of law based on the concept of natural rights and the ethics of the market, which had displaced all notions of reason, peace and justice. But he was mainly concerned with the inhumane condition of labour under industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century, which was justified by the liberal ideology of individualism.

In his “1844 Economic and Political Manuscripts”, and in his “Theses on Feuerbach”, Marx spoke of “alienation” and “exploitation”, caused by commodification of labour, as running against the nature of human needs. Labour as part of man’s life-energy was to regain the fulfilment of his humanity; but, instead, it was turned into the source of his torment and misery. The liberation of the worker from alienation and exploitation was, therefore, a natural historical destiny for which the proletariat was only an agent. The enormity of the influence of the ideology of modernity on Marx is most evident when he defines the proletariat not as an autonomous actor but an agent of the forces and relations of production. And his tragedy is in his quest to make this determinism into a source of the freedom of proletariat from both the tyranny of nature and that of social relations of exploitation.

Marx’s thought was so radically dedicated to the natural determinism of history and so fundamentally pessimistic with the wisdom and ingenuity of individual and group actors that it largely ignored the revolutionary potentials of religion. Both in The German Ideology and in the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx asserted the supremacy of the natural-historical will, which was to determine the destiny of man. He wrote: “In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and which correspond to definite forms of social consciousness... It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.”

It fell upon Lenin and Lukacs to emphasis the role of the class-consciousness of the proletariat, which was to be realised in the vanguard party. However, according to Lukacs in his History and Class Consciousness, the proletarian consciousness is not much more than the identification of the “historical necessities” at any given time by the vanguard party, and the effort of the party to align the interests of the working class with these necessities. As such, it is the revolutionary intellectuals, who by

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1 Touraine, A. 1995, p. 78  
3 Ibid, pp. 39-40  
4 Ibid, pp. 43-44  
5 Ironically, some radical religious revolutionaries of our time, such the hard-line Islamic revolutionaries in Iran, without having read Marx, have come very close to his deterministic views. This is evident particularly in their emphasis on the essentiality of the total victory of the mostaz’afin (disinherited) over the mostakberin (epitome of arrogance and idolatry).  
obtaining class-consciousness would lead the proletariat to transcend the “subject-object” division of the class society, and thus transform social reality.¹

Yet, the impact of this kind of interpretation of history was so real that it fuelled the major Communist revolutions of the twentieth century from Russia to China to Cuba and to Vietnam, in which the vanguard parties successfully seized political power in the name of the proletariat. The force of this new ideological offspring of modernity was so real that Lenin and following him Stalin carried out the project of construction of a socialist State in Russia by embarking on the literal elimination of the social classes. Unfortunately, to the extent that they were successful in levelling the social classes, they inevitably strengthened the absolute power of the State. Nonetheless, the impact of the Marxist revolutionary tradition on the post-modern achievements of various social movements cannot be denied. After all, in many of the so-called Third World societies, new movements in pursuit of freedom and human dignity arose in interaction with this modern revolutionary tradition. It is unrealistic to deny the positive achievements of the Marxist revolutionary tradition in the Third World because of the instances of absolutism that have been perpetrated in the name of this tradition. Just the same, it is wrong to dismiss the Islamic Revolution because of the absolutist tendencies that it has created.

It was the political blindness of the Marxist and other Western theories of revolution to “class subjectivity” and the role of cultural, economic and political motivations that failed the leftist revolutionaries all over the world. This blindness was due to a kind of closure of meaning that had excluded the understanding that the contemporary revolutions were guided more by the interpretative understandings of history, rather than by the objective conditions. It will also be blindness, or at least myopia, to assume that the success of new revolutions in the Third World will fail to provide moments of true liberation with concrete material and spiritual gains for the revolutionary actors. Such assumptions are based on the vestiges of the belief that the people of the Third World can hope for freedom only if their movements were guided by the guiding principles of the Western movements as interpreted by the secular intellectuals.

The Nostalgia for Meaning

The nostalgia for meaning, that motivated the Islamic Revolution, was also apparent in the Western nations in the early twentieth century. It arose in the wake of the success of the modern State to establish the legitimacy of its power, at least in part, upon the positive sciences as the guarantor of modernisation. Science was thus inherited from modernity to replace the meaning of life, which the metaphysics had tried to locate in the obscurity of religious traditions. It was Husserl who identified, in his Crisis of European Sciences, the danger of the loss of meaning as a result of the claim of the positive sciences to exclusive authority over human understanding and knowledge, and as such over human progress. Husserl warned that; “merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people”. For Husserl, such a science excluded the burning question of our time: “the meaningfulness and meaninglessness of human existence”; because its primary requirement was that the scholar must carefully exclude the questions associated with “reason or unreason of their human subject matter and its cultural configurations.”² Thus, a science that in the name of objectivity and truth

¹ Lukacs, G. History and Class-Consciousness, Merlin, London, 1971, p. 71
excludes the knowledge of spiritual and cultural world from its domain can not take account of the multifarious nature of life, the human consciousness and the inner spiritual needs of the human beings.

According to David Holbrook, neither scientific logic, nor the factual observations of the positive sciences “are able to say anything about ends and values, and certainly not about ultimate meanings.” In the countries of periphery of the world capitalist system, particularly in the Muslim countries, the trust in such a science has never taken a strong root. Even in the West, scientific progress has encountered scepticism. But still, in the West (and in the so-called Third World with much more pain), the States go on pretending that “social problems can be solved by an economy of abundance with a high productive capacity, increased efficiency and productivity.”

In his emphasis on the role of meaning in politics, Holbrook raises an interesting question about the validity of the arguments that have replaced economy with pleasure as the central issue in addressing the modern human sense of alienation. Here, he echoes Victor Frankl who, in his concept of will to meaning, emphasised the primacy of meaning over pleasure in human life. In Frankl’s view, the pursuit of pleasure in itself is self-defeating.” Holbrook thus emphasises the importance of the “phenomenological methods such as the interpretations of symbols” as the contribution of what he calls “life-sciences” to the project of pursuing the satisfaction of the human need for meaning. As such he follows Heidegger’s Being and Time and Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception in proposing that the study of political man should consider humans as beings-in-the-world rather than natural objects.

He also echoes Rollo May’s message in Power and Innocence, namely that political violence, and all forms of aggressive expression of discontent, result from “a deep lack of a sense of meaning”. In his references to Abraham Maslow and Ernst Cassirer, Holbrook pinpoints the extreme attraction of transcendental experiences such as “peak moments” and “the exploration of the meaning of existence in symbolism.” And finally, Holbrook traces even in the non-religious existentialism of Sartre’s Being and Nothingness, a political philosophy that aspires to “moral choice and action” of humans in order to overcome nothingness and achieve freedom.

It is this kind of understanding of the essentiality of meaning in the life-world of human beings that reveals to what extent merely objective analyses of the social and political movements of our time obscure the true nature of these movements. It is not thought that reveals the world to our consciousness by making it an object of understanding, as Descartes and Kant tried to do. Nor is it the laws of nature and history that determine the totality of our subjective being, as the Enlightenment philosophers would have us to believe. Both of these paradigms of interpretation of the world lead to postulating an imaginary dualism between subject and object, which then makes itself appear real. It is more sensible to remain aware of the interpretative sources of our understanding of the world, which is essential to the attempt of individual and collective beings to understand the world via imaginary constructs and symbolic structures, which situate us within the world.

As Merleau-Ponty has pointed out, the meaning of things and events does not take shape totally independent of our understanding; nor is it formed completely as we

2 Ibid, p. 182
3 Ibid, pp. 184-186
5 Holbrook, “Politics and the Need for Meaning”. 1978, pp. 188-189
6 Ibid, p. 190
consciously intend. It is rather through our existence in the world that we discover the meaning of the world; but this discovery is itself a heuristic process, which entails creating the world for ourselves in order to understand it. This understanding of the world is then not based on reason but on perception. Perception, thus, always predicates any form of rational understanding.¹

This world of “perception”, which corresponds to Husserl’s concept of “life-world”, is a place where the constructed duality of subject-object can be overcome by integrating man’s body, or his physical and moral existence, and not only his body or soul, in the world. It is at this level that man develops a sense of the world that is dialectical, and that pre-exists any positive science. The task of knowledge at this level is thus not to attempt to eliminate the ambiguity of the world in order to give it perfect clarity. Rather, knowledge must reflect this ambiguous quality of the world in its understanding of it.² It is this quality, which makes it possible to understand that all mythologies, religions, sciences and laws have their roots in the inchoate structures of meaning that pre-exist them in the world symbolics and imaginaries, or in Merleau-Ponty’s word, the world of “pre-consciousness”.

Language is the primary ground for the formation of collective meanings; meanings that make themselves manifest in legitimate social and political institutions through collective consent. And yet, it is these initially meaningful institutions that turn into dominating structures when they lose their meanings for human beings, and as such become ripe for change. What defines the human need for meaning is thus not only the capacity of meanings to allow human collectivities to construct their social, political and cultural worlds, but also their ability to enable human beings to transcend these created structures in order to create new structures. Here, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, transcendence implies that “endless social change is part of the human condition”, which in turn implies that history can never come to an end.³

Therefore, the manifestation of meanings in the cultural traditions, and social and political institutions, does not mean that institutions and traditions become eternally meaningful and hence will, forever, be respected by the humans. In fact, the transcendence from which all new traditions and institutions spring up may well become an obstacle to freedom, when the traditions and institutions lose their meanings to their solidification and sedimentation. Thus, “the dialectic of transcendence and sedimentation is an essential element of human existence. Man creates and is then trapped in his own creations. He negates his creations in transcending them; and this process repeats itself endlessly.”⁴

The will to revolution on the part of collectivities is therefore associated with the dialectic of transcendence and will to meaning, which has been variously described in social and political science as the tendency to anti-structure or anti-society, and which is inherent in all forms of human collectivity. Whereas in modern Europe this process of transcending the sedented structures involved the creation of the ideology of modernity; in our post-modern condition, this transcendence is being attempted by creating a plurality of ideologies, such as novel forms of religious modernism, various shades of nationalism, and of course feminism, environmentalism and multiculturalism.

All these new ideologies, which are no longer Western as such, aspire to the goal of freedom, which was also the aspiration of the Western ideology of modernity.

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¹ Kurks, S. The Political Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, the Harvester Press, Sussex, 1981, p. 10
² Ibid, p. 11
³ Ibid, pp. 16-17
⁴ Ibid, p. 17
Their affinity to the ideology of modernity is reflected in their revolutionary intent and form. They all relate to collective action in order to transcend the imposing structures of the past traditions. But, just as the ideology of modernity did not do totally away with the past traditions of the Greek and Christian thought, these post-modern ideologies never free themselves completely from the past. They search for freedom from the weight of the past, but their nostalgia for a meaningful freedom, always gears them into the past, a past which is interwoven with their present situation. As such, the past continues to be lived in the present, and “outlines the shape of the future”.

This kind of analysis exposes the fundamental weakness of most class-analyses of modern revolutions, which consider revolutionary consciousness as a by-product of strictly objective socio-economic factors. As Merleau-Ponty suggested, the revolutionary class-consciousness is not to be understood as a mere product of “objective conditions”; rather it is a “choice”, which is not made purely at the level of consciousness. Class-consciousness as such is not achieved through understanding of the social and political institutions as rational “systems of impersonal forces”, but through understanding of the institutions at the level of emotions and experiences, since the people carry the institutions within themselves. This is why in the moment of revolution, the collective consciousness - which really motivates people and drive them to action - is often lived through the experience of collective imagination and construction of popular utopias, rather than formulated in the form of sophisticated scientific theories. One has to agree with Merleau-Ponty when he compares revolutions to works of art. “Both are projects in which man asserts his freedom by transcending the present, but without knowing exactly where he is going.”

The participants of the Islamic Revolution of Iran must have experienced their revolution in this manner. Certainly, the revolution was experienced as an intention or will to transcend the existing structures in a leap into future; an intention that sometimes consciously and sometime non-consciously created “its instruments and its means of expression” out of its own traditions. This intention was driven by a collective will to freedom, but was not realised exactly as intended. The Islamic Revolution must thus be seen as the collective action of a people with a shared experience in a common situation where they encountered common obstacles to their freedom, but were yet to form a consciousness of the freedom they desired.

Charles Taylor - in his Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity - has treated the issue of the loss of meaning in terms of the crisis of modernity. He has examined modernity in the context of the cultural conflict of our time over “the disengaged and instrumental modes of thought and action.” As such, he agrees that modernity sought to give “depth, richness and meaning to life”, but failed to address successfully the conflict between subjectivity and the instrumental reason. This view is also echoed by many other critics of modernity who have brought into question the predominance of instrumental reason and utilitarian capitalism in modern technological life.

Taylor’s critique of modernity points to the utilitarian tendency to destroy the “matrices” in which meaning could flourish by disembowelling or marginalising traditional or “less instrumental” ways of life and interaction with nature. At the

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1 Ibid, p. 19
2 Ibid, p. 21
3 Ibid, p. 22
cultural level, this means, following Weber, that world is encountered today with a sense of emotional neutrality fit for a utilitarian way of life, rather than with a sense of awe and excitement, which could animate life with magic, with the sacred and with transcendence. An instrumental view of life and nature, therefore, cuts them off from "the sources of meaning", and splits "reason from sense", and divides the community.\(^1\)

Taylor questions the naturalism of Enlightenment that overemphasised the divorce of modernity from religious morality on the ground that religion was the source of ignorance and potentially destructive tendencies. Instead, he sensibly suggests that "potentially destructive ideals" of religion and moral philosophy, as those of any form of thought, could be "directed to genuine good"; as has been the case for "the ethics of Plato and the Stoics". And as has been the case for non-believers, who would feel the "powerful appeal in the gospel", if they opened themselves even to alternative secular interpretations of the sacred book.\(^2\) This is because even the secular worldviews, willing to reach a deep understanding of the world, could not avoid the dilemma of reconciling reason and meaning.

Taylor was right, when in his critique of the Western ideology of modernity, he wrote: "We tend in our culture to stifle the spirit. We do this partly out of the prudence, (acquired) particularly after the terrible experiences of millenarist destruction of our century; partly because of the bent of modern naturalism, one of our dominant creeds; partly because of partisan narrowness all around. We have read so many goods out of our official story, we have buried their power so deep beneath layers of philosophical rationale, that they are in danger of stifling."\(^3\) And he deservedly embarks on uncovering these "buried goods" in order to make them into sources of empowerment, and into a breath of fresh air that would revive the "half-collapsed lungs of the spirit".

The Irrationality of Reason

Here, I go back to Friedrich Nietzsche in order to make it further clear how the crisis of modernity, manifested in the loss of meaning, came to inspire revolutions and social movements of our time. Nietzsche identified the malicious hypocrisy of modernity, which lied at its heart, namely its pretence to rationality and reason, while giving rise to most virulent forms of irrationality and unreason. This hypocrisy was most prominent in the capitalist mode of production, which in identifying itself with impersonal and universal laws of the market had produced the most intense forms of possessive and egotistic individualism throughout the nineteenth century.

Nietzsche witnessed how capitalism clung to concepts of consciousness and instrumental reason to repress the energies of life: the bodily desires and the "will to power". He, however, saw the source of this hypocrisy in the presence of the vestiges of the idea of God in the mentality of modernist philosophy, which, he believed, was evident in the guilty conscience of modernity for its blatant rejection of God.

Nietzsche asserted that God was dead and, in his *Beyond Good and Evil*, urged modern philosophers, whom he admired for killing God, to go "beyond murder, beyond good and evil, and rediscover or create a natural existence which is free of all asceticism and all alienation." And his method for the creation of this natural existence was to liberate the self by "a combination of desire and reason, domination and self-control" through a return to "Dionysus"; a concept that was used by Nietzsche in his *The Birth of Tragedy* to mean the energies of life.\(^4\)

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1 Ibid, pp. 500-501
2 Ibid, p. 519
3 Ibid, p. 520
4 Touraine, A. 1995, p. 110
Nietzsche’s critique of modernity was anti-social in the sense of fighting a society dominated by utilitarianism and economic interests. His appeal though was to life forces, which were to be manifested in the superman and the generative energies of a new nationalism. He despised the intellectual obsession of modern philosophers with the value of truth, certainty and positive science; and instead he offered alternative values, which could define new normative structures. He set out to debase the normal values of modernity by appealing to “the untruth”. He asked: “What really is it in us that wants the truth? Why not rather untruth, and uncertainty, even ignorance?”

Nietzsche searched for the origin of “truth” in “error”, of “will to truth” in “will to deception” and of the “unselfish act” in “self-interest”. In doing this, he was, in fact, questioning the conventional wisdom of his age, whereby knowledge was to be searched in scientific clarity, free from the “confusion of desire and illusion”. In doing this, Nietzsche anticipated the philosophical tradition that would follow him in the works of Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault and Jacque Derrida, a tradition directed, at various levels, against scientific rationalism, reason and universal truth.

Nietzsche also questioned the validity of the findings of the philosophy of consciousness at his time, and by this anticipated the traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics and psychoanalysis. In rejection of the conscious and value-free objectivity, he appealed to the pre-conscious, instinctive perceptions in inserting specific values in logical judgements. According to Nietzsche: “Just as the act of being born plays no part in the procedure and progress of heredity, so being conscious is in no decisive sense the opposite of the instinctive – most of a philosopher’s conscious thinking is secretly directed and compelled into definite channels by his instincts. Behind all logic too, and its apparent autonomy, there stands evaluations, in plainer terms physiological demands for the preservation of a certain species.”

Here, Nietzsche’s search for alternative meanings in philosophical evaluations may be seen as an early contribution both to the tradition of modern hermeneutic understanding of the texts and the development of psychoanalysis, where language is seen as a living faculty that constitutes consciousness. Nietzsche thus anticipated Lacan, Castoriadis and Ricoeur in seeing language as a distortive, ambiguous and yet vital symbolic structure that advances and preserves life by creating social imaginaries.

Nietzsche also emphasised: “Our fundamental tendency is to assert that the falsest judgements are the most indispensable to us. That, without granting as true the fictions of logic, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the unconditional and self-identical, without a continual falsification of the world by means of numbers, mankind could not live. That to renounce false judgements would be to renounce life, would be to deny life.”

Here, Nietzsche’s allusion to the vital role of “false judgements” was a forerunner of Heidegger’s notion of “prejudice”, further developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer argues against the classical notions of hermeneutics, which emphasised the doing away with prejudices and distortions in order to reach a valid understanding of a text. Gadamer, following Nietzsche and Heidegger, asserts that the interpreter’s “prejudices”, as part of his/her own present situation, are already “constitutively involved in any process of understanding.” This is so because, as Gadamer points out in his Truth and Method, prejudices as “the biases of our openness to the world”, are closely involved in

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1 Nietzsche, F. Beyond good and Evil, in Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. 1990, p. 465
2 Ibid, pp. 465-466
3 Ibid, p. 466
constituting "the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience." Therefore, prejudices and traditions as part of the past provide "the positive enabling condition of historical understanding", and as such insert themselves in the "ground the interpreter himself occupies" when he sets out to understand the "texts or events that make up the objects of interpretation".

This view, as David Linge has pointed out in his introduction to Gadamer's *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, offers an opposition to Neo-Kantian philosophers. Like Nietzsche, Gadamer criticises the Kantian view that defines knower as the "essentially situationless, nonhistorical subject of transcendental philosophy." But at the same time, Nietzsche acknowledged the essentiality of the notion of "synthetic judgement" in human understanding as a form of his own notion of "false judgement". He wrote: "Synthetic judgements a priori should not be possible at all: we have no right to them, in our mouths they are nothing but false judgements. But belief in their truth is, of course, necessary as foreground belief and ocular evidence belonging to the perspective optics of life."

Nietzsche exposed the weakness of claims scientific philosophy to achieve certainty even in the knowledge of nature, let alone the knowledge of man. He also ridiculed the romantic nostalgia for the natural life. He wrote: "You want to live according to nature? O you noble Stoics, what fraudulent words! A being, such as nature, is prodigal beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without aims or intentions, without mercy or justice, at once fruitful and barren and uncertain. Think of indifference itself as a power — how could you live according to such indifferences? To live — is that not precisely wanting to be other than this nature? Is living not valuating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different?"

Nietzsche sounds unequivocal in his rejection of Christian morality in his emphasis on the death of God; but his own guilt feeling about killing God leads him to call for humans to take the place of God and continue His work. His theory of desire thus resembles Freud’s theory of Oedipus where the killing of father leads to the inevitability of assuming his position in order to continue his mission. With all his anti-religious rhetoric, Nietzsche in fact did not break totally with Christianity; and in his *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*, he appealed to the figure of Christ as the example of association of "suffering and willing".

In short Nietzsche’s critique of modernity is in the name of freedom of the life forces of power, desire and sexuality from the domination of social norms, political order and religious moralism. However, this critique does not identify with any concrete individual, social group, or movement. Its appeal is to the unconscious forces of anti-structure, which may be manifested in charismatic figures or movements with ecstatic appeal. As such, it goes a considerable distance to anticipate the ecstatic release of energies in our post-modern condition, whether in unprecedented orgiastic forms of sexual and artistic expression, or the ecstatic religious revivalist movements.

Despite his objections to the prevailing moral standards of his time, which he described as destructive, Nietzsche grudgingly admitted that religion had a "creative and formative influence". He wrote: "For the strong and independent prepared and predestined for command, in whom the art and reason of a ruling race is incarnated, religion is one more means of overcoming resistance so as to be able to rule: as a bond that unites together ruler and ruled and betrays and hands over to the former the conscience of the latter;...and if some natures of such noble descent incline through lofty spirituality to a more withdrawn and meditative life and reserve to themselves only the most refined kind of rule,

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2. Nietzsche, F. 1990, p. 469
3. Ibid, p. 467
4. Touraine, 1995, p. 113
then religion can even be used as a means of obtaining peace from the noise and effort of cruder modes of government, and cleanliness from the necessary dirt of politics...Religion and the religious significance of life sheds sunshine over these perpetual drudges and make their own sight tolerable...”

In his attention to the forces of the unconscious, Nietzsche has a lot in common with Freud. It was in fact ahead of Freud when he referred to “the peculiar narrowness of interpretation of the origin of action as an intention.” Instead, he insisted: “The decisive value of action resides in precisely that which is not intentional in it. And that all in it which is intentional, all of it that can be seen, known, conscious, still belongs to its surface and skin – which like every skin, betrays something but conceals still more.”

Nietzsche and Freud were representative of a mode of thought that carried over the intent of revolution as a social subversion from Marx, the philosopher of alienation. Their attack on modernity was based on their deep distrust of the modern positive sciences of nature, which were to extend their authority to the domain of the subject in functionalist sociology. Their mainly philosophical theorisations were taken up by subsequently in defence against the attempts of functional sociology in dehumanising discontent as a destructive, deviant and anti-social behaviour. Their philosophical heritage thus became the voice of concern about the push of functionalism to empty dissent of all its life-preserving and life-enhancing energies.

Following Marx, the theorist of socialism, the sociologists like Weber and Durkheim had tried to deal with the issues of social subversion, deviance and anti-structure in a less subversive manner. No doubt, they recognised the vital energies of the forces of revolution and subversion as sources of social change. But their essentially critical views of modern scientism were gradually turned into a tradition of theorising by functionalist experts who believed that sociology’s main task was to maintain social order.

Even Nietzsche and Freud were not immune to systematic exploitation of their theories by ideologues and psychologist experts, who saw themselves responsible for maintaining order. However, Nietzsche’s and Freud’s fundamental resistance to socialisation made them the source of a political philosophy and a psychoanalytic theory, which have been fundamental in illuminating the sources of discontent, and social and political subversion beyond a mere systemic understanding of the political and the social. And it is by going back to them through their intellectual heirs that we can locate the sources of the crisis of modernity and the new collective movements of our time.

Subversive Sources of the Post-modern

Nietzsche and Freud tried to liberate power from the repression of authority; but they realised along the way that the repressive authority was in fact the psyche that was inserted in a maleficient way in the social relations. The process of this insertion was thought to be via the unconscious desires and fears, which had penetrated the practice of society through language and culture, and as such had become naturalised. Therefore for them, liberation was not possible through simplistic recipes of the rationalist philosophers. Nor was it possible through a universal and total revolution, which would claim to free man from all bondage in order for itself to become a new bondage. Nor was it possible through a normalisation, which would

1 Nietzsche, F. 1990, p. 488
2 Ibid, p. 478

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seek to cure or contain deviance and subversion by restoring equilibrium to the social system.

Complete liberation was in fact impossible since man was torn apart between desire for pleasure on the one hand, and fear of death on the other; between the need for transcendence and the need for security and law. It was impossible to reach a state where man would stop reproducing himself culturally and linguistically, as it was impossible for man to stop reproducing himself biologically. And as such, it was as impossible for human beings to free themselves totally from their cultural prejudices and restrictive traditions - and still continue to exist as human - as it was impossible for them to purify their genes from all its previous impurities - and still survive as a species. Therefore, the path to freedom must run through a perilous path of pleasure and pain, subversion and order, unity and disunity, rationality and irrationality. And furthermore, there would be no hope for a total unity of the individual actor and the social system, between pleasure and law, and between the rationality of a technological world and the inner spiritual and transcendental elevations. And yet, there must be hope for finding means of incessant transformation of values to enable the society to incorporate the subversive powers of desire and transcendence, and become revitalised.

Subversion should thus be seen as reinvigorating and revitalising, rather than destructive, for the society; and therefore, it must be celebrated rather than being repressed or castrated. Modern capitalism could not be a site for integration of the individual in the social as a means of reducing tension and optimising the individual and social functions, as Talcott Parsons and Chalmers Johnson would suggest. It was rather, the arena of a mode of repression whose existence was as constitutive as was the need for its subversion. As Touraine has suggested: “This image of a capitalist society is consonant with the way in which that society experiences itself.”

The capitalist society experiences itself in terms of its social norms and its values. In this society the pursuit of the individual interests of human beings are connected with the forces of the market. The market is a site of struggle where law and discipline intervene to contain or repress the disorder and violence that arise from this struggle. In this ironically peaceful battlefield, human beings, as “beings of desire”, will have to learn to become “social beings” through submission to discipline, law and order. The capitalist order is maintained on the cutting edge of the battle of non-social and even anti-social forces of desire for money, power and pleasure, which it encourages, and the forces of social order that it keeps in order regulate and control this desire. This is essentially true of today’s market economy, as it was true in Freud’s day.

In his *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, Freud suggested that in the modern society, the presence of the *super-ego* denied the simple correlation between the *id* and the *ego*. In this, the *ego* was seen as the social being that repressed the *id*, and the *id* signified the site of the unconscious desire. The intervention of the *super-ego*, or the moral force of conscience, meant that the repression of the *id* is sublimated into a moral order, and as such would become meaningful for the subject. The subject then would not experience the repression of the *id* by the *ego* directly, because through the intervention of the *super-ego*, the moral order would fulfil or defer certain demands of the *id*. It does this by sublimating into meaning the suffering that comes with the denial of the potentially subversive desires of the *id*.

According to Freud, a decisive step towards civilisation was the move of certain community to restrict “their possibilities of gratification”. And he added: “The

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1 Touraine, 1995, p. 119
liberty of the individual is not a benefit of the culture. It was greatest before any culture, though indeed it had little value at that time, because the individual was hardly in a position to defend it...The desire for freedom that makes itself felt in a human community may be a revolt against some existing injustice and so may prove favourable to a further development of civilisation and remain compatible with it...A great part of the struggles of mankind centres around the single task of finding some expedient solution between the individual claims and those of the civilised community..."

Thus the destiny of the individual is not the simple submission of pleasure to law by means of socialisation of instincts; the power of the psyche lie in its capacity to transcend and defy total order, and hence total submission. It is this capacity that, when sublimated, makes the individual to give consent to a meaningful integration into the society and the acceptance of the existing order. And it is this capacity as well that, when faced with unsublimated and hence coercive repression, pushes the individual to seek identity with the fellow-repressed in dreaming of an ideal, and in taking action to construct a utopia.

In order to find out how the sublimation of suffering leads to a human struggle for survival in the gap between pleasure and death, we have to look to the productive field of culture and discourse; a field that gives rise to religions ethics and moral ideologies. It is by looking into this field that we can appreciate that human beings can never internalise the social discipline completely, and that they are always potentially the agents of liberation and hence subversion of social order. It thus becomes clear why at the moment of revolutionary upsurge, the laws of existing order become so easily transcended without creating any guilt feeling or moral restraint. This transcendence becomes possible both because of the loss of the meaning of the political order, which secures its legitimacy, and because of the meaningfulness of the new order, which is sublimated by a subversive utopia.

In Freud, therefore, we can find a critique of modernity that, like Nietzsche’s, resists the push for socialisation brought to the West by the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries nationalisms. But at the same time, it acknowledges the essentiality of this socialisation for the survival of each culture. In our post-modern world, we are faced with the rise of ever new forms of nationalism and religious revivalism, which try to find their own ways to sublimation and meaning by defying and transcending the existing orders and by creating new orders.

Nietzsche and Freud broke with the ideology of modernity, which in its Marxist and Liberal versions, had tried to define human beings in terms of their social roles and positions: in terms such as workers, capitalists, subjects and citizens. Instead, they presented a view of man that fitted the coming post-modern age. In this view man is a "being of desire", driven by the forces of the unconscious. He is a being of desire for freedom and autonomy, a being that is engaged in a life and death struggle against both nihilism and the totalitarian tendencies of the modern utilitarian society. Thus, man’s desire for freedom appears as a will to resistance against the forces that seek to destroy the creativity of the energies of life and of the Eros.

It is this being that in all its complex and contradictory existence, inhabit our post-modern world. Whether in the countries in the centre of the world capitalist system or in the countries of periphery, this new being is on the rise. This new being is a hybrid of multiple cultures, whether as a product of global immigration from the periphery to the centre, or as a product of the interaction of cultures through

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1 Freud, S. Civilisation and Its Discontents, in The major works of Sigmund Freud, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. 1990, pp. 780-781

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information super-highway. But this hybridisation does not mean that the man of the post-modern condition has acquired a clear self-awareness of his intimate connection with others. This hybridisation therefore has not repressed nationalisms; in fact, as I hinted before, it has given rise to new nationalisms.

The new human beings have proved wrong the ideologues of modernity in their anticipation that industrial growth, scientific and technological development, and universal values of reason would lead to universal peace, economic abundance, and the creation of a universal culture of humanity. As Touraine has eloquently explained: “The actors of history are more than agents of modernity. The great idea of the modernists – that there would be correspondence between system and actor in modern society as the actors internalised society’s norms – has been inverted and overtaken by historical reality. The old is used to create the new, and particularisms are used to...resist universalism, despite the widespread intellectual conviction that modernisation meant a transition from particularism to universalism, from belief to reason.”

Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus is but one fashion of extending Freud’s psychoanalytic theory to provide a subversive account of post-modern social and political developments. Deleuze and Guattari have used schizophrenia as a guide for connecting desire to the workings of social and political institutions in the post-modern culture. Like other psychoanalytical theorists, they see the Western culture, or more accurately “the symbolic order of capitalist production”, as the key element in repressing desire in our post-modern condition.

In his critical analysis of Deleuze and Guattari’s work, Anthony Elliott has noted their attempt to undermine the traditional conceptions of revolutionary action. For them, politics is “embedded in desiring and in social production”, and as such cannot be “rationally refashioned”. To overcome cultural oppression, therefore, the suppressed libidinal forces must turn against the social system through schizophrenic processes. “To turn the process of schizophrenia against the logic of capitalist production might just allow us to construct alternative social relations – relations that permit a spontaneity and intensity of desire free from cultural constraint.”

But, psychoanalytical critique of global capitalism in search for emancipation has outgrown these purely individualistic attempts to construct alternative realities. It has had to take account of far-reaching changes in social, cultural and political conditions in our time. It has had to pay attention to “the proliferation of generalised communication; the dispersal of economic production and consumption; global, multinational capitalism; the multiplication of new political movements and identities, (and) the fracturing of knowledge and information.”

Coining the concept of “social imaginary”, Cornelius Castoriadis has also offered a new way for the conceptualisation of the issue of the socialisation of the psyche. He defines the social imaginary as the seat of originary representations and significations that constitute the self by instituting society. For him the drives, desires and passions behind these significations are “a productive core which permits human subjects to create and reproduce society anew.” Castoriadis thus connects the imaginative creativity of cultural production to the socially “instituted imaginary representations”, which are themselves part of the historical traditions.

1 Touraine, A. 1995, p. 138
3 Ibid, p. 148
4 Ibid, p. 156
5 Ibid, p. 161
The Islamic Revolution: A Post-modern Movement

The philosophical legacy of Nietzsche and the legacy of Freud’s psychoanalysis provide theoretical tools to be used for a new understanding of revolutions and movements of our time. It is no longer possible to reduce the multifarious nature of the post-modern condition to economic production, consumption and self-interest. Nor is it possible, as for example Charles Tilly does in his *From Mobilisation to Revolution*, to reduce the complex cultural forms of revolutions to systematic acts of collectivities, which use their opportunities to organise and mobilise people. There is undoubtedly merit to Tilly’s insight about the instrumental and functional use of the available social and political resources by organised interest groups to mobilise masses for a revolution. But at least some revolutions, particularly revolutions inspired by religious imaginaries, express far more than the pursuit of self-interest, and far less organisation is behind their power of revolutionary mobilisation.

Certainly in the case of the Iranian Revolution, the imaginative projections of the cultural and religious traditions to the future were far more effective in motivating people to mobilise and take up action than organisation under concrete demands for political and economic reforms that the secular political groups proposed. No doubt, socio-economic and politico-economic factors were instrumental in giving force to the rhetoric of various revolutionary groups in order to sensitise and mobilise people. But only those groups were successful in using these factors in any effective manner that connected them with a meaningful worldview or truth claim that could be shared by the widest sectors of the society. The truth claims of the Islamic Revolution was constructed on the basis of a religious worldview, which used the shared cultural symbolism and new interpretations of traditions to express worldly collective aspirations in transcendental terms.

Movements like the Islamic Revolution of Iran are indeed local affairs, reflecting the rise of collective passions for new nationalisms. But more than that, they are global post-modern movements, which challenge what they see as unjust and unfair in the world order. The Islamic Revolution, by virtue of its global environment, was inevitably globally oriented. It may thus be characterised as a moment of the global post-modern culture.

For the Islamic Revolution, the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime was only the first step to bring the zeal for establishment of a new cultural power face to face with what it perceived as its true adversary: the West, and particularly the United States. The Shah was an object to get rid of, not so much because his regime created political and economic problems for the people, but particularly because he was perceived to have inflicted a serious injury on the Iranian pride and sense of dignity. The revolutionary actors saw in the Shah the image of a foreign agent who was prepared to surrender the country to its cultural adversaries by undermining its main source of cultural value, Islam.

The Islamic movement was not an indication of imperviousness of Iranians to modernisation as such. It was a movement against a Western-inspired modernisation that had left Iranians spiritually defenceless against the dominant global powers. Otherwise, this movement has been more than willing to use modern political, cultural and economic techniques in its struggle. But its real source of power is not to be located in its techniques that in any case would not match that of its adversaries. Its
real source of power was in its appeal to religious traditions in order to restore meaning and a sense of spiritual worth to the living experience of Iranians as a modern nation. It set out to do so by making claims to defending the human dignity of those who felt rejected by hypocrisy, insensitivity and corruption that had marred the Western appearance in the Muslim world first under the guise of colonisation and later under the rubric of modernisation.

Islamic societies, like all peripheral societies in the "world-system" today, are internally engaged in one or another form of struggle between the need for rationalisation of industry and technology, on the one hand, and the need for some sort of ethics and value system, on the other. And it is becoming ever clearer that the need for meaningful values could actually enable these societies to define themselves as an existence worth of reproduction and perpetuation, and thus could interfere with the process of rationalisation and technologisation.

This need for value entails a quest for putting meaning back into life. This need is normally as intense, if not more intense, than the need for physical survival, because physical survival often loses its urgency when an individual or community faces the problem of the loss of meaning, as Durkheim has eloquently explained in his analysis of the social causes of suicide. The need for meaning has thus become the main vehicle of struggle for survival not only for the Muslim nations, but also for many social movements elsewhere in the world.

The ideological image in which a society constructs itself is so important to its continuity that if this image is lost or devalued, the society must restore it or create it anew, lest it would not be motivated to reproduce itself culturally and hence materially. Cultural reproduction of a society is essential in producing the ethics that make material reproduction socially meaningful. The economic relations of production and consumption would be meaningless without an ethics of the market, which can be reproduced and renewed.

Likewise, the restoration or rejuvenation of the moral system would be of no enduring sense without a political philosophy and a set of legitimate institutions. Or, more accurately, the construction of an ideology, which can legitimise the social imaginary, would be impossible without the institutions that would conceal the repressive nature of authority by making it meaningful to the people. Only such institutions can create laws to which people consent and not coerced. Although there are major differences between the ways in which the Islamic and Western societies experience modernity and the means by which they attempt to tackle its crisis, they are essentially fighting the same battle and for the same end.

The Birth of the Subject

The approach of Western societies to the present crisis of modernity has involved what Touraine calls the "birth of the subject", which is manifested in various new social movements; movements that challenge the attempts of the existing polities at total social integration and unbridled utilisation of the environment. Touraine hopes for more than the negative liberalism of Isaiah Berlin and Richard Rorty. He rightly proposes that social movements still can pursue the hope of combining "freedom and equality", as well as "personal creativity and social justice". He defines the subject as neither "a supra-social principle", nor as "the individual in his particularity", but as "a mode of constructing social experience".

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1 Touraine, A. 1995, p. 235
2 Ibid, p. 234
The birth, or more accurately rebirth, of the subject thus means for him a return to “the bourgeois spirit”, the spirit that resisted the total capitalist political and social domination in the West during the eighteenth century. It also means a return to the workers movement; the movement that during the nineteenth century, when bourgeoisie submitted to rationalised capitalism, defended the rights, dignity and autonomy of the workers against “scientific management” and the “logic of productivity”.

In this sense, the “subject” should be understood as a form of collective action, which is primarily a cultural struggle to challenge the power of instrumental reason over social values. The role of the subject is to constantly debase the ideology of rationalisation to prevent its domination over the power relations that exist between the human subject and the rationalising forces of the State and the economy. This is so because in the last analysis, it is these power relations that determine the cultural orientation and hence the values of a society. So much so that gaining control over these values is essential to any successful preservation of the creativity and productivity of social actors. It is this creativity and productivity of the social actors that will preserve the spirit of anti-structure and anti-establishment, which are so vitally needed for upholding the freedom of individual in the post-modern condition.

Touraine’s concept of new social movements includes the feminist, environmentalist and gay movements. It stresses the challenging nature of these movements against the dominating power of the established order. As such, it presents certain similarities to Habermas’s concept of the struggle of new social movements against the total “colonisation” of the “life-world” by the “system”, which he expounded in his *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1985). It also resembles the ideas of Anthony Giddens in his *Consequences of Modernity* (1990) and *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1992), whereby Giddens stressed the correlation between the push for globalisation of the modern culture, and the resistance of individualism in various forms of collective identity.

However, Touraine goes further than these writers in his emphasis on the interference of the “subject” as “social movement” with the social environment in a bid to resist and, if necessary, reshape the norms and forms of social and political organisation. He goes beyond Habermas’ optimistic rationalism about the possibility of an action totally mediated by expressive communication. He also goes further than Giddens’ individualistic view of self-identity, which emphasises the individual ability to freely choose desired “life-styles” in the consumer society. Touraine differentiates his “subject” from Giddens’s “self-identity” and Robert Bellah’s “changing images of individualism” by stressing the role of the subject as social movement in inspiring dissidence and putting up resistance against the “apparatuses of power.”

But, in the face of the huge revolutionary movements in the Islamic world, Touraine is fearful that the struggle of the subject against rationalisation, which for him, is a continuation of the subject’s struggle for freedom from the sacred order, would fall back upon religious communitarianism, dogmatism and absolutism. Touraine’s fear is understandable; because modern nationalisms whether inspired by technical rationalism, or by religious enthusiasm, have presented strong anti-individualist tendencies, which have led to violence, repression and manipulation of minds to shape personalities with a sense of duty to the established order. And, for this reason alone, one tends to agree with him in rejecting the anti-individualist tendencies that repress desire and deny the human need for freedom from the reign of various forms of dogmatic belief. “Modernity means the disappearance of all models and

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1 Ibid, p. 264
all transcendence, and therefore of religious political or social forces which create civilisations defined by the imperious norms of ethics."

Therefore, the liberal societies of the West must be congratulated for their allowance for the expression of civil society; a society that has created a kind of legal balance between the collective and the individual. So much so that revolutions calling for the total destruction of the social order have become virtually extinct in Western democracies. But this congratulation must remain qualified as the flaws in this liberalism are being exposed both internally and externally. The liberalism that is still heavily burdened by the impersonality and rationality of the laws is facing problems both on the home front and on the international level.

At home, liberalism is confronted with the incipient movements for greater freedom, which push for the removal of all the social taboos, and in their very creativity, threaten the liberal values by questioning the failures of liberalism in tackling violence, criminality and anomie. And at the international level, it is faced with rival cultural ideologies, which question the Western liberalism due to its failure to apply to others the same standards that it applies to itself. As such, it has become internally divided and externally aggressive. And, it is for this reason that it has become subjected to conflicting forces that pull it in different directions. Countervailing forces at home, which demand a return to “community spirit”, and the massive cultural forces from the outside, which try to assert themselves as alternative models of reality for the good of humanity. Both of these forces have creative potentials for reviving society and save it from stagnation. They also have the potential to become the locus of new totalitarian ideologies.

In the face of all this, therefore, Touraine’s fear of the movements, such as the Islamic Revolution of Iran, which appear to have led to the rise of absolutist regimes, is justified. But if we accept, as Touraine does, that the classical dichotomous understanding of the modern society, which saw it either as individualistic or wholistic, must be rejected; then we must be prepared to accept that each society must follow its own experience in order to renew and revive itself. We must also accept that, to be genuine, such experience will have to go through a dialectical interaction of forces of individualism and wholism. It is only through this painful process that a society might be finally able to see itself as a network of relations of power, which is manifested in various forms of culture, economy and politics. It is therefore in the context of these relations of power that culture, economy and politics could become meaningful at the level of the interaction of the individual and the social.

It is within the context of this intricate network of power relations that we must look forward to and hope for the emergence of a human subject who would assert his/her individuality in interaction with the institutional structures around him/her. It is therefore senseless to hope for the emergence of the subject in a context from which it is totally alienated. The hope for the rise of the “subject” in various forms of post-modern social movements in the West is a real hope, because it is still possible to say that the individuals are not totally alienated from their social and political institutions. There is in fact a fundamental commonality in the cultural traditions of the West, which is based on the Christian tradition and the tradition of modern revolutions, and is reflected in modern social and political institutions in the form of law. It is this fundamental commonality that provides a background against which social actors can organise and mobilise movements of difference and change.

The rise of a pluralist Islamic culture in Iran on the back of a revolution could also provide a common cultural background from which to organise and mobilise new

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1 Ibid. p. 258
movements of liberation against the political and religious establishments, but not in total denial of the community. The aspiration of the Islamic Revolution for the total transformation of the Iranian society reflected the total frustration and alienation of individuals with the meaninglessness of the structures of political and social order and the sense of community that this order preached. However, it did not mean a total denial of community. In fact, it was an aspiration for a renewal of community in a more meaningful fashion.

Touraine's worries about the new Islamic movements arise from the fear that these movements might become the "site" for the rise of new totalitarian regimes. And hence, his reluctance to see in them the potential ground for new forms of resistance to the global apparatuses of power. This fear as I noted earlier is justified, but it ought not to deny the potential emancipatory value of the individual and collective movements for freedom that are already rising in Iran in the name of human dignity and the subjective creativity. Interestingly, these movements are rising from the ashes of the Islamic Revolution, and under a coercive political regime that has been trying very hard to present itself as a total force of rationality and the logical end of this revolution.

Similar to the Western-type social movements of our time, the actors of the new movements in Iran are individuals demanding personal and collective freedoms in the name of the same principles that inspired and motivated the revolution. The wild, ambitious, but vague imaginations for freedom, that animated the revolution, are gradually sinking not necessarily in the dominant apparatuses of power; but in the more concrete imaginations of freedom, which have achieved measurable results within the existing models of social reality. At times, they even seek to alter the social relations, but they are yet to bring down the whole structure of violence and repression that is perpetrated under the coercive force of the dominant religious ideology. These movements emerged in the process of post-revolution battle of ideas within the adherents of the Islamic revolutionary ideology, and have been expressed in the language of religious and ideological conviction. But they have end up with a language of a kind of secular ethics, which is gradually penetrating political, legal, and economic institutions.

The new movements in Iran echo the voices of the victims of the ideology of the pursuit of self-interest, which is also heard in the Western societies. It is so because in addition to political repression and poverty, they also suffer from the same problems of the liberal societies of the West, such as addiction, depression, schizophrenia and suicide. It is in this context that these movements pursue the goal of the freedom of human subject beyond the Western classical notions of individualism, which identified the subject with self-consciousness. In this sense, these movements, in their incessant struggles against apparatuses of domination and totalitarianism, present essentially similarities to the new social movement in the West, which struggle against the predominance of instrumental rationality and utilitarianism. But whereas the Western social movements use one or another form of secularised ethical language, the new movements in Iran resort to a language of religious ethics that is becoming increasingly secularised.

Demand for the dignity of human subject, and rationalisation and limitation of the sphere of influence of religious and political institutions are being increasingly voiced in the new religious, political, philosophical and artistic discourses in Iran. These intellectual discourses can potentially provide a powerful tool for understanding of Iran's developments in the post-modern age. These discourses are more positive, more empirical and more essential for understanding the current
developments in the context of the global culture and politics than many previous concepts such as the class and class-consciousness. (See Chapter 8 for more detail on the post-revolutionary intellectual movements in Iran.)

**Self, Beyond Self-interest**

It is imperative for the analysts of the Islamic Revolution of Iran not to reduce the study of the revolution and its outcomes to economic analysis based on the calculation of indicators, such as growth rate, balance of trade and rate of inflation. Although such data are quite important, they cannot be used on their own for explanation of this revolution. Any meaningful analysis of the Islamic Revolution should alternatively, but in concert with political economy, consider the role of religion and ideology as fundamental factors in giving rise to the imaginary of a dignified human subject in the context of a distinct and collective identity that is worthy of recognition.

It is as much absurd to deny the power generated by the forces of collective conviction in motivating resistance to the power of the economy and the State, as it is to deny the power of desire to resist the domination of a rigid moral order. But individuals participate in social movements as much in their quest for individual freedom, as in their desire for belonging to an alternative community, which is perceived to be better than the one that they reject. Social movements lose their meaning if they are dissociated from social actors, as much as individual actors become meaningless if they stand outside all collectivities.

Yet the social actor, as Touraine suggests, is “the antithesis of the Self”. A social actor does not merely comply with its social role, which he/she has acquired via self-consciousness, as Parsons would have us to believe; rather “an actor reconstructs the social field on the basis of demands, including the demand for subjectivation, which introduces a non-social principle into society.”

1 Similarly, social action is not totally governed by rationality of the social system; rather it defies the system by its capacity to transform the society.

The movements in the Islamic countries must be understood in relation with their encounter with the crisis of modernity, where modernity is experienced not as an “endogenous” phenomena, but as modernisation, which appears as totally “exogenous”, and as such alien. The crisis of modernity in the West has thus been translated to the crisis of modernisation in the Islamic world. The crisis of modernisation has had a double face. Not only did it carry over the problems of modernity faced in the West, such as the instrumentalisation of reason; it also led to the decline or many cases destruction of the local cultures, which were perceived to be the “enemies of freedom”.

It was under this slogan than the Western ideology of modernity helped various colonial powers to mobilise their people around a massive cultural attack against the colonies. It was also in this context that the colonies and semi-colonies tended to return to their traditions as a shield against this cultural attack. Whereas religion was attacked in some Western societies due to its identification with reaction and absolutism, in the colonies, religion was sought as a source of empowerment against the western onslaught. Touraine poses the right question when he asks: “How can colonised and dominated countries not distrust a rationalisation they identify with the history and culture of the powers whose might oppresses them? How can they not invoke their history and culture in order to resist a hegemonic power which identifies with modernity

1 Ibid, p. 287
and reason, and which regards as universals forms of organisation and thought that correspond to its own interests?'

Dominated societies reject modernisation not because of its modernity, but because of its aggressive and destructive history. In returning to their traditions, they do not reject freedom, but they seek a freedom bound with the affirmation of their collective memories and identities. This is why these societies are so obsessed with cultural identity, which they feel responsible to protect. For instance, Iranians by and large do not find their religious traditions to be antithetical to freedom; nor do they see it as inherently conducive to a totalitarian theocracy. These sentiments are not dissimilar to religious sentiments in many Western societies. Iranians as a Muslim nation have learnt that Islam is not an enemy of technology and economic development. For many Iranian religious modernists, religion, if rescued from narrow interpretations, may even be instrumental in creating a fundamental balance between the need for rationalisation of science and technology, on the one hand, and the need for spirituality, meaning and connection with cultural values, on the other. Iranian history makes it evident that religious traditions when mobilised to support freedom can enhance the struggles of individuals and collectivities against dominating powers, and protect the individuals against manipulations of the market.

It should be also clear from the foregoing arguments that any individual and collective resistance to internal and external domination is bound up with one or another form of religious or cultural tradition. But the modernisation that came to the Iran, and many other Muslim societies, sought to sever these societies from their past traditions without offering any reasonable means of continuity in its place. As such, it was far less successful than modernity in the West in providing tangible benefits for the modernised. Total break with cultural traditions meant that modernisation appeared to the members of the invaded cultures as an exogenous force imposed through war and conquest. But, as Touraine notes: "As the modernisation movement gained strength, modernity began to affect cultures and societies which were incapable of adapting to it, or which underwent it rather than using it. What had once been experienced as liberation became alienation and regression."

In our global situation in which conflicting cultures need more than ever to interact and communicate freely, the defence of identities sadly keeps them ever more far apart. In this situation, the cultures with access to higher military might make more and more references to their access to scientific knowledge and superiority of reason. Meanwhile, the defensive but struggling cultures, which boast to their religious traditions, are referred to as backward and fanatic. It would be wrong to dismiss the movements in the Islamic world simply as traditionalist, when they are in fact trying to incorporate modernity into their cultural traditions. It would also be wrong to keep up the conflict between the West and the Islamic world, where the Western cultural universalism manifests itself as a threat to the local culture and as such gives rise to new dangerous particularisms.

The Western cultural-ideological push against the colonies under the title of modernisation has undermined the image of the Western liberal and socialist ideologies as ideologies countering the dominance of the State power over the society. Immanuel Wallerstein has noted the fundamental alliance between basically Western ideologies of liberalism and socialism in the context of the “world-system” in strengthening rather than weakening the States. These ideologies arose following the French and Russian Revolutions on the back of the pledges of weakening the State

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1 Ibid, p. 297
2 Ibid, p. 317
with respect to the civil society, or withering away of the State with respect to the classless society. But as Wallerstein has suggested, they have in fact led, particularly since the mid-nineteenth century, to the “real increase in the State power” and its “intrusiveness”, both in the Western democracies and in the Communist States. He has noted the rise of a “world revolution” against the Western ideologies, which he dates from 1968 to the fall of Communism in 1989. According to Wallerstein, the fall of Communism was in fact the collapse of the liberal ideology whose unravelling had started since the late 1960s in core capitalist nations.

Wallerstein has also noted the defensive role of religious ideologies in the countries in the “periphery” of the “world-system” vis-à-vis the cultural assault of the Western ideologies. But, like Touraine, his view of the new Islamic movements is bleak. For him, movements such as the Islamic Revolution of Iran, although not intrinsically fundamentalist, fall outside the “cultural orbit” of the “world-system”, and as such offer no chance of communication, and hence no chance for conflict resolution. However, he speaks of a new era in the world development, where the call for democracy is no longer identified with liberal ideology due to the economic and political unfairness of this ideology in the global scale. The rejection of liberalism as an ideology is the rejection of the present “world-system” as undemocratic, “because economic well-being is not equally shared, and that is because political power in not in fact equally shared.”

For Wallerstein, this rejection means that the world is moving away from the course anticipated by classical modernist predictions, namely that progress would be identified with the rise of nation-States and social integration. Instead, he predicts that people are now turning away from the States to “group solidarities” and “South-North immigration”. Indeed, massive global immigration and return to culturally based collective solidarities seem to be a feature in the world, but this has not stopped the emergence of the new forms of social integration around new nationalist and religious aspirations.

Samir Amin has also noted the effects of the “new world-order” on the development of international relations. In a mainly politico-economic language, Amin has pinpointed the United States as the carrier of what he calls “a global conception of world-wide economic, political and military hegemony”. He emphasises the rise of the “U.S.-Third World conflict” in the international political agenda, as the “East-West conflict” subsides and while the “intra-West conflict” is expressed mainly through non-violent economic competition. Amin particularly mentions the significance of Islam as a cultural “anti-Western” source, but he remains suspicious about the Islamic movements in the Third World as an effective resistance against the U.S. hegemony. There is no doubt that the Third World countries can be of no real threat to the U.S. security; but the United States, nonetheless, confronts them as such. And this is why, as Amin suggests, the American hegemony over the Third World has often been maintained by military posturing and “genocide”.

André Gunder Frank has also alluded to the failure of modernisation in the Third World societies not as a result of the resistance of these societies to modernity, but as a result of the economic and political policies of modernisation, which mirrored

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2 Ibid, p. 30-31
3 Ibid, p. 32
5 Ibid, p. 12
6 Ibid, p. 18
a distorted image of the West. In this light, even the collapse of the Communist system could be seen as a result of the failure of the Western ideology of modernity. The ideology of modernity, according to Frank, has characterised the whole world as the domain of rationalisation, industrialisation, bureaucratisation and the rise of the nation-states following the English, American and French Revolutions. Thus the movements that brought down the Communist States should be viewed as part of the post-modern global movements dealing with the crisis of modernity.

Charles Tilly has noted the global rise of the modern national States as the primary cause of revolutions. Tilly has criticised the sociological and social-psychological theories of revolution, such as those of Crane Brinton, Ted Gurr, James Davies and Chalmers Johnson for their lack of appreciation for the essentially political nature of revolutions. He writes, in line with Barrington Moore and Theda Skocpol: “The form and likelihood of revolutions depend closely on transformation of States, which through wars and flows of capital bear strong marks of changing relations to other States. War, international relations, State formation and revolutionary change are a tightly-connected system.”

Tilly’s analysis tends to virtually ignore any force on the part of the social actors in revolutions, as he attributes revolutions strictly to the State expansion and the tendency of the State to strain the population in order to wage war or take other measures for expansion. However, his formulation of the interconnectedness of States and revolutions in the context of a global system confirms the international, rather than local, significance of the modern revolutions that I have been discussing.

Moving from an essentially Millian, utilitarian viewpoint, Tilly formulates the formation of the Third World States as a process of “decolonisation”, which has landed them in “administrative structures, fiscal systems and armed forces designed on Western lines”. For him, revolutions in the Third World essentially follow the same course and are motivated by the same incentives as those of the Western revolutions. He is basically concerned with the utilitarian interests as the driving force of the revolutions and the ability to organise and mobilise resources as the vehicle for revolutions. He takes interests for granted, and emphasises “the causes and effects of different means of action on those interests.”

In the last analysis, Tilly streamlines interests theoretically by arguing that pursuing interests comes down to conflicts between the interests of those in power and those opposing the power. And hence, he suggests that the common problem in tackling all cases of conflict of interest is to obtain enough resources to be able to pursue one’s own interest. As such he, again in line with Skocpol, argues that revolutions are structural rather than motivational.

Fred Halliday has also noted that it is only with the emergence of the concept of modern State that modern revolutions could be conceived. He has also noted the global orientation of the new Third World revolutions including the Islamic Revolution of Iran, where the revolution addressed itself not only to Iranian Shi‘i Muslims, but to all the oppressed of the world, Muslim or non-Muslim. In the case of the Islamic Revolution, this international orientation stemmed from the capacity of Islam as a world religion to present itself as a moral philosophy transcending national

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3 Ibid, p. 13
4 Tilly, C. From Mobilisation to Revolution, Addison-Wesley, Inc. Philippines, 1978, p. 29
5 Halliday, F. “Revolution in the Third World: 1945 and After”, in Revolution and Counter-Revolution, p. 135
6 Ibid, pp. 140
boundaries. Halliday does not pay a serious attention to the cultural and motivational forces of the Third World revolutions, but acknowledges that since the rise of the post-war independence movements in the colonies, the world has become “split into two camps”, and hence the Third World revolutions became possible.¹

In referring to the tendency of the Third World revolutions, such as the Chinese Revolution, to integrate into the world capitalist economy, Halliday confirms the idea that the Third World countries are part of the global economy. It is so despite the fact that the political integration of the Third World societies in the world-economy might be quite farfetched given the cultural and ideological hostilities between the societies in the centre and those in the periphery.

Halliday tries to find out why the Third World revolutions, that often originate from socio-economic problems, end up under the domination of ethnic and religious ideologies, which for him are “frightening”? He ends up concluding that the answer to this question may be found in the anti-democratic and anti-human rights nature of the Third World revolutions.² Halliday’s concerns with the lack of democracy and human rights in the Third World revolutions is well-founded, but it should not deter us from looking for answer to his question in the cultural and ideological intricacies that are involved in motivating and driving these revolutions.

Another analyst of Third World revolutions, Elie Kedourie, has considered the Third World revolutions from a totally different perspective. He has questions the significance of the concept of imperialism in the revolutions of the Third World.³ Indeed, in the reformulation of this concept, Hobson and Lenin defined imperialism as a period of advanced capitalism where huge monopolies dominated the world. It has also come to mean the process of the post-colonial expansion of the Western capitalism since the end of nineteenth century, particularly in Asian and African societies, whereby the Western powers dominated and exploited the Third World territories through more complex and indirect policies of neo-colonial type. As such, anti-imperialist struggles became the main theme of the liberation and independence movements of the Third World, which sought to stop “imperialist exploitation” and achieve “self-determination”.

The concept of the “Third world” itself was a post-colonial concept whereby the First World, understood as the capitalist West, was distinguished from the Second World, the socialist camp, and from the Third World, which meant the rest of the world. Kedourie, however, sees the formation of these concepts as mental productions of individuals such as Hobson, Lenin and Mao for political purposes. And as such, he does not appreciate their existence as part of the autonomous production of collective imaginaries in search for new models for resistance to relations of power and domination. He thus does not consider these imaginaries as mental structures that are used for construction of an ideal self-image, whereby alternative ideologies and utopias are created in order to undermine the legitimacy of the hegemonic ideologies.

Also in dealing with the Shi‘i, Islamic doctrine of the Mahdi, Kedourie takes a similar view whereby the revolutionary re-interpretation of this doctrine by Islamic modernists is seen as a plot of anti-Jewish extremists who are transforming the quietist character of the Mahdi. Thus, he does not acknowledge the modern revolutionary interpretations of the Mahdistic tenet as a genuine process of formation of new imaginaries for modelling an alternative political order against an order, which is perceived to be alien. Indeed the re-interpretation of the concept of the Mahdi was

¹ Ibid, p. 141-142
² Ibid, p. 147
³ Kedourie, E. “The Third World: The Idea of Revolution”, in Revolution and Counter-Revolution, p.194
instrumental in the formation of the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, which successfully undermined the ideology of the existing political and religious establishments. (See Chapters 5 and 6 for more detail.)

Ernest Gellner, the eminent Western Scholar of Islam, has taken a similar view of what he calls “cult of martyrdom” and “martyrdom hysteria, which is ever latent in Shi’ism.” For him, Ayatollah Khomeini and other radical Shi’i ulama activated this latent Shi’i characteristic in order to seize power for the “religious lawyers”. In order to build up his argument though, he begins with a dubious premise; namely that “Iran is an exception in the Shi’i world”. It is not clear what he means by this since outside Iran there is hardly any Shi’i world as such. Nonetheless, in an Orientalist fashion, he readily issues a statement depicting the whole of Shi’ism as the locus of “political mysticism and absolutism”.

In criticising Ayatollah Khomeini in a language evidently ridden with political hostility, and far from any scientific impartiality, he seeks to introduce him as an innovator and heretic, who turned Shi’ism upside down for personal gain. He acknowledges that the concept of martyrdom, as connected to what Shi’i believe to be the unjust killing of the third Imam Hussein in the seventh century, had been used traditionally to provide “an escape for the oppressed”. But he suggests that under the conditions of modernisation, Shi’ism has acquired an “explosive revolutionary potential” because it is fuelled by lack of economic gain from which Khomeini has profited.

As such, Gellner views Islam and Shi’ism as a set of rigid and absolute structures of belief that can be readily interpreted by the eminent scholar in order to identify its few simple meanings. As I mentioned, he defines the political attitudes of Sunni and Shi’i Islam in classical Orientalist fashion. He broad-brushes the history of Shi’ism as one of support for monarchy, and writes: “Khomeini has in fact developed a new position, which combines Sunni law-worship and this-worldliness with Shi’i intransigence and absolutism” in order to build “a republic of the lawyer clerics”.

His emphasis on the cult of Khomeini’s personality in politicising Shi’ism following the Sunni model is such that he ends up entering the debate between the Shi’i clerics by calling Khomeini a “kharijite”. This title was used originally to identify those who broke away both from Shi’ism, which supported the hereditary rule of the blood descendent of the Prophet, and with Sunnism, which recognised the caliphate, during the struggle for political power following the demise of the Prophet. Instead, the kharijites advocated something akin to an egalitarian republicanism. As such, Gellner attacks Ayatollah Khomeini almost from the position of his clerical opponents, who have variously accused him of heresy and Sunnism. He tries to show that Khomeini in fact changed the original political philosophy of Shi’ism, which, at the maximum, was no more than a caretaker legal authority in the absence of the Hidden Imam, to one that advocated the direct political rule for the experts in the Shi’i law.

Although Gellner’s interpretation of Khomeini’s theory of velayat-e faqih (the authority of the jurist) contains part of the truth, his understanding conceals more than it reveals. It does not, for example, allow for hermeneutic dynamism, which is required to uncover the incessant changes in the Shi’i theology and political philosophy over its long history. Nor does it allow for new understandings of the

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2 Ibid, p. 140
3 Ibid, p. 142
4 Ibid, p. 146
current processes of change that is affecting the monolithic interpretations of the ruling clerics of the concept of *velayat-e faqih* (authority of the jurist).

Gellner defines and eternalises Islamic theology, including Khomeini’s theology and political philosophy, in terms of a linear “shift towards a symmetrical, egalitarian, rule-oriented, scripturalist, anti-mediationist and anti-ecstatic pole of the faith.” As such, he identifies the end of the ideology of the Islamic Revolution with the domination of Khomeini’s discourse on the Iranian politics. He also correctly refers to Khomeini’s ideology of revolution as a theological reformation. But in a monolithic interpretation of this ideology, which is plagued by Western stereotypes of Islam, he attributes this reformation entirely to the person of Khomeini, and hence foresees the demise of the revolutionary discourse in the demise of Khomeini. He writes: “In the end, it seems clear that the theological revolutionary, the ruthlessly brutal moralist and politician, the scholastic Solon of bathroom etiquette, and the forceful mystic and thinker, are one and the same coherent person. He reflects the deepest currents and strains of the society which has engendered him, and which he now dominates.” Therefore, Gellner does not allow for the possibility of any positive developments in the post-Khomeini era, despite the new trends of reform in the theology, philosophy and political theory of Shi’ism. (See Chapter 8 for more detail.)

**Ideology: An Objective Phenomenon**

One main reason for the static understanding of the Third World revolutions and particularly the Islamic Revolution of Iran is the misconceptions about the notion of religious and ideological convictions as subjective phenomena belonging to the superstructure. Such misconceptions have exercised influence on modern political philosophy particularly through narrow interpretations of the ideology of modernity. Ironically, they are part of an ideological-interpretative process that has played a constituting role in human understanding of the modern world, while denying the constitutive nature of ideology. An important legacy of this ideological process, which we have called modernity, has been the more readily recognisable ideologies of Marxism and liberalism.

An early Marxist understanding of ideology defined it as a part of the superstructural formulation of the ideas of the ruling class, which was used for the legitimation of the authority of the ruling class. Ironically, an important part of the critique of superficial understandings of ideology has come out from among the Marxists themselves. Marxist ideologues like Lukacs, Gramsci and Althusser noted the structural and motivational force of ideology beyond its understanding as merely a collection of ruling class ideas by offering new interpretations of the original Marxist texts.

George Rude, in his *Ideology and Popular Protest*, has discussed this transformation of Marxist understanding of ideology. In his discussion of Gramsci, as the one who took the theory of ideology even further than Marx, Lenin and Lukacs, Rude emphasises the distinction that Gramsci made between “historically organic ideologies”, which are essential to social and political structures, and ideologies that are “arbitrary, rationalistic, or willed.” It is the former type of ideologies that, according to Gramsci, have the “psychological” force to “organise” people, and create the

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1. Ibid. p. 148
2. Ibid. p. 151
context in which they gain consciousness of the validity of their struggle, and then move to action.\textsuperscript{1}

Although Gramsci, like Rude, does not totally free himself from the Marxist notion of ideology as part of the “super-structure”, he acknowledges “a relatively independent role” for ideology, very close to the role of material forces that belong to the “base”. Gramsci’s treatment of the concept of ideology is particularly important due to his recognition that ideologies do not necessarily come in the form of systematic formulations by the ideologues of the major social classes. For him, ideology also exists in “less structured forms”, which are in “circulation” among the ordinary masses in the form of “folklore”, “myth”, and the day-to-day utterances of the lived experience.\textsuperscript{2}

But, as Rude notes, the most important contribution of Gramsci to social and political theory is his formulation of the concept of “hegemony”. He defined “hegemony” as the process whereby people give consent to a dominant authority via peaceful means. For him, the “civil society” is the seat of this consent, a consent that is achieved through “indoctrination” by means of education, religion and the media. Resistance to the ideological hegemony of the State, according to Gramsci, is only possible through the construction of “counter-ideologies” that would debase the State ideology, and hence the means by which the State maintains its control over the people.

More recently, Nicos Mouzelis has offered a post-Marxist alternative to the conventional understanding of the role of ideology in social order and collective action. Mouzelis rejects the empiricist method of observing the statistical regularities as a sign of social order. Instead, he asserts that for explanation of the constitutive elements of social order, one should go beyond the quantitative observations and “discover the underlying generative mechanisms which, although real, are not empirical” (in the sense of being directly accessible to our senses).\textsuperscript{3} In other words, “social forms, conjunctures, and strategies are to be understood in terms of theoretically expressed tendencies that have a real structural status, but are not empirically transparent.”\textsuperscript{4}

As an example of real, but “theoretically expressed” structural tendencies, he refers to what he calls the “mode of domination”, which is to be considered as important an element as the mode of production in upholding social order. Thus “political constraints”, such as “military and administrative technologies”, are as real and material as the forms of economic organisation of the society.\textsuperscript{5} In understanding the concept of ideology, he follows the same line of reasoning whereby ideology is not considered a “residual category” of secondary objective validity belonging to the sphere of super-structure. According to him, more than material goods for physical survival, human beings produce “the political order that makes organised life in complex societies possible; as well as the cultural order that enables them to relate meaningfully to each other and to the non-human worlds surrounding them.”\textsuperscript{6}

As such, Mouzelis attempts to develop a theoretical structure that is a synthesis of Marx and Weber. In his view, just as human beings develop the tools and

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\textsuperscript{2} Rude, G. 1980, p. 23


\textsuperscript{4} Ibid, p. 11

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid, pp. 12-13

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, pp. 47-48
technologies that make production of goods possible, they develop cultural technologies to make political order possible. The function of collective action for social change therefore is, at least in part, to replace more efficient “technologies of domination/coercion” for less efficient ones. In other words, the process of the formation of new ideologies is a kind of development of “the forces of domination”, which is as important in giving rise to collective action as is the development of the forces of production.

In his discussion of the role of ideology, Mouzelis follows Gramsci in arguing that “counter-ideologies” of anti-structure are generated in “normal circumstances” as a result of “institutional contradictions”. With the intensification of contradictions, these counter-ideologies threaten the hegemony of the ruling ideologies, and with it “the existing relations of domination”. Mouzelis sets out to reject both the “Parsonian/functionalist” and the “phenomenological/hermeneutic” theories of action. But his arguments are much more forceful in criticising the former than the latter theories.

Mouzelis’ critique of the functionalist sociology, although not new, is based on the idea that Parsonian functionalism fails “to conceptualise collective actors” in their connection with economic, political and cultural institutions, or what he calls “the means of social construction”. It does so because of its “one-sided systemic” bent, which undermines the “voluntaristic dimension” of collective action. But his critique of hermeneutics on the ground of its incapacity to go beyond what he calls “the micro-world of actors’ inter-subjective understandings”, reflects a superficial understanding of modern hermeneutics.

Robert Wuthnow, following Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner and others, has offered a cultural analysis of ideology, which is meant to make it available as an object of empirical study, rather than a subjective phenomenon that escapes scientific understanding. He understands the role of ideology, in analogy with ritual, as a symbolic-expressive aspect of social life. In a dramaturgic understanding of ideology, he defines ideology, on a par with ritual, as part of the culture, which dramatises the moral order of the society. “It consists of symbols that express or dramatise something about the moral order.”

By defining ideology as “a set of utterances”, reflected in the language, “visual representations”, “symbolic acts”, and “events”, Wuthnow presents ideology not in terms of beliefs, which are “subjective” and “cannot be observed”, but in terms of utterances, which are “objective, behavioural, observable”. In this sense, ideology, as part of the discourse and culture, is understood in terms of infinite linguistic possibilities governed by the rules of culture. This view comes very close to Wittgenstein’s notion of “language games”.

Wuthnow posits a dialectical relationship between ideology and moral order in which three phases of ideological struggle for gaining hegemony are identified. “A phase of production in which the existing variation in ideologies is amplified, typically by the emergence of new ideological movements and in conjunction with some disturbance in the moral order. A phase of selection in which competition among ideologies – competition to provide plausible models of moral obligations – results in some ideologies or ideological forms being selected for and others being selected against. And a phase of institutionalisation

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1 Ibid, pp. 52-53
2 Ibid, p. 77
3 Ibid, p. 56
5 Ibid, p. 146
in which successful ideologies develop or take on additional features that make them less vulnerable to competition and less subject to radical alterations in the environment.\(^1\) As such, the movements such as the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment movement and the socialist movements that emerged in the nineteenth century could be considered as various manifestations of the social production of ideologies in search for more stable moral orders that would lead to social and political order.

Of importance to my purposes here is Wuthnow’s emphasis on the association of the collective production of ideology with the rise of social, religious and political protest movements that offer “innovative sets of symbols and rituals”, which in turn disrupt the established moral order. As he writes: “The disruption of established moral expectations creates a situation in which new symbols can be advanced as interpretations of what the moral order should include.”\(^2\) The success of these new symbolic structures, of course, depends on the availability of a competent leadership to provide acceptable new interpretations.

Modern movements with millenarian aspirations, such as the cargo cults, are thus undoubtedly involved in one or another form of ideological production in order to alter the moral order. Modern political movements in the Third World, particularly those inspired by religious convictions, have also presented millenarian tendencies in anticipating the return of a Messiah or a Mahdi, and have formed strong solidarities around charismatic leaders who are optimistic about future and the return of a “Golden Age”. Such movements, particularly when they are founded on popular religious beliefs with access to collectively validated symbolic structures, often begin to gather following as marginal forces that produce alternative ideologies. In time, however, they might grow to powerful forces that oppose existing social and political orders. Such was definitely the case in Iran where, under the modernising Pahlavi regime, jurisprudential Shi’ism grew from small religious networks to a powerful political movement that challenged the monarchic order.

Wuthnow has also explored the connection between ideological revolutions, the quest for power and autonomy by social groups, and the rise of the world capitalist system. Ideological revolutions, he writes, are led by “elites with a rising degree of power and autonomy, often in areas that were previously peripheral to the world-system”.\(^3\) Most importantly, Wuthnow agrees that ideological revolutions do not necessarily end up in the domination of one static form of ideology over society in the form of an absolutist regime. He emphasises that ideological and religious responses to socio-political and socio-economic circumstances are often expressed in more than one ideology. An example of this is the sixteenth century rise of various religious responses to social, economic and political changes in Europe in the form of Lutheran, Calvinist, Arminian, and Anabaptist movements, as well as movements within Roman Catholicism and the “scattered episodes of mysticism, and witchcraft”.\(^4\)

Ideological responses to socio-political and socio-economic circumstances in Iran, particularly since the 1960s, have also been variegated and expressed in diverse forms of interpretations of the religious and literary traditions. (See Chapter 7 for detail.) The rise of these multiple ideological and interpretative responses should be considered as a result of the uncertainties of the public in search of an alternative moral order. These uncertainties inevitably entail debate over the validity of one or

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1 Ibid, p. 151
2 Ibid, p. 155
3 Ibid, p. 237
4 Ibid, p. 159
another interpretation. This phenomenon is clearly observable in Iran today. (See Chapter 8 for detail.)

**Ideology: An Episodic Discourse**

Mansoor Moaddel has offered a model for understanding Iranian Revolution whereby ideology is used in the sense of an “episodic discourse”, a discourse which consists of “general principles, concepts, symbols and rituals that shape human action in a particular historical period.” Following Furet, he defines revolution as “a particular mode of historical action shaped by revolutionary ideology”. In this sense, revolutions are characterised as the episodic rises of ideology where a rising ideology “takes over politics, transcends social differences among participants, moving them in a communitarian relation and orienting them to act directly against the State.”

Following Wuthnow, Moaddel reiterates that ideology must not be seen as a mere collection of ideas but as a force that shapes collective efforts for formulating strategies of action. Like Geertz and Turner, Moaddel provides an analogy between ideology, and symbolic structures, like rituals, whereby social and environmental constrains and obligations become meaningful and as such acceptable to the people. But in concert with B. Alexander’s “Correcting Misinterpretations of Turner’s Theory”, he asserts that ideologies like rituals, beyond their integrative function, have the function of instigating social change in the direction of re-establishment of the sense of community. They do this by temporarily transcending the normal structures of society, which are perceived to have caused the loss of community, and by attempting to reconstruct social institutions in ways that restore the sense of community.

Moaddel’s “episodic discourse” comes into play in the construction of a particular form of ideological domination in an episode of the history of a society where a sequence of significant events make certain ideologies to rise and others to decline. The dominance of a particular discourse in a revolutionary action debases the previous dominant ideologies. Moaddel considers revolution as a structural phenomenon. But instead of explaining revolution in terms of the developments in global economic and political structures, he understands revolutions, in line with Furet, as “the appearance on the stage of history of a practical and ideological mode of social action totally unrelated to anything that came before.” Therefore, he attributes to ideology the role of an autonomous power that subjects revolutionary actors and their collective action to its own internal logic and dynamics, thus making suffering and death meaningful and therefore acceptable for the committed individuals.

This understanding of discourse is similar in many ways to Foucault’s notion of discourses of power whereby various forms of meaning and action are constituted within the discursive field of the operations of power. From this standpoint: “a rebellious desire to authority is part of the same historical network organised by power as that for which repression is denounced.” For Foucault, political and cultural change cannot occur beyond the prevailing discourses of power. Power is not necessarily oppressive;

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2 Ibid, p. 345
3 Ibid, p. 359
4 Ibid, p. 360
rather, the realisation of any emancipatory project would be essentially mediated by power.

Ideology as episodic discourse, suggested by Moaddel, is analogous to the discourses of power suggested by Foucault, and as such suffers from a similar weakness. As Anthony Elliot has noted, in Foucault’s understanding of power the role of the social actor is all but reduced to an “epiphenomenon” in the cultural and ideological field, a field which is pervaded by power relations. Similarly, Moaddel tends to ignore the role of the subject in objectifying the discursive ideological field; and at times he seems to assume that ideology pre-exists the human agency, and thus is immune to its intervention.

This view would inevitably lead to the assumption that revolutionary ideology must rise and fall within a certain episode, and thus its institutionalisation is absolute. Hence, it cannot take seriously the imaginative creativities that may alter the dominant ideologies and hence the prevailing relations of power. This may be the reason why Moaddel does not take account of the developments in the political and religious discourse in the post-Khomeini era, such as the rise of new styles of hermeneutic interpretation of the political doctrines of Shi‘ism within the religious revolutionary discourse.

Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that in analysing the pre-revolution development in Iran, Moaddel does pay attention to the role of Muslim ideologues in shaping the ideology of the revolution. He writes: “Islamic revolutionary discourse was not simply a pre-existing ideology resting on the political theory of Shi‘ism or the ulama institutional development, ready to be used by discontented groups and classes against the Shah. Rather, it was produced by diverse ideologues as a result of the dialectic between the State and its opponents in a broad episodic context.”

Moaddel is rare among analysts of the Islamic Revolution in giving credit to the clash of ideological discourses as a main contributing factor in the making of this revolution. He rightly argues that it was mainly the formation of an Islamic revolutionary ideology that threw the Shah’s regime into crisis and not economic and political problems per se. In explaining the failure of Muhammad Reza Shah’s modernisation policies in confronting the religious opposition in contrast with the success of his father, Reza Shah, he correctly points to the differences between the “ideological universes” that dominated the rule of these two monarchs. In other words, given the similarity of ideological positions of the two monarchs, the reason for the success of Reza Shah’s anti-clerical policies could be understood as a result of the dominance of the ideology of a civil society in the cultural scene under him. Whereas the demise of this ideology in the reign of Muhammad Reza Shah made way for the dominance of religious ideological discourse in Iran’s political culture. The liberal ideology of civil society, as Moaddel has suggested, was “ushered in” when the Allies invaded Iran in 1941. According to this argument, in Iran of the early 1940s, the dominant trend in political culture of the opposition belonged largely to the “ideological universe” of a liberal civil society. In the 1970s, however, there was a divergence between the liberal ideological trends among the secular opposition forces and the Islamic ideological movement that dominated the opposition at large.

To be sure, the acquiescence of secular intellectuals and the weakness of religious ideology in the early 1940s were two important factors, which allowed the introduction of certain cultural policies Under Reza Shah; policies, which claimed to
be modernising Iran and initiating a trend toward civil society. Despite criticisms offered by some secular intellectuals and political parties of such harsh policies as outlawing the traditional manner of clothing, forced unveiling of women and direct attacks on the religious authority, these policies were largely accepted as part of a general trend toward modernisation and development of civil society. However, it is very difficult to conclude from this, as Moaddel does, that under Reza Shah the notion of civil society, advocated by a secular liberal discourse, had already dominated the cultural scene in Iran.

It is difficult to argue that under Reza Shah the core of a civil society, dominated by a secular discourse, had already been established, because the clear lack of a social constituency in support of civil society. This in itself could be understood as a main reason for the later success of the religious opposition to form a coherent ideology of revolution. Moreover, it is not logical to see the lack of a strong opposition to the policies of Reza Shah as an indication of the sensibility and success of these policies. In fact, these policies were harsh by any civil standards; and as such, the lack of a strong secular opposition to them could be attributed to the lack of strong sentiments for a civil society in the popular political culture.

It is more sensible to argue that after the defeat of the democratic aspirations of the 1905 Constitutional Revolution, civil society had never found a firm grip on Iran's cultural and political developments. Moreover, Iranians had never consented to the separation of religion and politics in its liberal secular sense even in the 1910 Constitution, which was otherwise virtually a selective translation of the French and Belgian Constitutions. Although there were instances of attributing the social and economic problems of Iran to the clerical intervention in politics, these instances had not led to the demise of the spiritual and institutional influence of the religious authority on the polity and society. However, it is fair to say that under Reza Shah, the notion of civil society had become the ideological and intellectual core of the secular opposition to the State in competition with the nascent religious ideology, which was still weak but was fast strengthening. Therefore with the strengthening of the religious ideological discourse under Muhammad Reza, there was not a shift of allegiance on the part of the public from liberalism to religious ideology, as Moaddel implies, rather the public faced a fresh choice that was made in favour of the latter.1

The revolutionary condition in the 1970s arose when the Islamic revolutionary ideology found a firm grip on the already existing public grievances under the Shah. By posing the protest movement against the Shah in the language of the defence of religion against anti-religion, the Islamic revolutionary ideology succeeded to offer a transcendental view of the movement to the public. This transcendental outlook temporarily suspended the existing differences in class and group interests, and with it the divisions among various political parties, which shared in their opposition to the Shah. The Islamic ideology of revolution thus succeeded to ingrain an image of Iran in the public mind that portrayed it as a community of believers with a collective purpose. Although political groups of divers persuasions, particularly the leftists, never expressed sympathy or support for such an imaginary, their acceding to the religious leadership was perceived by the public as the mark of confirmation of the dominance of the religious revolutionary discourse.

Thus, the reluctance of the secular political parties to weaken the revolutionary movement by criticising the religious ideology (due to political concerns for the religious sensitivities of the public) was instrumental in the predominance of religious

1 Ibid, p. 365
imaginary in the revolutionary movement. The Islamic concept of *vahdat-e kalameh* (the unity of word) and the image of a desirable Islamic *ummat* (community) epitomised the unifying and communitarian message of the Islamic revolutionary ideology, which was posed against to the *taghut*, a *Qur’anic* term adopted to symbolise the Shah as a boundless tyrant. From this dominant position, the Islamic political ideology produced a discursive field of symbolic structures, sacred texts and religious rituals, which were effectively used for free communication between the religious leadership and the people at large. As Moaddel has suggested, this situation was vital to the instigation and maintenance of revolutionary mobilisation against the Shah.1 (See Chapter 6 for more detail.)

In short, Moaddel’s important contribution to new interpretations of the Islamic Revolution of Iran lies in recognising two aspects of this revolution. Firstly, that like any other revolutionary action, revolutionary ideology was the primary driving force of the Islamic Revolution, with economic and political considerations playing a secondary role.2 And secondly, that the ideology of the Islamic Revolution was primarily fuelled by the cultural contradiction between the Islamic discourse and the discourse of Western liberalism.3

**Islamic Ideology: A Theology of Discontent**

Hamid Dabashi is another analyst of the Islamic Revolution who has used the concept of ideology as a constitutive force in explaining the Islamic Revolution of Iran. In his *Theology of Discontent*, he has drawn on various Western theoretical traditions, such as those of Marx, Weber, Mead and Ricoeur, to construct a theory of revolution that reflects the workings of ideology as a deep-rooted social force, which grows out of the collective imagination and the national psyche.

In parallel with the forces of production, he has acknowledged the bureaucratic and administrative institutions of the State, as well as the cultural symbolic structures, as the elements that make or break the social and political order. He has also argued that the power relations that pervade social institutions and define the modes of domination in each society are produced by the existing discourses and texts, which are part and parcel of the projection of the desires of the self in the society. He views revolutions as “the acts of communal denial”, engendered by the forces of radical ideological convictions, which when turned religious, add the “incentive of calling God on their side”, and thus strengthen their claims to Truth.4 He has also noted the role of the *imaginary* of the West in the “Iranian psyche” as the epitome of “the hostile other” that has left Iranians with an “injured self”.5

Dabashi has traced the process of the formation of the ideology of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in a detailed analysis of the texts of eight ideologues of the revolution. These ideologues are Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Ali Shari’ati, Morteza Motahhari, Mahmud Taleqani, Muhammad Hossein Tabataba’i, Mehdi Bazargan, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, and Ruhollah Khomeini.

According to Dabashi, the Islamic religious ideology was an inevitable from of ideology for the Iranian Revolution because alternative secular ideologies that had advocated a revolutionary struggle against the Pahlavi regime in their own right

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1 Ibid, p. 366
2 Ibid, p. 375
3 Ibid, p. 369
5 Ibid. p. 5
lacked effective power for revolutionary mobilisation. Nor was it possible for the purely traditional religious thought to inform an ideology of a revolution in a modern society. As such, he argues that religious politicisation in Iran entailed the formation of a “cryptosecular” ideology out of the religious discourse, and a “cryptoreligious” ideology out of the secular discourses of Marxism and liberalism. This argument is based on the observation that the Iranian Islamic revolutionary thought has been deeply influenced by modern Western ideologies, and that the secular ideologies in Iran have been unable to free themselves from religious convictions. Hence, the most prominent of the Islamic ideologues, Ali Shari’atī, tried to redefine Shi’i Islam in terms of a utopian project on the model of the “Marxist utopian motifs”. And the Tudeh (Communist) Party of Iran used its share of sacred symbolisms and imaginaries to inspire intensive sentiments for hero worship and the cults of “saintly” personalities.

To be sure, the tradition of martyrdom, cult of personality and the hope for a utopia were shared by the religious as well as secular ideologies in the pre-revolution Iran. These countervailing ideological forces shared in the tendency to break with the symbolic structures of the immediate past, which were being used to legitimise the existing monarchic regime. The Islamic ideology appealed to the early Islamic icons and events to inspire this break, and the Tudeh Party to the Marxist revolutionary icons and instances of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles.

The Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali and Imam Hussein were proclaimed to be original revolutionaries, whose path was continued by Khomeini, the idol-breaker, Shari’atī, the martyr teacher, and Motahhari, the martyr philosopher. Historical events, turned mythical, were identified as the foundational events of a new community. The image of the Mahdi, for example, became the tantamount with the hope for a much dreamed-of utopia of absolute justice. And the events, such as the wars of the Prophet against the infidels, and the struggles of Ali and Hussein against the worldly caliphate of the Umayyads found potent symbolic values. To these were added the modern events, such as the 1963 uprising against the Pahlavi regime under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Similarly, the leftist revolutionaries found in the figures of Marx, Engels and Lenin the icons of original revolutionaries, and in the memory of the communist martyrs like Khoosrow Ruzbeh and Bijan Jazani, the genuine heirs of the true legacy of a socialist revolution. In this case, the events such as the Paris Commune, the socialist revolutions of the twentieth century were identified as models for a true revolution in the path of world Communism and the utopia of a classless and stateless society. Similarly, the local events such as the oil nationalisation movement of the early 1950s and the Guerrilla struggle of Siyahkal became foundational events, which were celebrated as annual rituals.

The denial of legitimacy to the Pahlavi State by the revolutionary ideologies was as forceful as, if not more forceful than, the political and economic problems facing the monarchic regime in the 1970s. Thus, social and cultural fantasies of the revolutionary utopias sublimated merely material problems facing the country under the monarchy into a moral force capable of motivating and mobilising the population against the regime. According to Dabashi: “sublimates of material life as they may be, phantoms of liberty, equality, and moral certitude (became) realities sui generis capable of drastically altering the same material life.” The ideology of the State was thus challenged by the collective social and cultural fantasies, which were capable of generating

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1 Ibid, pp. 14-16
2 Ibid, p. 19
meanings, meanings that motivated revolutionary action via the sublimation of the otherwise mute mythological and historical memories.

The claim of the State ideology to legitimacy, as I have noted earlier, was based on its claims to the truth of its allegedly divine origins in pre-Islamic religions, and its approval by of the Shi'i establishment. With the removal of the religious approval by the Shi'i ulama, and the incessant agitation of the revolutionary forces to render the divine sources of the kingly power senseless, the State ideology was virtually disembowelled. But as it turned out, the claims of the secular ideologies vis-à-vis the Islamic ideology was also doomed due to the inherent superiority of the Islamic ideology, which had God on its side, over the secular ideologies, which did not.

The ideology of the Pahlavi State had become so rigid that it could not offer its opponents any means of transcending its immediate boundaries without destroying its whole structure. The history of the ancient Persian Empire, which it enthusiastically invoked for legitimacy, was denied cultural validity, which it required in order to generate an appealing imagination of the future. The pretences of the monarchy to Islamism were also in tatters due to its overemphasis on pre-Islamic traditions. Similarly, the socialist ideology had no means to connect itself to any underlying cultural roots that could help it to construct a symbolic structure capable of producing shared meanings. The symbolism that it offered evoked no shared memories and had little, if anything, in common with the lived experience of the people it purported to lead, and thus failed to render itself motivating and conducive to the creation of a mobilising force. By contrast, the Islamic ideology, as Dabashi suggests, drew on both, religious reinterpretation and ideological reinvention.1 In other words, it both produced new meanings out of the same familiar vocabulary that was once used to legitimise authorities, thus creating a credible Utopia; and at the same time, it invented an ideology of revolution that defied alternative claims to truth in their own game.

The Shah celebrated the 2500 years of the Persian monarchy in the early 1970s as a mark of glory and grandeur, as a memory of national pride, and as a source of it own empowerment. Ayatollah Khomeini reinterpreted the 2500 years of monarchy as the history of tyranny and injustice, a continuation of the subversion of the right of the true holders of authority to power. The Shah tried to gain support from the traditional interpretations of the Shi'i fiqh, which rendered the faith apolitical and referred to the king as zellollah (shadow of God). Ayatollah Khomeini reinterpreted the same Shi'i fiqh to transform it into a politically militant ideology offering the utopia of a truly legitimate government of Islam. The Shah offered the image of the Aryan race as a model of national superiority for the Iranian psyche to aspire to. Ayatollah Khomeini introduced himself as the advocate of the poor and the disinherited (mostaz'afin), who defied racism and offered the return to an ideal community (ummat). The Shah, despite his claims to modernisation, clung to monarchy as the traditional form of political authority in Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini supported the modern idea of revolution and a modern form of polity, i.e. republic.

It was at these symbolic levels that, as Dabashi notes, the Islamic ideology won the battle of legitimacy; and it was at this level that the Islamic Revolution was launched.2 In parallel, and with a stronger force, the Islamic ideology launched its battle against what it portrayed as the permanent source of hostility against it; a source that the revolutionary hope for building the utopia must continue to confront if it was

1 Ibid, p. 24
2 Ibid, p. 25
to achieve its ends. This eternal enemy was constructed in the image of the West, and particularly the United States, the Great Satan.

Rejecting the theories of “the end of ideology” (Daniel Bell, 1960) and “the end of history” (Francis Fukuyama, 1989), Dabashi, in line with Karl Mannheim (1936), argues that the end of ideology theories neglect the existential human need to redefine his existence in terms of new exigencies. “The language of that quintessential need, always speaking with suggestions and symbols, is irreversibly ideological...Translating private virtues into public convictions, ideologies are the primary movers of human history through the active agency of the most enduring human need for Self-and-Other-definition.”

As such, secular ideologies are as much relevant to human need to redefine his/her existence in terms of an image that gives it meaning and hence significance, as are the religious ideologies.

Specific forms of ideology may rise and decline; but the production of ideologies and utopias can never stop due to the human need for “re-enchantment” of the world after every “disenchantment”. Dabashi refers to the entanglement of human societies in dualistic worldviews as the source of continuation of the history of good and evil. He writes in a Nietzschean fashion: “As in the Manichaean pre-eternal cosmology, world history commences when particles of good and evil begin to recognise themselves – and with themselves their opposites – in some universal frame of reference. Insofar as that recognition in terms of two opposing dialectics continues to be the quintessential mechanism of human self-knowledge, history continues.”

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the development of the phenomenon of modernity from its inception in the rationalisation of religion in the West to the its present state of crisis. In tracing the rise and fall of instrumental rationality, I relied on some of the important critiques of modernity in order to delineate the post-modern culture as a response to the crisis of modernity. I indicated that the ideology of modernity with all its promises and potentialities for creativity and enhancement of humanity, has suffered from a serious crisis, which is manifested mainly in the dysfunction of instrumental interpretations of reason and rationality. I pointed to the constitutive nature of ideologies, which on the one hand, offer emancipating and integrative potentials, and on the other hand, perform a dissimulating and distorting function. I argued that ideologies, despite their distorting social and political operations, are indispensable for the struggle of humanity in enhancing its means of the reproduction of society. I argued that any meaningful and for that matter successful reproduction of every society goes through a process of formation of new ideologies and utopias that take the society beyond its existing structures, and as such produce the society anew.

Thus, the successful reproduction of symbolic structures of a society, such as cultural, political, legal and economic institutions, some times entails necessarily the production of these institutions anew. It is in these junctures in the history of each society that revolutionary ideologies lead the way to meaningful construction of new social realities through creation of new imaginaries as models for building the future. These imaginaries, as I have suggested, are produced out of creative interpretations of the discourses embedded in the texts of tradition, narratives, fictions and other symbolic structures that constitute a culture.

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1 Ibid, p. 28
2 Ibid, p. 29
I have used these arguments to suggest that the revolutionary politico-cultural and politico-religious movements in the non-Western world are essentially the locus of the same cultural and social fantasies that have inspired the new social movements in the West, such as the feminist, environmentalist and cultural movements. As such, they produce essentially similar ideologies and utopias, which demand social change in pursuit of freedom, autonomy and recognition of distinct identities.

I proposed the Islamic Revolution of Iran as a form of global response to the crisis of modernity in the societies that came in contact with the Western modernity first through colonisation, and then through modernisation. I also reviewed some of the existing views of the operation of ideology in the course of the Islamic Revolution and in its aftermath.

I proceeded to demonstrate the resurgence of religion as a revolutionary ideology that proposes challenging alternatives to the existing global political order through cultural and political dialogue. I also noted the pathological plunge of this originally non-violent challenge into unnecessary violence. The senselessness of this violence makes it imperative to call for attention to the imaginary sources of the misunderstandings that exists between the Islamic and Western political cultures as a means for creating a critical dialogue between the Islamic challenge and the Western dominance. I suggest that such a dialogue could open new possibilities for true global political pluralism, which is much more creative than the present destructive and suspicious animosities. Modernist Muslim intellectuals in Iran are likely to play the role of the forerunners of a new era of reform in the Islamic political culture with global implications.

Building upon the foregoing arguments on the role of ideology in the Islamic Revolution, I now turn to a discussion of the formation of the Islamic ideology that gave rise to the Islamic Revolution and its political outcome, the Islamic Republic of Iran. In Chapters 5 and 6, I will discuss the historical development of the Shi'i political philosophy, and in Chapter 7, I shall concentrate on the ideas of the ideologues of the Islamic Revolution.