

Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment

Philosophies of Hope and Despair

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Introduction

Political Islam's Romance with the "West"

When the French philosopher and scholar Henry Corbin visited Iran in 1945,¹ Allamah Tabataba'i, the most eminent Shi'i scholar and philosopher of the time, traveled from Qom to Tehran just to meet with him. Corbin conducted several intense dialogues with Tabataba'i and a number of other religious scholars, some of whom later became the leaders of the Islamic Republic (Motahari, Beheshti).² Corbin was also a mentor to Darush Shayegan and Housen Nasr, two of the most prominent secular scholars in Iran.³ Perhaps most significantly, he was highly influential for Ali Shari'ati, one of the better known Islamist intellectuals of the 1970s, who had studied with Corbin at the Sorbonne.⁴

Corbin was a scholar of spiritual Islam and Iranian-Islamic philosophy, but his importance for Iranian religious intellectuals had an additional mysterious dimension. He was known as the French Heideggerian scholar of Islam, and he wielded a particularly important influence for this reason.

Corbin had visited Heidegger in Freiburg in April 1934 and July 1936 to discuss the French translation of *What Is Metaphysics?* He also translated Heidegger's text on Hölderlin and the *Essence of Poetry*. What is interesting in the Corbin-Iran connection is the renewal of strong interest in Heidegger within Islamic intellectual circles: Heidegger, the radical critic of Western Enlightenment who ambiguously collaborated with the Nazi regime, the philosopher of existence, transcendentalism, and the jargon of authenticity. It is within the context of the Corbin-Iran link that we may fully appreciate the meaning and contribution of the three most significant Iranian intellectuals of the 1960s and '70s, Ahmad Fardid, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, and Ali Shari'ati, and their role in intellectually shaping the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

This book accordingly focuses on the contribution of certain ideas and intellectual trends, generated in the West, that have shaped the principal ideological formation of the Islamist critique of modernity and the West. I suggest that an excessive emphasis has been placed on the purely religious quality of political Islam, and that this has led to a scholarly blindness concerning “non-Islamic ideas” in the overall development of the Islamist ideology as a mobilizing and motivating force.

The tendency of most scholars to overlook the Western influence on political Islam has contributed to the perpetuation of widespread and simplifying myths that occlude the actual complex nature of this significant and often troubling political phenomenon of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I propose that there is a profound influence of certain intellectual trends, originating in the West, that has contributed significantly to the formation and continuing development of political Islam as an anti-Western and counter-Enlightenment ideology. In this book, I argue that Muslim intellectuals in general – and Iranian intellectuals in particular – have come to know the West, modernity, and democracy largely through the radical anti-Enlightenment ideas of German philosophy, as well as of certain French intellectuals. These ideas were generated in the counter-Enlightenment discourses that ultimately played so major a role in the fermentation of reactionary modernist politics in Western nations in the mid-twentieth century. These discourses, based on the appeal of nostalgia and the restoration of a “lost” shared sense of community and social meaning, and feeding off of the social discontent and cultural disorientation endemic to rapidly modernizing societies, found their way into influential political discourses offering “salvation” to the newly urbanized publics of twentieth-century Iran and other Middle Eastern and Islamic societies. In this phenomenon, we see the invention of a new language and mode of describing the problems and discontents of modern social realities by way of familiar symbols that conceal a radically transformed meaning and propose a solution based on the familiar modern concept of “total revolution.” It is therefore very unproductive to talk about Islamic thought as such, or to discuss political Islam as if it were disconnected from crucial political discourses and issues of the modern West.

Changes in the Middle East reflect, not an autonomous or linear historical process, but, like all late modern history (and to a lesser extent early modern), a distribution of often fractured lines of becoming in tradition, modernity, and cosmopolitanism, expressing geographical and economic realities cutting across and incorporating multiple distinct conflicts

(class, colonial, political, religious, ethnic, gender, regional, ideological, etc.). These conflicts are patterned in the twentieth century by the World Wars, the Ottoman disintegration, decolonization, the Cold War, nationalism, refugee influx and state formation (particularly Israel), development and labor migration patterns, the postwar capitalist boom, and corresponding population and resource connections. We have, in sum, a complex historical-geographical configuration or multiple interconnected singularities from the Russo-Japanese War to the Marshall Plan and the Soviet politics in Azerbaijan. In this accumulation of connections and productions without an organizing center – except the minimal structural logic of capitalism in dependent populations, universal exchange value, surplus, wage labor, state-law complex, and so forth – we may identify several formative discursive moments in, first, modern Enlightenment as the French Revolutionary model of national assimilation and emancipated human nature as “intellectual virtue” (narrowly essentialized as modern/tradition, science/culture, fact/value), and, second, radical Enlightenment seeking to conceive “rights” within a more inclusive framework than autonomy as property ownership or education (Marx, Sen) and seeing in practical “moral virtue” a potential for everyday forms of democracy beyond the legislative moment of the state (Dewey or Thoreau as thinkers, Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King as practical demonstrations). Third, we have the influential discursive moment of counter-Enlightenment that in rejecting the coercive universal pretences of Enlightened modernity also categorically rejects the institutional forms of secularism and liberal democracy in the name of a totalized “local” and “ontological” claim to either religious or cultural truth – the highest intellectual expression of which is probably contained in the works of Martin Heidegger. This was the discursive moment that gained ideological influence in late-twentieth-century Iran within the context of the crisis of the secular modern developing state and a history of foreign intervention and had enormously dangerous consequences for the project of building Iranian democracy.

Because of this strong identification with anti-Enlightenment discourses by many important Muslim intellectuals during the late twentieth century, the Muslim understanding of the West and modernity is often highly limited. The exaggerated association among these intellectuals of “modernity as such” with the particular paradigm grounded in French Enlightenment and revolutionary experience has resulted in many Muslims seeing modernity as secular in the sense of inherently hostile and even at war against non-Western/traditional cultural ideas and beliefs. This

French Revolutionary paradigm was the vision of modernity and secularism adopted by Kemal Ataturk and the Shah of Iran in the Middle East. In fact, a more “middle way” secular politics exists and is available as evidenced by different experiences of the secular from Britain (expressed in the eighteenth-century moral philosophers such as Shaftesbury, and the tradition of progressive and piecemeal social and administrative reform) to the independent Indian Republic (expressed in the ideas and practices of Gandhi and Nehru).

Although “secularization” may be a specific socioeconomic process, theorized by Habermas as the “public sphere” and necessary to all free societies, it is an institutional rather than cultural or moral construct. The “secular,” by contrast, is an epistemic or imaginative construct shaped heavily by cultural and moral elements, but has often been taken to mean Europeanization projected as a fixed “scientific” universal (i.e., for Ataturk, with his now-dated nineteenth-century scientific determinist imaginary) – when in fact even within the West itself the “secular” can mean different things within various historical conjunctures of modernity and their unique historical-geographical variables from population to existing religious structures (from Britain to America, from France to Italy, etc.). Where the “secular” is concerned, different cultures can develop all sorts of specific cultural and moral ideas and discourses in order to imagine, discuss, and negotiate such crucial issues as freedom, agency, justice, and rationality. Within this context, the possibility of a positive contribution by religious ideas and values to the creation of a new democratic society is by no means ruled out – as with late seventeenth-century post-Puritan England, where a prophetic and scriptural structure was used to undermine clerical claims to authority in a championing of secular principles.⁵ For the same reason, secularism should not be confused with a “natural” or “inevitable” process, nor should it be supposed that it is inherently linked to democratic or politically free society. The twentieth century offers numerous examples of violently authoritarian secular regimes, from the Shah of Iran to the Ba’athist regime in Iraq.

Overlooking the many rich historical examples of secularism as a “middle way,” and focused on the secular regime in its authoritarian variation, many Islamic thinkers have become attracted to a narrowly Nietzschean and particularly Heideggerian critique of the West as the single source of modern inhumanity and a general loss of cultural and existential meaning in a Manichean universe. A clear case study is the rise of political Islam in Iran and the strong Heideggerian influence on a number of leading Iranian intellectuals who helped enormously to articulate

the Islamist ideology that paved the way to the 1979 revolution (Fardid, Al-e Ahmad, Shari'ati, Shayegan, Davari, etc.). Therefore, this project maps out a philosophical genealogy (namely, the reception/mobilization of counter-Enlightenment thought in political Islam); at the same time, it also sets forth counterexamples of nonviolent and pluralistic political practice – within, for example, the twentieth-century Indian experience of achieving national independence – that are highly relevant and useful for modeling alternative futures for Islamic democracy in the contemporary world.

1. Discourse of Political Islam

The goal of this study is to situate the rise of political Islam in contemporary social and cultural contexts from a fresh and alternative perspective. Political Islam promises to restore a pure and unbroken order to modern society based on a claim to an ontologically legitimized higher truth and a uniform set of values grounded in this truth. Critics and analysts of political Islam, as a rule, do not look beyond the superficiality of these claims and uncritically accept them on their own terms, thereby perpetuating a vicious cycle of misunderstanding. My argument is that far too dogmatic a grip has been maintained on the contention of religious content as being intrinsic or essential to political Islam, whereas a comparative blind spot has prevailed regarding those “global” qualities that have been highly important in giving the movement its integral substance and definition. The overemphasis on the religious content has produced a deficit in public understanding and debate where this important issue is concerned, as well as creating an unwarranted sense of “mystification.”

This book therefore focuses on the contributions of ideational complexes and intellectual trends that, although generated in the West itself, have ironically had a powerful influence in shaping the principal ideological formation of the Islamist critique of modernity and the West. From this perspective, I hope to raise awareness among scholars by defining the “non-Islamic” ideas that have been essential to the overall development of the Islamist ideology, disturbing at once the Islamist claim to local “authenticity” as well as the too-common assumption in the West that these radical politics somehow represent a “natural” or “logical” extension of Islamic religious or cultural history as such. For, although it is true that Islam in its historical evolution has provided conceptual, institutional, and moral resources for contemporary Islamic political movements, there have also been fundamentally important levels of the

Islamist social *imaginaire* that are interacting and interrelating deeply with core intellectual discourses of what has been called the Western counter-Enlightenment.

I argue in this connection that Muslim intellectuals in general – and Iranian intellectuals in particular – have come to know the West, modernity, and democracy largely through the radical counter-Enlightenment ideas of German philosophy, as well as of certain French intellectuals, in a genealogy that goes back to the counter-Enlightenment movement: from its various twists and turns through such early ideologues as Joseph de Maistre – who defended the French *ancien régime* – to such latter-day and more boldly aggressive defenders of the aristocratic “order of rank” as Friedrich Nietzsche, and finally Martin Heidegger, on the eve of fascist total war against the values of the Enlightenment in World War II. On the other hand, we may just as easily indicate evidence of the Enlightenment democratic tradition at work within modern Iranian political history – for example, in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11, or the democratic experimental interim of 1941–53. In other neighboring Asian nations, we may point to the successful political establishment of these democratic Enlightenment traditions over the long term, most particularly in India.

These expressions of Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment heritage are always unique and specific to the evolving society in question. In this context, I argue that political Islam in Iran is in considerable part a nativist reaction to modernity that is in many ways very similar to early twentieth-century populist reactions to modern democracy in Europe. Similarly for Iran, as for Europe, there is the ever-present possibility of the establishment of democratic hegemony within the Iranian context.

2. The Philosophical Foundations of Islamism

Many Islamic thinkers have become fascinated by the Nietzschean and particularly Heideggerian critique of the West as the source of modern dehumanization and a general loss of cultural and existential meaning, or so-called roots. Through the popularity of these discourses, in turn, the West, modernity, and democracy have often been construed through a narrowly constricted lens that unjustly links the positive democratic heritage directly to such dark experiences as colonization and imperialism. It is necessary to show that the assumption of such an “essential” link is a harmful error and is based on a falsely monolithic imagining of the West popularized in counter-Enlightenment discourses.

This project presents a clear case study of the rise of political Islam in Iran, and the strong Heideggerian influence on a number of leading Iranian intellectuals who helped enormously to articulate the Islamist ideology that paved the way to the 1979 revolution (Fardid, Al-e Ahmad, Shari'ati, Shayegan, Davari, etc.). These individuals reckoned with experiences of social and cultural dislocation spurred by rapid modernization, urbanization, foreign intervention, concomitant economic marginalization, and crises in political legitimacy – all of which induced them to seek and, indeed, invent an appropriate ideology of radical social transformation. In light of such complex evidence and genealogies, it becomes meaningless to talk about Islamic thought as such as any explanation for these political movements and discourses, or to discuss political Islam as if it were disconnected from crucial political discourses and issues contemporary to the modern West itself. We see, rather, how it is more productive to discuss radical Islamist movements in terms of the troubling alternative vision of modernity that was ushered in by the counter-Enlightenment tradition with a reactionary emphasis on rigid social cohesion, hierarchy, and preservation of order grounded in shared public meaning and culturally rooted values and traditions. The counter-Enlightenment undertook a fearful effort to bring final closure to the disconcerting unity of disunity that is modern life.

The reappraisal of political Islam in this light should lead to a new approach in public discussion and better illuminate the general predicament of Islamic societies by going beyond the current focus on two issues:

- (a) The idea that political Islam is representative of Islam or the Muslim world against the values and institutions of the democratic West or Judeo-Christian civilization. Framing this conflict as a fundamental clash of two essential worldviews, or competing forms of socioethical understanding, will only assist Islamists who claim that their own political aspirations represent the historical grievances of the Muslim world as a whole. The framing of the issue in this way, moreover, is consistent with the Islamists' goal of presenting their agenda in terms of opposing identity politics, and can only close any meaningful public dialogue concerning the relationship of our contemporary societies and the possible nature of their complex interactions.
- (b) The treatment of current tensions in terms of an idea of East-West communication. This is something to be avoided, because we know that this kind of discussion is prone to imagining the West

as a closed and essential entity that is situated in the context of the historical experience of Christian moral values and is hostile to the “Eastern” worldview. This project should alert us to the fact that the West is not a bounded geographical entity and has a great deal more presence in the Muslim world than has so far been adequately recognized and reflected on. Of even more significance, the Islamists themselves are far more influenced by important ideological waves in “Western” thought than they are ready to admit and than others indeed have so far recognized.

These two mainstream tendencies are embodied in the writings of, for example, Esposito and Hadad, in arguments that “Islam” represents a tradition that does not separate religion from politics. There is also the “critical theory” social science approach that interprets Islamist movements as part of larger emerging discursive movement identified, in Michel Foucault’s terms, as the rise of “subjugated knowledges.” From this perspective, Islam is viewed as a tradition presenting an alternative to liberal modernity and challenging the totalizing nature of rational Enlightenment. Influential writers including Talal Asad, and in a less rigid way Saba Mahmood, have declared the Islamic tradition incompatible with secular liberalism on this theoretical basis. These views ultimately entail a concept of Islam anchored in a notion of romantic authenticity.

Going beyond these two dominant interpretations (the “conventional” and the “critical”) will first contribute to a demystification of Islamism, and will second indicate the extent to which we live in a critical and defining moment in the future development of Islam itself, in which an important struggle is taking place over how Islam is to be defined in the modern situation. Within this context, we see that, although political Islamism offers an important voice within contemporary Islam, there are at least two other voices with very different interpretations of Islam and an altogether different understanding of the place of this religious tradition in the modern world.

(a) The traditionalist Islamic establishment and its Ulama.

Since its inception in the 1950s in Iran, Islamism has been and remains a major challenge to traditionalist Islamic leadership and institutions. The traditionalist establishment does not agree with the overpoliticization of Islam and religious institutions, and it is therefore an important force in quietly undermining certain Islamic radical movements. This is true in Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and many of the Gulf States.

The unfortunate tendency to treat Islamism as representative of Islam as such in today's world has made it difficult for the traditionalist forces to effectively challenge political Islam in the more serious way of which they might otherwise be capable. Making the distinction between opposing elements and tendencies within an "Islamic" world space already rich in diverse languages and ethno-cultural variety will both help the existing democratic forces and, at the same time, undermine the ability of Islamism to claim for itself the role of complete embodiment of the religion.

(b) The reformist movements, intellectuals, and institutions.

In almost all Muslim countries, including Iran, Algeria, Egypt, and Turkey, the main challenge to conventional Islam comes from reformist religious intellectuals, and the many institutions with which they have been involved. Religious intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush in Iran, Mohammed Arkoun in Algeria-France, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd in Egypt, and so on, are important forces with powerful and practical ideas that have attracted and captured the imagination of both educated youth and the middle class. Those who see these religious intellectuals as representing simply more moderate versions of Islamism make a considerable error. Intellectuals of this variety have achieved a fundamentally different view of Islam and its place in society and have, moreover, set themselves and their ideas up as potential democratic forces aligned with the more progressive elements in the society.

Although it is no doubt true that these Islamic tendencies have certain shared ideas and outlooks, in looking at the social and intellectual contexts and the complex developments that have attended the ascent of political Islam over the decades we should be able to clarify the distinction between the basic aims and precepts of political Islam in comparison to those of the religious intellectuals. The larger argument of this study is that Islamist movements are a part of the larger issue of reconciling Islamic societies with modernity, a project that has opened up a variety of roads. Whereas much current literature on political Islam focuses largely on the origin or nature of Islamist movements or their failures in resolving the crisis of Islamic societies, I argue that unless a properly democratic narrative of modernity that is compatible with contemporary Islamic societies can be offered, the Islamist ideology will likely continue to dominate even in the clear absence of an ability to offer any meaningful political or socioeconomic progress.

3. Alternative Narratives of Modernity and Enlightenment within the West, in Non-Western Countries, and within Islam

One central aim of this project is to offer a democratic narrative of modernity by highlighting diverse intellectual trends in the West and in non-Western societies such as India. There were different experiences at the origins of modernity in England and the United States, with their own particular approaches to religion and secularism, and these differ from the French model that is so often taken to represent the experience of modernity as such. Yet, these often more open experiences, allowing for a far wider latitude of possible belief and a greater openness to religion, are regularly overlooked or minimized in comparison to those historically constructed and more dogmatic discourses that are repeated routinely in studies of the meaning and nature of modernity. The vision of an expanded democratic narrative of modernity is also given articulation in the philosopher John Dewey's ideas of democratic public life and his philosophy of conceptual pluralism, which critique the often unknowingly recycled metaphysical presuppositions that insist on the unique possibility of a single road to democratic modernity. Dewey goes further to argue that secularism – as merely a formal and legal system – cannot by itself maintain democratic and egalitarian principles in a society, and some additional “common” or unifying ideals and moral traditions are required to help develop our communities toward the realization of freedom.

Dewey's ideas are given an interesting practical counterpart in the social movements in both India and the United States, in which intellectual leaders – namely Gandhi, Nehru, and King – envisioned democratic social change in terms of the incorporation of values of the Enlightenment, in addition to a critique of Western oppression, with their particular moral and cultural understanding of the world.

Through an in-depth look into the ideas of visionary democratic leaders of the twentieth century, such as Gandhi, Nehru, and King, we find models for practical experiences of democratic social change that incorporate moral and cultural sensibilities while creating democratic spaces and extending the heritage of Enlightenment along new paths. Both Gandhi and King articulated nonviolent and inclusive democratic discourses suited to the growing complexities of evolving global multicultural societies in which the traditional past need be neither enshrined in dangerous dogma nor rejected out of hand as being “other” to modernity. Rather, for these thinkers and activists, the traditional past is to be engaged as a vehicle for the construction of a democratic form of social

organization suited to the society in question. At the same time, Nehru articulated a vision of Indian history that in many ways expands the historical paradigm beyond the regularly reproduced limits of a “West-centric” and linear framework to include voices and experiences that have fallen under the shadow of the “unthought” in dominant historical narratives, all the while being highly important to the complex development of global modernity and its democratic possibilities.

In this context, it is crucial to examine the ideas of those important contemporary religious reformist intellectuals who offer a radically alternative, open-ended, and democratic path for Islam in opposition to the intellectually and politically totalitarian project of Islamism. We may point here to certain key Muslim intellectuals, particularly Mohammed Arkoun, in order to show a widespread and growing tendency among Islamic thinkers toward conceiving and imagining a more enlightened understanding of historical and contemporary relations between Islam and the West, as well as venturing profound criticism and reinterpretation of historical and contemporary Islamic thought and culture with a view to developing more democratic forms in existing Islamic societies. By way of these reconstructions of Islamic thought and reconsiderations of historically engrained dogmas, these thinkers explore paths along the frontier of the “unthought” in contemporary culture and politics and point to alternative democratic possibilities while also showing an often-overlooked dimension of contemporary Islamic culture and religious discourse. This project, in sum, presents a critical representation of an important, but unfortunately overlooked, dimension of contemporary Islam that is ever-growing and open to the ideas and experiences of democratic modernity along a variety of new paths.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1. Intellectuals and the Politics of Despair

The central theme of this study is introduced in the dangers of ambitious intellectual projects for social transformation that fail to take into account, or are openly hostile to, everyday life. It is argued that existing everyday life, and not any metaphysical or epistemological plane, is the necessary intellectual starting point in projects for democratic social change.

Taking this problem into account, an epistemic historical analysis is called for to increase an awareness of the broader and unexamined frame of our received modern intellectual heritage in both Western and

non-Western social contexts, and particularly in Iran. In this context we may distinguish “narratives of hope” from “narratives of despair.” If the first presents a more sociological vision of change grounded in the everyday and centered around a flexible pragmatic ethics, the second disparages both the everyday and liberal institutions in the name of a supposedly higher order of social being grounded in an inflated and remote, generally totalizing, and metaphysical projection.

In light of this issue, the significance of John Dewey and Martin Heidegger are discussed, particularly the relevance of Heidegger to the rise of a powerful Islamic ideology in the Iranian context.

An analysis of the current Iranian intellectual situation, explained in terms of the “Fardid phenomenon,” shows a radical separation between prevailing intellectual discourses and everyday life in contemporary Iran. Discourses tend to be either immersed in German metaphysical abstraction with dubious political aspects, or engaged in so-called radical epistemological critiques that call for the absolute overhaul of existing and traditional patterns of Iranian thought and culture in the name of a “new beginning.” These equally pessimistic and totalizing forms of discourse have little to contribute in a society where an ongoing struggle for democratization continues to be the concern of most people.

In an analysis of “Fardidism” we see how Fardid, whose discourse introduced a break with Constitutional-era discourses around Enlightenment, science, progress, and so forth, established a new dominant intellectual model centered on a Heideggerian historicism and a metaphysical imaginary of “East” and “West” as hostile adversaries. Above all, Fardid introduced within this context the notion of a “master thinker” as the single key to opening up tomorrow’s “new realities.” This conception of the “master thinker” has shown amazing persistence in Iran, even among those intellectuals who are critical of Fardid, until it has become an almost *de rigeur* stance of contemporary Iranian intellectuals. It is this almost unconscious archetype that remains largely at the root of hostility to everyday life and democratic aspirations among too many Iranian intellectuals.

In this context, other important and influential Iranian intellectuals are examined, including Al-e Ahmad and Shayegan, who like Fardid anchor an imaginary cosmos of “East” versus “West” in a metaphilosophical framework of Heideggerian historicism and thus create a discourse of so-called Islamic authenticity that projects its absolutes beyond the mundane concerns and realities of the everyday, and beyond the democratic aspirations of most Iranian people.

On the other hand, we also find a second wave of “master thinkers,” including Dustdar and Tabatabai, who argue that only by a radical destruction of existing and historical Iranian traditional religious thought – or an “epistemological revolution” – can the scene be properly set for establishing a modern democratic society. These equally pessimistic and metaphysical, not to say arrogant, ideas also project themselves on a totalizing level far above and beyond the realities of everyday life. Moreover, even as critics of Fardid, these thinkers share in the harmful archetype of the “master thinker.” There is simply a shift from the premises of European counter-Enlightenment and culturalist (especially German) thought to the “certainties” of eighteenth-century rationalist and Orientalist ideas about the inadequacies of “Islam” for democratic modernity.

The chapter argues that these tendencies do have serious political implications in terms of fostering an elitist and undemocratic approach to social change, based on totalizing concepts that in no way take into account the sociological particulars and genuine issues of contemporary Iranian society.

Chapter 2. The Crisis of the Nativist Imagination

It is argued here that at stake in the type of discourses initiated by Fardid and others is a larger crisis of security rooted in the decentering experiences of modernity and a consequent will to project a future based on some vivid imagining of a stable and authentic past. This landscape of the imagination is far from unique to Iran and can be found in many writers from both the West and the world over. An analysis of Rimbaud’s influential *A Season in Hell* shows a similar obsessive anxiety over loss of roots and obliterated memory, a critique of modern reason interwoven with Orientalist imagery and a search for a spiritual “home.” Indeed, we can find a similar “landscape of the imagination” in the thought of such illustrious figures as Gandhi and Hegel. This chapter seeks in some measure to map out the main features of this powerful subterranean geography of the unconscious imagination.

The chapter offers a detailed analysis of Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, arguing that this novel depicts the inherently violent dangers and antidemocratic character of anti-Western discourses centering roots and authenticity. The narrative reconstructs the Orientalist ‘landscape of the imagination’ as it is deployed from both “Eastern” and “Western” angles and simultaneously deflates its claims to any true reality beyond mere fantasy and violence of thought. We are

urged to fully face up to the radical and disturbing nature of changes that have taken place throughout the history of the modern world without recourse to either fantasies of “return” to an unchanged precolonial past or dreams of revenge in the form of violent discourses of nativism.

We may read this book as a warning against political definitions of nation or religion centered on authenticity and thus based inevitably on the exclusion and denial of other ideas and experiences. Conversely, it is argued that open and democratic societies avoid the imposition of a narrative of authenticity as a principle or basis for inclusion and exclusion within modern society.

Chapter 3. Modernity beyond Nativism and Universalism

Contemporary Iranian discourses of authenticity that express a crisis of inner security and a bid for “wholeness” depend on the use of certain notions whose meaning is taken as self-evident: the West, universalism, tradition, nativism. As a result the level of debate is contained on a simple level of binaries (inside/outside, East/West) and does not extend to the more serious level of debate at which these very concepts in themselves contested and were redefined. Moreover, this tendency overlooks the reality of a particular Iranian experience and understanding of modernity and sees a falsely imagined option between a dichotomous inside and outside. These ideas, in turn, are anchored in certain metaphysically inspired “philosophies of history.”

The chapter presents these Iranian discourses in the broader global context of discourses of Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment. We can make much sense of seminal Iranian political discourses of the late twentieth century in terms of their affinity with counter-Enlightenment thought and ideology as a somewhat unselfconscious global movement that is given expression in a great variety of modernizing national settings. It is argued that such discourses are inherently hostile to democracy.

The initial focus of the chapter is a presentation of the main debates that have animated intellectual life in postrevolutionary Iran, over “historicism” and “positivism,” mainly between Soroush and Davari. These views, in turn, are discussed in the context of larger issues of modern political thought touching on the views of Hegel, Heidegger, and Dewey. In particular the discussion focuses on the relevance of movements in modern hermeneutics to such debates, as well as the dialectics of the nation-state. Here, we may take cautionary example from projects that combine hermeneutical interpretation with dogmatic and totalizing truth claims of an ontological nature, as we find in Heidegger and the

many Iranian intellectuals who are influenced by him. On the other hand, we may point to different and more pluralistic uses of hermeneutics in the works of Arkoun, Soroush, and others.

By opening up these horizons for discussion, it is possible to investigate the potential grounds for a reflective and democratic enlightenment project in the contemporary Iranian context in terms of nontotalizing critique of national tradition centered on the strengthening of existing democratic possibilities. Such a project seeks a way to democracy through openness and pragmatism and presents an alternative to discourses of authenticity that center around forced and violent conceptions of closure.

Chapter 4. Heidegger and Iran: The Dark Side of Being and Belonging

Considering Heidegger's work, particularly *Being and Time*, from a political point of view, the chapter locates the philosopher's discourse in the historical context of the counter-Enlightenment tradition including Maistre, Rivarol, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Junger, leading up to European fascist ideologies and World War 2. The chapter analyzes the importance of this tradition, and Heidegger's key place in it, for the Iranian Islamist discourses that took shape leading up to and provided the ideological base for the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

It is argued that Heidegger contributed to creating an alternative vision of modernity, one opposed to the values of Enlightenment and 1789 and indeed secular democracy as such. In contrast to the conservatism of the counter-Enlightenment tradition, Heidegger (like Nietzsche and also Junger before him) made a call for total and radical change combined paradoxically with a call for absolute authority in tradition. His alternative vision of modernity is thus totalizing in its call for what amounts to a "spiritual purity" and restored "rooted" community. These political ideas of "home," or being and belonging, had very strong resonance in Iran during the rapid modernization program imposed dictatorially by the Shah, and greatly helped to shape the "nativist" philosophy of the revolution in terms of both a "spiritual" sensibility and a defense of "local" culture against universalism grounded in a dangerously conceived "return" to a "pure source" of being or "authentic" identity.

The chapter analyzes Heidegger's ambiguous relation to the heritage of the "West" and his hermeneutical reconceptualization of the "West's" history as a decline or "fall from being." In an effort to reckon with the vertigo of modernity, Heidegger redefines the proper and "rooted" relation to the past in the name of a "new beginning" to be ushered in through language and action.

Heidegger is ultimately arguing for the institutionalization of “authentic being” in opposition to the “rootless” cosmopolitanism that is constructed on a “superficial” primacy of knowledge (from the Cartesian ego to the Hegelian dialectic). The institution of an “authentic” being grounded in “lived depth” necessitates a relation to the past as a “productive force.” Such “authenticity,” in the first place, amounts to an “ontological” privileging of cultural particularism as the “primordial phenomenon of truth” (in opposition to the “superficial” modern intellectual truth of representation). Such an idea of “truth” is further wedded to a set of “heroic” values of “active nihilism” in which “resoluteness” anchored in a strong tradition leads to the “primordial truth of existence.” Heidegger accordingly identified two levels to Western tradition, the dominant inauthentic level, and the authentic level (“aletheia”) buried under layers of corrupted interpretation awaiting resurrection.

It is argued that this series of philosophical positions in Heidegger is based on a totalizing truth claim as a hidden “authentic” ground accessible only by way of “revelation” and not reasoned argument, an experience of authenticity rather than any system of knowledge, and a matter of courage rather than understanding. A higher and deeper goal is realized in a “moment of vision” to revitalize and extend the “absolute tradition” grounded in “authentic being.” Heidegger thereby establishes a paradigmatic conception of a clandestinely grounded essence of history as invisibly competing truth claims with apocalyptic moments of overall transformation.

Heidegger’s is ultimately a religious discourse, calling for a social structure to impose an act of witness and remembrance of the unknowable “mystery” of being. In this way it is a political discourse that is antiseccular, and in its call for a single overarching meaning, it is antipluralistic. His philosophy amounts to a philosophy of the will in the grip of a higher power as the basis for a radical and “authentic” social reconstruction. Finally, it is elitist in its privileging of moments of inspiration sent from being for the few as the basis for authentic action in an aesthetically conceived framework of truth. The idea complex in *Being and Time* points to the need for a totalitarian state power to carry out its vision and the disappearance of formal liberal freedoms under the promise of a rooted experience of being.

Chapter 5. Democracy and Religion in the Thought of John Dewey

The chapter considers the contribution of John Dewey’s philosophy of Pragmatism to debates on the historically received paradigm of

modernity, particularly with regard to the question of democracy and religion in modern societies.

In his critique of dualisms, Dewey contended that Western historical epistemology, tacitly influenced by religious tendencies, had conceived a great wall between an imaginary higher and perfected order of being and the continuous change of an always unfinished lived experience, to the inherent denigration of the later. In defense of the rich pluralism of everyday life, Dewey sought to emancipate thinking from a metaphysics that he viewed as fostering a closed and antidemocratic paradigm of a “pure” and “completed” beyond. In this sense Dewey was a philosopher of openness and immanence in contrast to, for example, both the universalist dialectic of Hegel and the ontologically sanctioned hermeneutic of Heidegger – that is, the pitfalls of both liberal development schemes and cultural or religious essentialisms. Dewey sought answers in the complexity of moral experience as lived – a premise that begins from the existing world of lived cultures and traditions in their specific dynamism within the broader framework of the modern social universe. Dewey evolved a concept of “conceptual pluralism” grounded in a politics of “deliberative democracy,” envisioning a decentered rather than statist political framework where sites of deliberation occur at multiple points beyond the narrow voting-based institutions controlled by elites.

“Conceptual Pluralism” opposes a conception of truth as a “fixed object of knowledge,” beyond lived experience, proposing instead a specific and relational view of truth. Seeing Dewey’s affinity with some poststructuralist thought, the chapter presents a comparison between Heidegger and Dewey in terms of their similar preoccupations over the basic problems of modernity as a universalizing end. Unlike Heidegger’s insistence on protecting “being,” or the insular stasis of traditional social forms, Dewey sought a balance between the “being” of tradition and the “becoming” of global scientific modernity. For Dewey, the conventional modern metaphysic of excluding or “transcending” traditional social forms was in clear error, and yet rather than protecting these traditional forms, Dewey saw in modernity an opportunity for their radical regeneration and growth toward the realization of a democratic politics. As an ethical premise, Dewey argued for the unity of ends and means, opposing the “grand plans” from above of totalizing modern ideologies that commit atrocities to attain their “ideal” ends, and he therefore introduced an alternative to the excesses of both liberal and “counter-Enlightenment” modes of political thought. These insights will prove to have great importance regarding the potentially positive relation between democracy and

tradition, and the cautioning against the dire consequences of epistemic violence in roads to national liberation.

“Conceptual pluralism” may be understood principally in terms of its refusal of a transcendent “Reason” as the search for “immutable truths” and rather its emphasis on the application of intelligence and imagination to specific problems. Dewey’s refusal of an “antecedent” or “pure” truth has implications for “deliberative democracy.” In line with the shift into a pluralism and immanence of lived experience that is story structured rather than “beyond,” we also see how democracy cannot be governed by any fixed or final principles of either the ontological or epistemic sort, but is at once a goal and a means requiring a broad participation inclusive of the diversity of existing social forms to be effective. In this way Dewey creates a nonfoundationalist framework or conceptual openness to modernity, potentially open to trajectories of reason traditionally linked to non-Western contexts. Dewey, being aware of this, urged philosophical thought to move outside the narrowly conceived and closed historical framework of “Western Civilization” from ancient Greece to the modern West, anticipating the pluralistic historical meditations of Nehru explored later in this study.

Dewey’s thought has considerable relevance to current debates over modernity in the “Third World” with respect to any secular democratic project. It is “rooted” and “meaningful” while avoiding any totalitarian pitfall, reducible neither to a “scientific secularism” nor to “ontology” of “roots” and “authenticity.” In his radical democratic vision, he emphasizes the social nature of knowledge and imagination as well as the importance of community and tradition. In this context, Dewey is open to the potentially positive role of religion in democratic modernity as he opposes received “foundationalism” to a “conceptual pluralism.”

Key to “conceptual pluralism” are the ideas of “imagination” and “intelligence,” and in this chapter we focus on Dewey’s *A Common Faith* with its distinction between “religion” (closed institutional doctrine) and the “religious” (the evolving historical imagination) and critique of historic epistemology. For Dewey, the supernatural, or “transcendent object,” is the defining limitation of traditional Western faith and intellectual thought. Rejecting the dogma of any specific kind of experience that is religious experience – the exclusive claim of each particular religion – and arguing that *all* experience can be potentially religious, Dewey argued for an understanding of God as the “unity of all ideal ends arousing us to desire and action.” Hence the “religious” needs to be liberated

from the narrowly dogmatic claims of “religions” so that the virtues, moral traditions, and contemplative sensibilities of traditional religions may survive and flourish in an increasingly secular modern culture and contribute positively to its growth.

Here Dewey opposes a dogmatic substantive metaphysical reason to a principle of growth in everyday life and proposes a corresponding cognitive structure of considerably wider range beyond “known objects.” In this Pragmatist framework, there is no inflatedly conceived “utopia” beyond, for which existing cultures must be violently transcended; rather, existing cultures in their living immanence are to be developed with full realization of their flexible and dynamic potential through reflexive thought and action. Dewey therefore at once calls for a reflexive modernity and a radical reconstitution of our intellectual and practical relation to our inherited traditional past: a combination without the “completion” of absolutely new beginnings or final ends, but rather evolving options between sometimes incompatible conventions grounded in the open terrain of everyday experience guided by democratic principle. Dewey’s work makes an important case for cultures, including religions, as being not monoliths defined by fixed essences but rather sites of multiple evolutions in a perpetual becoming and regeneration where non-violent democratic potentialities may always represent possible roads to the future.

Chapter 6. Enlightenment and Moral Politics

This chapter explores the idea that Enlightenment may be viewed on a far broader spatiotemporal basis than is regularly supposed in conventional narratives that center the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment and Revolution. The experience of the British Enlightenment centers a notion of “moral sense” that is more inclusive than the more restricted and elitist French Enlightenment discourse of Reason. This alternative emphasis has ethical implications, pointing to a politics of broadly based dialogue and localized democratic transformation, while permitting the valuable contribution of religious and other traditional values/ideas in the process of modern democratic nation making. The ideas of the British Enlightenment have certain continuity in the radical Enlightenment ideas that drove the Indian National Movement, itself a rich blend of Indian political and philosophical ideas as well as Western and other intellectual elements. The core ethical and practical precepts of the Indian National Movement under Gandhi and Nehru, following their success in achieving a democratic Indian independence, were adopted by Martin Luther King

in his leadership of the American Civil Rights Movement. In this history of ideas and practices we see a broadly inclusive, creative, and flexible tradition of Enlightenment that is derived from global ideational sources and far more adaptively open and nonviolent than the conventionally recognized French Enlightenment paradigm.