

The Outside (*Kharij*) of Tradition in the Aftermath of the Revolution

Carl Schmitt and Islamic Knowledge in Postrevolutionary Iran

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In the aftermath of Iran's 1979 revolution, the energies and passions that had animated the struggle for a modern Islamic government were partially redirected to the task of the renewal and transmission of the Shi'i Islamic tradition. "The Cultural Revolution" (*enghelab-i farhangi*) was a paradigmatic example of this effort. Building on the popular discourses of "Westoxification" (*gharbzadegi*) and "the return to the self" (*bazgasht be khvishtan*), the Cultural Revolution portrayed Iranian intellectual culture and specifically the universities as sites of proliferation of poisonous Western modes of being and thinking.¹ The activists who engineered the Cultural Revolution sought to combat what they perceived as the destructive effects of Western culture by aligning the production of knowledge with the teachings of Shi'i Islam.²

Despite the anti-Western tenor of postrevolutionary politics and notwithstanding the extensive and ongoing sidelining of dissenting voices from the Iranian public, the Cultural Revolution has paradoxically intensified the translation of European social thought in Iran. In order to create modern Islamic sciences that have been conceived in terms of *ulum-i insani-i islam-i* (Islamic human sciences) and *ulum-i ijtema-i islam-i* (Islamic social sciences), Shi'i seminarians and academics extensively read, translate, and write in direct relation to modern forms of thought that are indebted to movements of European histories and traditions. Their work has also invested the practice of translation with the ethos of revolutionary Islam and seminary education and contributed to the emergence of a large public of translation over the course of the last three decades. As a result, in a self-proclaimed Islamic state the terrain of the translation of European thought has emerged as a site for the (re)negotiation of religious and political belonging.

This article offers a historical and anthropological exploration of the interrelated questions of *tradition*, *transmission*, and *translation* in contemporary Iran by drawing on a long-term interlocution with postrevolutionary thinkers that includes fieldwork in the public and private centers of education in Tehran and Qom. It is ethnographically centered on a seminar titled *Ilahiyat-i Siyasi* (Political Theology), in which seminarian-academics selectively read and translate authors and texts that belong to the modern Euro-American discourse of political theology, including but not limited to Carl Schmitt and Emmanuel Levinas. Former revolutionaries and children of the 1979 revolution, my interlocutors are the protagonists of the terrain of the renewal and transmission of modern Islamic knowledge. In their sensibilities, actions, and thinking, they inherit and extend the dream of creating a modern, virtuous polity. Four decades after the creation of the Islamic Republic, they also address what they perceive and articulate as the limitations of these revolutionary dreams. In the space of a modern university and in a mode of debate and disputation characteristic of the Shi'i tradition of cultivation and transmission of knowledge, they draw on the imaginative

capacities of translation to consider their ethical and political responsibilities.³

My interlocutors are part of a much longer history of Islamic revolution and reform that spans the twentieth century. Scholars of Iran tend to address this history as the triumph of nativist ideology.⁴ However, to simply consider Islamic revolution and reform as ideological is to elide the fact that modern Islamic politics has emerged in relation to the demands of a concrete historical situation and in a particular moment in the history of the Islamic tradition. My inquiry registers a political crisis and a corresponding demand to elaborate all social and political phenomena according to Islam. I demonstrate a twofold dynamic that characterizes the practice of translation in the context of this demand: first, as the instrumental replication of European concepts and discourses in Islamic garb, the creation of an Islamic *Republic*, Islamic *social sciences*, Islamic *diplomacy*, Islamic *cinema*, and Islamic *self-help*; and second, as a quest for an opening wherein the present limitations of Islamic politics are debated and metabolized within the body of the tradition. In its second operation, translation addresses the conflation of Islamic tradition, national culture, and statecraft along with a specifically Iranian formation of the Islamic state, or what Wael Hallaq has recently designated as “an impossible state.”⁵ Thinking through the question of commensurability in the practice of translation, I argue that insofar as post-revolutionary translations elide the historical incommensurability of European discourses, they diminish the capacity of the Shi’i tradition to make sense of its historical circumstance. Instead, they extend a dynamic within the tradition in which, as I will describe, the tradition becomes foreign to itself.

Ethnography plays a crucial role in what I call a historical and anthropological exploration of tradition and translation. Exploration of concepts such as *tradition*, *politics*, and so on, within which entire processes are, according to Friedrich Nietzsche’s formulation, semiotically concentrated, along with exploration of the movement of concepts across discernible histories marked by different traditions and discords, requires moving beyond a search for origin or a clear definition.⁶ It requires bringing to the fore the simultaneities and disharmonies condensed in the historical enactment of a tradition and in the movement of concepts.⁷

As a mode of inquiry, ethnography has the capacity to apprehend and address how concepts and conceptual practices emerge in relation to the demands of a particular historical situation. I use it to assemble what

Walter Benjamin noted as a “force field” within which concepts are shot through with actuality beyond their rationalization and without their mythologization.⁸ While addressing the dispersion and contraction of the Islamic tradition in postrevolutionary Iran, my ethnography follows the movement of the concept of political theology as it enters the languages, silences, and grammars of Iran’s postrevolutionary history and as it participates in the movements of a shared historical life. What I put forth as arguments are attempts at a critical exposition of this shared life that are internal to my ethnographic exchange. With a foot in anthropological discourse, they also belong to the Shi’i tradition of disputation that my interlocutors and I inherit and extend in its contemporary fragmentation.

A Postrevolutionary Space of “Islamic Knowledge”

In the *Ilahiyat-i Siyasi* seminar, Professor Q repeatedly asks his students, “Inja chah etefagh-i oftadah?” (“What has happened here?”). Week after week, with an urgency characteristic of religious sermons, he looks at his students around an oval conference table and asks, “Who are we? Where are we standing? What are we doing? Are we the kinds of people that we think we are?” Venturing toward an answer, he points his students to modern European meditations on “political theology.” He states, “Westerners have been asking these questions and remaking themselves by exploring their *ilahiyat-i siyasi*. It is time for us to consider our political theology.”

The university where the seminar takes place is one of Tehran’s top centers of higher education. Like all other Iranian universities, it operates under the auspices of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. It was founded after the three-year period, from 1980 to 1983, when all universities were closed, during which Islamic activists purged forms of thought that they deemed at odds with virtues of revolutionary Islam and the newly founded Islamic government.

Professor Q was one of the first recipients of a PhD in political science in the postrevolutionary period. In conjunction with his academic training, he has studied in various religious schools and seminaries, including Anjoman-e Hojjatieh, the traditionalist Shi’i religious association that is notorious for its strict adherence to orthodoxy, its vigilance toward *bed’at* (innovation, heresy), and its ardent activism. His association with this organization and his work with Shi’i revolutionaries in the late 1970s have served as guarantors of his commitment to the values of the Cultural Revolution and paved the way for his prominence as a scholar of Islam and

politics in the last three decades. Today, Professor Q is a respected academic and a renowned public intellectual. His books, public lectures, and media appearances attract the attention of academics and the public alike. He has cultivated a wide network of former students who teach across Iranian universities and conduct research in seminary research institutes such as the Islamic Center for Human Rights in Qom.

Ilahiyat-i Siyasi, the name Professor Q has chosen for his seminar, is not a standard course title or even a very familiar phrase. It has emerged in Iran by way of the translation of the term *political theology* over the course of the last decade. During this time, Iranian thinkers became aware of the Euro-American discourses of political theology and particularly the attention Euro-American critical theorists paid to Schmitt's theorization of sovereignty.⁹

The German jurist and political theorist Schmitt (1888–1985) reexamined the modern concepts of the state in light of the destruction of traditional political institutions and the great historical transformations of European society in the nineteenth century. In the background of his thinking, moreover, were the attempts by legal practitioners in France and Germany to address the legitimacy of newly conceived liberal democratic states.¹⁰ Schmitt's experiences of political crises in the interwar period, including his own country's transition from the Wilhelmine era (1890–1918) and the Weimar period (1919–33) to National Socialism (1933–45), led him to theorize political authority in a way that does not rely on a preconstituted social or legal order. In his 1922 essay *Politische Theologie (Political Theology)*, he criticized liberal political theory for its attempt to stabilize sovereignty in the operation of general legal norms and for failing to acknowledge the problematic of the interpretation and application of the law. He argued, instead, that “the sovereign is the authority who decides on the exception” wherein “the exception” disentangles the institution of sovereignty from any given norm or law, whether historically, sociologically, or metaphysically construed.¹¹

In *Political Theology*, Schmitt drew a parallel between modern political theory and the works of earlier Christian-Catholic theologians with his well-known thesis that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.”¹² Not only have political concepts been transferred from the domain of theology to the modern theory of the state, he observed, but the two discourses also have the same systematic structure. He suggested that the excep-

tion in modern juridical theory was analogous to miracle, since both concepts assume a higher power authorized to act in this world by drawing on an otherworldly or extraconstitutional source of authority.

Schmitt's work is controversial because of his criticism of liberalism and his advocacy for National Socialism. The debates surrounding his works, however, are contained within small circles in the academy in Europe and the United States. In Iran, his works have recently garnered a more popular appeal. In the last decade, *The Nomos of the Earth*, *The Concept of the Political*, *Political Romanticism*, and *Political Theology* have become available in Persian. As part of a larger popular interest in European social theory, there have emerged public seminars on Schmitt and particularly on the theme of political theology.¹³ Intellectuals of various persuasions and even news services such as BBC Persian have come to use political theology in reference to Islamic politics.¹⁴

Professor Q's seminar is part of the Iranian uptake of political theology. It is composed of fifteen PhD students, three of them women, who range in age from mid-twenties to late-forties. They are all enrolled in the PhD program in the Department of Political Science, specializing in the subfields of political thought, Iran, or Islam. This means that they have not only ranked highly in a challenging nationwide PhD qualification exam and prevailed in the “scientific selection” process in this specific department but also passed the infamous *gozinesh* (selection) process that, according to the criteria set by the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, tests the applicants' commitment to Islam as well as to the Islamic politics of the state.¹⁵

Among the students, five men have had or are concurrently perusing seminary education. In addition to the fifteen students enrolled in the course, Professor Q has opened the seminar to a number of advanced graduate students from other universities and to some of his former students. In the first session of the seminar, he explained that he has personally vetted this group because he had a particular type of interlocutor in mind, the *bachchah musalman-ha* and *basiji-ha*, literally, “Muslim children” and “the mobilized.” These are expressions that indicate earnest and pious adherence to Shi'ism and to the dominant narrative of the Islamic revolution and the Islamic Republic. These terms, as invoked in the class, group together—not without eliding contentious differences—activists of the Islamic revolution and the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88) with contemporary activists who are mobilized by the state in domestic and international political campaigns.

Though the majority of the students are not active partisans of the Islamic Republic, most of them positively, if not fervently, praise the Islamic Republic and consider it as the modern enactment of *madinat al-nabi*, “the Prophet’s city.” Three of the students lost family members in the Iran-Iraq war—they are *khanevadegan-i shuhada* (families of the martyrs)—while three others are employees of state institutions. In addition to their shared political commitment, they are also familiar with the textual archive, the interpretive sciences, and the modes of the cultivation and transmission of the Shi’i tradition. They follow Professor Q as he embodies the seminarians’ mode of teaching and as he draws on this shared tradition to address questions of common significance.

Professor Q describes his course as a *dars-i kharij*, or “a lesson of the outside.” *Kharij* is conventionally defined as “outside.” Within the paradigm of Shi’i education, *kharij* refers to the highest level of coursework in the seminaries.¹⁶ It is usually led by a cleric of the highest rank, who is called *marja’-i taqlid*, “a source of emulation,” a model of ethical conduct. In a *dars-i kharij*, the *maraj’-i taqlid* considers a question that has no set precedent within the archive of the tradition and thus, by virtue of being “outside” it, requires elaboration. In order to conduct a *kharij*, the source of emulation would use the four sources of reasoning: the Quran, (the Revelation), hadith (prophetic sayings), *aql* (reason), and *ijma* (consensus). He would elaborate the new case and bring the authority of the tradition to bear on the question at hand.¹⁷ This pedagogy is designed to transmit to the apprentices the practice of *ijtihad*, which encompasses both authoritative judgment and renewal, since by extending an authoritative judgment on a new case, the tradition itself is renewed.¹⁸

Both Professor Q and his students are quite accustomed to this style of pedagogy, popularized by lay clerics who emulate it in mosques, in wedding and funeral rituals, and on national TV and radio stations where they offer sermons or advice. Professor Q draws on this shared practice in order to create a radically modern *kharij* in the space of the Islamic university. Aware of Euro-American debates on political theology and his students’ curiosity about them, he refers to his course as a “*kharij* on Islamic political theology.” In addition to the textualities of the Islamic tradition, his *kharij* is indebted to the translation of the concept as well as to references regarding political theology. In translating “political theology” as *ilahiyat-i siyasi*, in other words, he strives to reactivate the imaginative capacities of the tradition and

deduce an authoritative judgment for what he perceives as unprecedented social and political realities.

What are the consequences, then, when the four sources of reasoning—the Quran, hadith, *aql*, and *ijma*—are mobilized in a neoscholastic form and in a seminar such as Professor Q’s, in which the writings of Schmitt and Levinas, among other European modern texts in political theology, are read and discussed? Specifically, how do European texts and concepts emerge in the terrain of Iranian history and in relation to the Islamic tradition, and what possibilities do their translation engender and foreclose? What is the place of the translation of European thought in the staging and analysis of Islamic politics?¹⁹

A *Kharij* on Islamic Political Theology

Mr. Moradi, one of the students in Professor Q’s seminar, delivers a presentation on Schmitt’s *Political Theology*. He has a printout of the English edition of the text and a notebook in front of him on the table. The margins of his English printout are full of annotations of the Persian translations of English terms that he has looked up in the dictionary. As a PhD student, he needs to be able to read and work through texts in English. He has learned the English language at the Iran Language Institute (Kanoon-i Zaban-i Iran), which prior to the revolution was part of the Iran-America Society. While looking down at the printout, Moradi elaborates the Schmittian theses on secularization and sovereignty.

After a brief discussion of Schmitt’s formulations, students go silent as Professor Q starts to speak. He tells the students that the modern debate on political theology emerged in the West in part in relation to the experience of Auschwitz and the gulag: “Is it possible, or how is it possible, to talk about God, about good and evil, about incarnation, or about the teachings of Christ after these events? How is it possible to conceive of ‘friendship’ or ‘the neighbor’ after the Holocaust? Is the Jew the neighbor? How about the Muslim? What about Asians, women, marginalized groups? Here is where political theology emerged in the West.” Professor Q tells the students, “The discourse of political theology emphasizes that theology is not neutral or subjective, personal or individual. It has something to do with society, with politics. What is the relation between theology and freedom of speech, violence against women and pornography? What is the relation between political theology and workers’ movements and class struggle? These were some of the questions in the background of politico-theological discourses in the West.” He

continues developing this line of questioning in reference to Schmitt and also to Levinas and more recent writings on political theology from US and British academic publishers.²⁰ He concludes by loosely situating these works in the context of twentieth-century European political crises, and in contrast he turns to Iran and its social and political ills.

In the oratorical style of a sermon yet in the form of a lecture, he continues: “Our own Islamic society, which we have created and speak of as an Islamic state, has its own many problems. Evils abound: cultural schisms, class divides, and political dead-ends are numerous.” He offers the state statistics on divorce, addiction, and suicide, and tells his students that during the two hours that they spend together every week, thirty to forty of their brothers and sisters die of drug overdose. He references the widespread corruption of the officials of the Islamic state and the entanglement of Shi’i revolutionary virtues with consumerism and geopolitics. He states that, on one hand, the state-controlled television and radio channels promote the virtue of *basij* (ethical mobilization), but on the other hand, they advertise, *ad nauseam*, potato chips and mobile SIM cards: “It is as if today, our ethically mobilized brothers and sisters are mobilized not by the pursuit of virtues but by the advertisement of potato chips and an extra free 20 percent capacity on a SIM card.”

In 2014, when Professor Q delivered his lecture, the Iranian state had mobilized the *basij*—a militant Islamic organization that was assembled shortly after the revolution to defend Iran from Iraq—as part of the present Iranian interventions in Iraqi and in Syrian wars. The virtues internal to the cultivation of the *basij* are *jihad* and *shahadat*, mobilizations “to struggle with” and for “bearing witness to” injustice.²¹ In his *kharij*, Professor Q wanted students to “struggle with” and “bear witness to” the fact that these virtues have been enlisted in the state’s geopolitical calculations and have thus lost their spiritual qualities; that, in the context of the market economy and geopolitics, the virtuous are now bought and sold as commodities or recruited in geopolitical campaigns instead of as offerings to God.

In addition to references to political theology, translations of a variety of other Euro-American sources were brought to bear on the loss of Islamic revolutionary virtues. In the course of the seminar, Professor Q draws on unexpected sources such as the Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami and a lesser-known American political scientist, Ronald Inglehart, to denote what he will paradoxically and somewhat ironically charac-

terize as the Westerner’s “participation in God’s creation” and the Iranians’ spiritual immobility. He invokes Murakami’s memoir on the experience of running and Inglehart’s *Cultural Shifts in Advanced Industrial Societies* to suggest that in a period of relative stability after the Second World War, Westerners have moved beyond satisfying their material needs and toward spiritual self-realization. He notes that Westerners’ travel and love for running and sports, their diverse expressions of gender and sexuality, their new forms of queer kinship, and their care for animals and other sentient beings are signs of Westerners’ participation in divine creation. *In translation*, he interprets these sources as the sign of Westerners’ full realization of their God-given potentials and desires, renewal of the sacred institution of the family, and care for God’s creations. He asks, “Is it possible that people in the secular West are taking part in God’s creation and we are stuck in our material needs? Is it possible that our present Islamic theology bars us from participating in God’s creation, that our religion, bereft of virtues and spirituality, is reduced to a sense of security and calm, precisely because it is security and calm that our historical situation denies?”

Some of the students are visibly burdened by the professor’s sermon-like lecture. They feel hurt. In their interventions and gestures, they show their unease with what is being expressed in class. They are compelled by the association of the Islamic tradition with the social and political maladies that they feel and experience, an association that is importantly enabled in the space of the translation of, albeit selective, European texts. The difficulty of enduring the conversations of the seminar is not lost on their teacher. Professor Q emphasizes his affinity with the students’ unease by recalling his own experience of pious activism and maintains that he does not seek to devalue the Islamic tradition or the history and the memory of the revolution:

Before our Islamic revolution I was in my early twenties. I, along with many Muslim kids of my generation, felt and thought that we need to change our society and end the reign of [Pahlavi] despotism. We thought we need a revolution against the evils of the monarchy and for the virtues of Islam. If anyone asked us how, we had ready-made answers—loss of piety, lack of spirituality, humility, friendship, egalitarianism, justice. After the success of the revolution we encountered a crisis when our personal and social challenges did not disappear. We said, OK, we need to work and develop solutions for the problems that are not simply about the institutions and structure of the state and society but about culture

in general. While some brothers devoted themselves to the front lines of Holy Defense [the Iran-Iraq War], we devoted our efforts to a cultural revolution. To continue our revolutionary struggle we rushed to the cultural and intellectual centers—and *I was one of those who did this*. We studied diligently in the seminaries. We worked hard in the universities and in various government ministries. Our challenges, however, did not subside. They only intensified and became more apparent. We wanted Islam to solve our problems. When it didn't, we said the solution is *Islam-i Muhammadi* [Muhammadian Islam] and not *Islam-i Amrika-e* [American Islam]. When *Islam-i Muhammadi* didn't do it, we emphasized *Islam-i nab-i Muhammadi* [Pure Muhammadian Islam]. Our problems, again, did not resolve but further magnified.

I understand your unease. I don't mean to defame our tradition and our history, the sacrifices of our brother and sisters. It is indeed for this history and for these sacrifices that I think we need to ask what has happened here. After a historical revolution, after all the efforts made in the name of Islam, it is our duty to ask what has happened.

Encountering *Vali-i faqih*

Each session of the seminar proceeds with a student-led presentation on a European thinker of political theology. Professor Q and the other students gradually join in elaborating the preoccupations and contributions of the author under examination. Swiftly, however, Professor Q guides the conversation to one about the history and the politics of Islamic revolution and the Islamic Republic. His account of the revolution and of the post-revolutionary period, such as the one cited above, are not without omissions. Absent are the histories and voices of those critical of the Islamic politics that he recounts. What interests me here, however, is the work of his retelling and the place of translation therein. In a space opened by the translation of Schmitt and Inglehardt, among others, and in a pedagogical mode that reflects the transformation and dispersion of the Shi'i tradition of the cultivation of knowledge in the post-revolutionary period, Professor Q seeks to transmit the history and the memory of the Islamic revolution and to renew the virtues of Islamic activism. At the same time, however, he seeks to open a space for what can be described as a critical analysis of the Islamic politics of revolution and the state and to reckon with the transformation of the virtues of Islamic politics into something other than themselves.

Almost all conversations in the course revolve around the conflation of religious authority and polit-

ical power in the Islamic Republic. Central to this conflation is the Shi'i idea of *vilayat-i faqih* (*wilayat al-faqih*, in Arabic), "the guardianship of the jurist," that was completed and put in practice when the jurist Ayatollah Khomeini assumed political power in 1979 and became the arbiter of all matters of government in Iran. As Roy Mottahedeh has noted, the background of *vilayat-i faqih* lies in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century development of Twelver Shi'i thought that bestowed high-ranking clerics—*mujtahids*—with the exclusive right to interpret Islamic law.²² The lay Shi'i are obliged to choose one among the few *mujtahids* who have risen to the highest ranks of *marja-i taqlid* for the discernment of the law and as a reference for their everyday conduct. The *marja-i taqlid* assume the worldly authority of the Twelfth Imam, the last of the infallible Shi'i imams. They can do so because at present humanity lives in the period of the "Great Occultation," wherein the Twelfth Imam is unable to guide the community directly because his presence is occulted to them.

Drawing on this intellectual background and shared sociality, Khomeini drew on his authority as a *marja-i taqlid* and asserted that it was incumbent upon Muslims to establish an Islamic government and upon the jurists to follow the model of the Prophet and of the infallible imams and assume political leadership. While within earlier developments of Shi'i thought, and in Khomeini's early writings on Islamic government, the exercise of authority in matters of politics was distributed among the different "sources of emulation," Khomeini's final formulation of *vilayat-i faqih* shrank this distribution by arguing that it was incumbent upon *all people*, including those capable of interpreting Islamic law by themselves, to follow the one jurist who assumed leadership of the Islamic government.

Since the revolution, the authority of Khomeini's jurisprudence, coupled with the force of the state that it helped inaugurate, has sustained the albeit contentious conflation of religious authority and political power under the person of *vali-i faqih*. Khomeini, who assumed this position after the revolution, saw himself as responsible for all matters of government. In turn, Professor Q, who looked to Khomeini for discernment of the law, heeded his leadership as if it were that of the Prophet. When Khomeini turned his attention to the domain of national education and decreed that the universities be transformed into a space for the cultivation of Islamic higher education, Professor Q devoted himself to this task and rose to prominence. Today, however, the project of Islamic higher education, along

with the engagement with European meditations on religion and politics that it has brought about, has had a paradoxical effect. It has moved this follower of Khomeini to rethink his commitment to the Islamic politics of revolution and the state and has invited a new generation of Islamic thinkers to reconsider the religious and political attachments that they inherit and extend.²³

Professor Q's seminar brings together classical Islamic discourses and modern European meditations on politics and religion to consider questions that exceed the immediate politics of the Islamic Republic. In different sessions and in relation to different texts, the seminarian-academics consider, for example, questions about the nature of God's knowledge: "What is the nature of God's knowledge and how is it discernable by men?"; about time and history: "Is it possible that God's knowledge includes a vision of a political system that is timeless?"; about God's will: "Has God willed a plan for the universe and is this plan presently unfolding? Does God's will pertain to generalities or particularities?"; about good and evil: "If God's will is indeed limited to generalities, what is the nature of good and evil that is willed by God?"

Translating the Sovereign

It is in part by drawing on Schmitt that Professor Q identifies "Islamic political theology" as the source of limitations of contemporary Islamic politics. In this process, Schmitt's formulation of the sovereign enters into the interpretive practices of Islamic tradition and into a process of commensuration with *vali-i faqih*. Is the *vali-i faqih* "the authority who decides on the exception," "the power that makes live or lets die"?²⁴ Or is he the leader of the pious in the interim of Occultation of the Twelfth Imam and, as such, the continuity of Imam whose authority descends from the Prophet himself and is distributed in the tradition today?²⁵ Does he "let live," or does he represent the political life of the tradition?

Note that in this context, Schmitt, among other European thinkers, is not simply read as one meditation on sovereignty among others. He is read as part of an *ijtihad* on Islamic politics. The pious students and seminarians might struggle with Schmitt to reckon with the ethical and political status of the state within which they live, for which they bear arms or endure the burden of, among other things, various international interventions or regimes of pressure or sanctions. Does their tradition bind them to the *vali-i faqih*? Or, alternatively, does the tradition require them to struggle against the

vali-i faqih and the Islamic state, which not only is a worldly idol but also has usurped the name of the tradition? What insights might Schmitt provide?

In placing the Shi'i tradition and modern European discourses in relation, Professor Q and the students in the seminar are forced to move between distinct forms of knowledge and to traverse the boundaries between one form and its other. For example, the students discuss the genesis of Shi'i Islam and the wars of succession by drawing on both *hadith* and *ravayat* or authoritative accounts as well as on Wilfred Madelung's 1997 *The Succession of Muhammad*, a history of the early years of the caliphate. The authority of *hadith* and *ravayat* and a text of contemporary historiography are established through different sciences of reading and interpretation. They rely on different conventions of time and history and enact different traditions of knowledge. The practices of seminarian-academics, however, enforce a relation of commensurability between a text from the "outside" and a mode of reasoning "within the tradition."

Elision of Incommensurability

The seminar proceeds by eliding the incommensurability of the Islamic tradition with the European texts and concepts that it draws into its fold through reading and translation. While Schmitt is brought within a reading practice that is deeply indebted to the tradition and in this sense is read as a part of the tradition, the historical difference of his formulation is absorbed into the historical enactment of the tradition without any elaboration. It is presupposed that Schmitt's representations are historically commensurable with the discourses of the Islamic tradition. The historical incommensurability that is elided therein is one that does not merely pertain to the origin and genealogy of the historical-philosophical discourses of political theology and the Islamic tradition, as both are historically related and relatable. Crucially, however, the historical incommensurability between the seminarians and political theology pertains to different traditions of thinking and acting, different curations of sociality, and discernibly contrasting perceptions of time and space.²⁶ In other words, what is not addressed in the space of the seminar is that the semantic differences that demand translation are meaningful in respect to representations of different worlds, the language games that construct these worlds, and the distributions of power and formations of authority that sustain them. Elision of incommensurability, in this context, relates to the simultaneous expansion of one world and the contraction of the other.

The example of the effort to translate *Political Theology* in the space of the seminar demonstrates the adverse consequences of translating authors and texts while remaining inattentive to historical incommensurability for the possibility of *ijtihad* and renewal of the tradition. In the process of making sense of Islamic politics and practices with the heuristic of Schmitt's representations of the political, the interpretive practices of Shi'i jurists that elaborated and gave form to *velayat-i faqih*—in part with reliance on the authority of tradition—become conceptually available as an embodiment of Schmitt's sovereign. By conceptualizing the political leader of the Islamic Republic as the embodiment of Schmitt's theorization of the sovereign, my interlocutors sidestep engaging in the debates of and between the *marja'i taqlid* that culminated with Khomeini's postulation of *velayat-i faqih*. In enacting the tradition, they address "the tradition" from the outside through Schmitt's categories of political thought and the histories and traditions that are sedimented therein. In this process, "the tradition" is not simply renewed but is transformed and rendered into something foreign to itself.

That is not all, however. Seminarian-academics fail to address the historical conditions of possibility and the attendant background of Shi'i juridical debates concerning politics and statecraft insofar as they participate in discussions about *velayat-i faqih* with Schmitt's categories and within modern European political historiography more generally. For example, they do not attend to the history of the decline of kingship in Iran and the weakening of the institution of monarchy that had dominion over what until the early twentieth century was referred to as *Mamalek-e Mahruse-ye Iran* (the Protected Domain of Iran). In the history of the decline of the institution of monarchy, the earlier distribution of political authority between kings and clerics was disrupted and created the conditions in which the clerical establishment ascended to political power. In and around the 1906 Constitution Revolution, jurisprudential debates about the possibility of a constitutional monarchy unfolded within this broader history and culminated with Khomeini's postulation of *velayat-i faqih*. However, whereas the former attempted to find a balance between political and religious authority, the latter collapsed that distinction.²⁷ Notwithstanding the complexity and richness of the history noted, the seminarian-academics and practitioners of Islamic knowledge render it obscure and forgotten when they elide the historical incommensurability between the Shi'i *vali* and the Schmittian sovereign.

Islam and Politics sans History

The seminarian-academics' translation of the European discourse of political theology and the elision of incommensurability therein echo larger intellectual trends that predate the twentieth-century politics of Islamic reform and revolution. As the Iranian political philosopher Javad Tabatabai has shown, in the context of Iran's devastating defeats in the Perso-Russian wars of the nineteenth century and the attendant rise in awareness of political decline, there emerged a new class of thinkers who were not trained in the Shi'i seminaries or through the Iranian court.²⁸ Known as the *roshanfekr* (enlightened thinkers), they drew on their readings and translations of predominantly European thought to make sense of and address what they perceived as the social and political crises of their time. Tabatabai, who critically studies the history of *roshanfekri*, shows that this form of thinking, which coheres by selectively deploying European categories and currents of thought, fails to directly relate to the particular development of Iranian history and the Islamic tradition. Instead, and in part through failing to critically mediate between the historiography of religion and politics in Europe and in Iran, it imposes an ideological understanding of Iranian history and Islamic tradition.

Tabatabai situates Islamic revolutionaries and reformists such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati as part of this intellectual history. The two revolutionaries were both born into clerical families and were destined to be trained as clerics. However, they both left their religious upbringing for academic training in Iran's nascent university system. Shariati continued his studies at the Sorbonne in Paris, while Al-e Ahmad drew from his travels in Europe and in America as well as from the experiences and studies of his long-term partner, the author Simin Daneshvar at Stanford University in California. In their intellectual and political activities, Shariati and Al-e Ahmad both read and engaged with critical traditions of European thought, including Marxism and existentialism, as well as twentieth-century discourses of anticolonial liberation that had emerged within the colonies of European powers. Al-e Ahmad was a translator of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre, while Shariati translated segments of Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* and Sartre's *What Is Literature?*²⁹

Al-e Ahmad and Shariati have been celebrated as anti-imperialists and revolutionaries by some and condemned as nativist ideologues by others. My interest is not in their particular intellectual and political project

or the outcome of these projects; rather, I consider how in their encounter with European thought they failed to consider the specificities of Iranian history and the Islamic tradition. Both thinkers, instead, imagined Iran as one nation among many and contributed to the refashioning of Islam as Iran's national culture. The Cultural Revolution and the contemporary quest for modern Islamic knowledge in Iran are part of this project of national re-creation. What I have tried to show is how translation, and specifically the elision of incommensurability in translation, sustains this project and in turn extends an Islamic politics that is predicated upon a historical amnesia.³⁰

Incorporating Difference?

Earlier, while discussing Professor Q's diagnosis of the degeneration of the virtues of Islamic politics, I mentioned that some students were made uneasy by the professor's suggestion. Now, I would like to consider the embodied and affective responses of seminarian-academics as a crucial site where differences that remain unspoken and disavowed in the debates of the seminar and in the discourse of the Cultural Revolution more generally are registered and acknowledged.

Students often reported that the seminar caused them pain, headaches, and sleeplessness. In the inseparable registers of language and the body, expressions of unease and disquiet were observable throughout the seminar. Though the students were for the most part at ease with Professor Q's line of questioning about the limitations of the contemporary politics of revolution and reform in Iran and elsewhere, they responded strongly to his insistence that such limitations were the consequence of deeply embodied theological discourses and habits of the Islamic tradition. For example, they were resistant to his questioning of the miraculous nature of the Islamic revelation and the significance of Arabic language in his engagement with modern theories of language and hermeneutics. They were alarmed when he sought to divorce the interpretation of hadith and ravyat from *ilm al-rijal* and *dirayat al-hadith*, the Islamic interpretive sciences that concern "the chain of transmission" and "the textuality" of narrations, and in turn attempted to historicize the sayings of the Prophet and the imams as well as other authoritative sources by employing the methods of modern historiography.

The students struggled to negotiate the discontent they felt with respect to Professor Q's questioning of the received truths of the Islamic tradition and their reverence for their guide. Instead of responding,

the students would often withdraw from the conversation and cast their gaze downward. They would sometimes shake their heads in discontent. As if they had committed a reprehensible act, they would abruptly declare "Astaghfiru l-lah," an expression of shame, and seek forgiveness from God. As if the conversation had undermined their sense of self and in order to end the conversations and reconstitute themselves, they would utter the opening of the Shahada—"La ilaha illa Allah," "There is no god but God."

In the very first session of the seminar, Mr. Salehi, an advanced seminarian who was familiar with the professor's thinking about Islam and politics, had told the class that they should be ready for a demanding and difficult engagement:

I have been listening to the commentaries [of Professor Q] for some years now and I am still struggling with them. When I first heard the professor's suggestions I became sleepless for nights. I had to read a lot of literature, review commentaries, and seek advice both here in the university but also elsewhere. It's been very difficult and demanding for me to enter a conversation about Islamic political theology. I am torn and don't know where I stand in relation to the suggestions of Professor Q. Some of the [professor's] conclusions are very worrisome and difficult for me to accept. But I am also convinced that they are reasoned observations that I need to hear. Professor Q has the best intentions for us. This is why I am back. I think I need to hear them again and *ba tavakol beh khoda* [relying on God's grace], develop a better response to the professor's suggestions. Ultimately, I think these exercises increase our *taqva* [piety] and *tuhid* [orientation toward the unity of God]; however, I really want to urge brothers and sisters to consider the difficulty and the demand of this seminar and come prepared, for it can be very *dard-nak* [painful]; it could produce *ya's va parishani* [hopelessness and disorientation].

I am thinking of the embodied and affective responses of my interlocutors in relation to contemporary studies that treat the body and the psyche in relation to historical operations of power and as sites where capacities and sensibilities with ethical and political significance take shape or disintegrate.³¹ The work of Talal Asad is particularly instructive here, for it considers the questions of tradition, discursivity, and embodiment together.³² Asad and Saba Mahmood have explored the question of embodiment in relation to contemporary enactments of the Islamic tradition and have drawn attention to forms of injury that could only be conceived once we take note of it.³³ These anthropolog-

ical elaborations of the body as a site of the inscription of a discourse or a tradition with distinct rules and of the sedimentation of time and history offers a point of departure to explore the embodied dimension of translation as a practice that traverses multiple discourses, traditions, and histories. It helps us ask, what are the embodied and affective dimensions of the linguistic, textual, and intellectual practices of reading, interpretation, and translation of texts that are in a language foreign from one's own and that belong to a tradition and a history different from those orienting one's thinking and practice? How does the body or the psyche, the site of cultivated sensibilities of a tradition and a distinct historical experience, register and respond to difference in a text or a textual practice? How does it reckon with historical incommensurability as it is brought forth in the practices of translation?

The affective and embodied responses of my interlocutors refer back to the simultaneities and disharmonies that condition the historical enactment of the Islamic tradition in post-revolutionary Iran. They register the contemporaneity of multiple and incommensurable discourses of knowledge as they have been politicized in the Cultural Revolution and in the modern Islamic politics of reform and revolution more generally. Professor Q's *kharij* opens the corpus of the tradition to its "outside" to expand the domain of Islamic knowledge. In a space of translation, he and his students seek to activate the imaginative capacities of the tradition and consider what they perceive as the limitations of contemporary Islamic politics. Their *ijtihad* on such limitations and hence the renewal of the tradition is preempted, however, when they fail to address the incommensurability of contemporaneous and distinct forms of knowledge. Instead, the difference of "the outside" is incorporated (*corporare*, "form into a body") into the body of tradition without any elaboration, rendering the tradition foreign to itself.

The seminarian-academics' expressions of unease are indicative of the incorporation of the difference that is not elaborated in the space of translation. If the professor's *kharij* and the translation of European authors and texts therein can be likened to a surgical opening of the body of the tradition for the purpose of its regeneration, the elision of incommensurability transforms it into the cause of an injury on the body of the tradition. The tradition's capacity to open to its outside collapses into a form of exposure to the outside and the creation of an open wound. The professor, too, is attentive to the difficulty of this surgical operation for his interlocu-

tors. His practice of listening and his ethos of patience acknowledge the pain of the incision underway. He fails, however, to "get outside" the wound that he has helped open, and it is the pain of his interlocutors tarrying with the outside that marks this failure.

Relating in Pain

If the practices of translation that I have highlighted here can be conceived as the crystallization of simultaneous and yet disharmonious times and tradition, the pain and the struggles of my interlocutors can be viewed as the contemporary modality of relating to the tradition.³⁴ There could be a range of attitudes toward pain. Throughout the seminar, most students registered their struggles with Professor Q's practices of translation and transmission with expressions of their willingness to listen and enter into a conversation with him. Their willingness to do so was an embodiment of the Cultural Revolution's confidence in the possibility of the *boomisazi* (nativization) and *islami-sazi* (Islamicization) of Western forms of knowledge and of the production of Islamic social and human sciences. However, a few rejected the idea that these texts and debates were necessary for the creation of modern Islamic knowledge or that European thought in general could help remedy Iran's religious and political predicaments.

A noteworthy example occurred during a discussion about Schmitt in response to a student who described the political authority of the current leader of the Islamic Republic, the *vali-i faqih* Ayatollah Khomeini, as generic, arbitrary, and independent of the virtues of the Islamic tradition. Ms. Haeri broke the silence that followed this student's claim by acknowledging the difficulty of considering the *vali-i faqih* as the incarnation of the Schmittian sovereign. She asserted, however,

We need to read these texts and learn from the way [Westerners] engage with their history and traditions. Even if it produces questions that are difficult and to which we have no answers, our *din* [religion] and *iman* [piety] demands of us to hear these views and adjudicate between them. We cannot be religious without questioning, without *naqd* [critique], without *ijtihad* [struggle for authoritative judgments]. My convictions are only stronger as the result of discussions such as these.

Mr. Amin, a tall and generally quiet young man, immediately professed, "Astaghfiru l-lah.":

But why are we engaging in these philosophical discourses? Philosophy belongs to the West. What does it have to do with us? I have been reading various texts of

Islamic and Western philosophy and examining the history of both. Philosophy simply obscures our own tradition and our own way of life [seyre]. Today, many Western thinkers *themselves* argue that the time of philosophy is over. It doesn't even matter in the West anymore! Today, in our Islamic society, philosophy is coming in the way of our *jariyan-i asli* [our mainstream]; it only adds to our questions, difficulties and headaches!

"What is the mainstream?" Ms. Haeri asked, looking directly at Mr. Amin. Without looking back, and keeping his gaze on other male students in the room, Mr. Amin responded:

Hamin din-i ma, sunnat-i ma, Islam [This religion of ours, our tradition, Islam]. I know and admit that there are many questions and challenges for us within this tradition of ours. But we simply add to these questions and exacerbate our challenges by introducing philosophy, be it of the Islamic kind of Khaje Nasir Tusi and Farabi or of the modern Western kind of Carl Schmitt and others who we read today. Philosophy and *din* [religion] simply don't go together.

"Is this what al-Ghazali says?" another student asked. Yet another responded jokingly, "This view is closer to Abd al-Wahhab." There ensued a short conversation among students about al-Ghazali's (1058–1111) and Ibn Taymiyyah's (1263–1328) views on philosophy and the boundaries of the tradition as well as their respective renderings of Islamic reform and politics. Mr. Amin rejects the association of his views with those of Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92) and Ibn Taymiyyah, who in the context of the discussion are understood to strictly and politically define the bounds of tradition, inviting accusations of blasphemy and apostasy. The modern forms of Islamic militancy that invoke Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Taymiyyah are in the background of the conversation. In the context of contemporary Iran, where "Taliban's Islam" is used as a damning shorthand to signify closedness, backwardness, and fundamentalism, one of the students suggests that Mr. Amin's narrow definition of Islam and his rejection of philosophy are "Taliban-like": "We all know our neighbor's *islam-i taleban-i*. It is the Taliban that is closed off to the world."

In response, Mr. Amin swiftly rejects the association of his position with that of the Taliban: "No! I follow Imam Hussein's dictum," and he cites a hadith from *Bahar-al Anvar*, the most comprehensive collection of hadith among the Shi'i, in which the Imam tells his opponents, "If you have no religion, and if you do not fear the day of judgment, at the very least, live with

courage." Mr. Amin continues, "I just worry that reading not only Western philosophers, who are engaged in their own questions and preoccupations, but also reading people from our own tradition who have engaged with classical Greek philosophy such as Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra, or with modern Western thought such as Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Mottahari, only furthers the rifts and divisions of our tradition."

As the conversation continues, Mr. Amin's arguments appear less and less meaningful to his interlocutors. The referents of his vocabulary, "philosophy" and "tradition," for example, are no longer clear or stable. Other students gradually withdraw from the conversation. Their withdrawal registers the anti-intellectual bent of Mr. Amin's propositions as well as his strong reaction to Professor Q's suggestions. The professor, however, tries to address Mr. Amin's objections. Assuming a sympathetic, fatherly voice, he tries to emphasize the history and significance of philosophy in the development of the Islamic tradition. He invites Mr. Amin into a conversation that has a "philosophical" quality. The irony of having a philosophical conversation about the dangers of philosophy is not lost on anyone, including Mr. Amin, who retracts with discontent but with respect.

When I think about what Mr. Amin means by "philosophy," I think he is actually referencing thinking about the Shi'i tradition, a reflexive activity and a process of translation and commensuration that requires adjudicating between the traditions' inside and outside. My sense is that Mr. Amin is really rejecting the developments within the tradition that have opened the practices of *kharij* and *ijtihad* to novel historical challenges, and in doing so, at least in this seminar, have come to reveal the foreignness of the tradition not simply with its outside but also with itself. Mr. Amin is rejecting *history* and not "philosophy." Or to put it differently, his *rejection* of philosophy is the modality of relating to the historical difference that is as much internal as it is external to the enactment of the tradition. In addition to inhabiting this difference in pain and sleeplessness, the demands of the professor's *kharij* conjure rejection as a form of relation. Rejection is perhaps the limit of relating to the pain of the tradition that has become foreign to itself.

The Last Islamic Revolutionary

In his remarkable 1985 study of modern Iran, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, the historian Roy Mottahadeh told the story of a young seminarian who grew up in Qom, stud-

ied with jurists of the highest ranks, including Ayatollah Khomeini, and became a learned scholar of Islam just prior to the revolution. Mottahedeh's informant, Ali Hashemi, beautifully portrayed the cultivation and transmission of Shi'ism as a tradition of practice and debate, of philosophy and law, with the capacity to incorporate and indeed expand different forms of thought such as Persian poetry and mysticism. With the advent of the Islamic revolution, Ali, who was at the time also a professor at Tehran University, left Iran for a life of scholarship in the United States. In the mid-1980s, Mottahedeh and Ali look at the revolutionary transformation of Shi'ism into a program for state making and nation building in Iran.

Although Mottahedeh does not directly state it, Ali Hashemi's move from the seminaries of Qom to an American university signals a crisis of the transmission of Shi'i tradition in the context of the transformations of modern Iran that made the *kharij*, here the geographic "outside" that is the United States, an anchor for a traditionally trained jurist from Qom. The life and words of Professor Q bear witness to the same transformations that came to decenter Shi'ism from seminaries into the political battles of revolutionary Iran. Since the revolution, many Iranian intellectuals who found their thinking at odds with the narrow agenda of the Cultural Revolution have had to follow Ali Hashemi's path to exile. They include those who once advocated for the Cultural Revolution, such as Abdolkarim Soroush, as well as seminarians such as Mohsen Kadivar and Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari. Some have found refuge in the social science departments of Euro-American universities and rendered *in translation* the disciplines of history, political science, and anthropology, among others, a site of the negotiation of Iran's religious and political future. Although they might not consider themselves as political allies of Professor Q and his students, they too negotiate their history and traditions through the rules and categories of historically distant discourses of knowledge and in a political context with demands of its own.

Professor Q is familiar with the life and words of the real man behind Mottahedeh's protagonist Ali Hashemi. He has studied with other seminarians and academics who have faced the contraction of Iranian politics by choosing to leave to the *kharij* of Europe and America. Confronting the same conditions of Islamic politics, Professor Q has turned to a different *kharij*. He translates European discourses to assemble a space "outside" the postrevolutionary crises of religious and political transmission, to conceptualize them, and to

revive, once again, a revolutionary Islam. He guides his students to breathe new life into the tradition, since the postrevolutionary period has made it evidently clear that "the tradition" was not adequate for answering the problems before them on its own.

At times I think of Professor Q as the last Islamic revolutionary standing, an untimely figure in postrevolutionary times. Like his mentor Shariati, he diagnoses a condition of loss of tradition and seeks a return where, in the act of return, the tradition is renewed. The selective reading and translation of European thought that mediates the two thinkers' respective returns to tradition reflect the simultaneities that mark the historical enactment of the tradition. I have tried to bring to focus the disharmonies of this enactment through my study of translation and to show the effects of elision of incommensurability in preemption of renewal and perpetuation of an estranged condition where the tradition is foreign to itself. It is only within such a condition, where the tradition has fallen outside itself and has lost its authority, that it becomes possible to subject it to the *dars-i kharij*. Whether the postrevolutionary seminarian-academics succeed in navigating the different outsides that they face is a question, but it is one that a revolution alone cannot answer and one whose chances dwindle amid renewed geopolitical polarizations.

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Notes

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1. *Gharbzadegi*, translated as "Westoxification," "Westernstruckness," "Occidentosis," and "Plagued by the West," was first put forth by

Ahmad Fardid. It was popularized by Jalal Al-e Ahmad's 1962 essay titled *Gharbzadegi*, in which he diagnosed Iran's cultural condition and particularly the universities as "plagued by the West." "The Return to the Self" is the title of a lecture by Ali Shariati that was first delivered in the late 1960s and became widely circulated in audio and print. My engagement here with Al-e Ahmad's and Shariati's thinking is limited to their contemporary significance for the questions of tradition and translation.

2. The Cultural Revolution was initiated in March 1980 through a decree by Ayatollah Khomeini. The Iranian universities were subsequently closed for a period of three years to be reformed and reopened under the leadership of Islamic activists and seminar-ians. For the history of the Cultural Revolution and the agenda of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution that oversees Iranian universities, see the council's website, en.farhangolm.ir/Home (accessed July 28, 2018).

3. In referencing Shi'i education, I have in mind the tradition of cultivation and transmission of knowledge "from chest to chest" (*az sin-e be sin-e*). As Roy Mottahedeh has observed, knowledge, in this paradigm, is cultivated and passed on from teachers to students through the teachers' exegeses of a text. The significance of "chest to chest" transmission is such that a book that is not studied with a teacher is considered not properly assimilated by students. See Mottahedeh, *Mantle of the Prophet*; Mottahedeh, "Traditional Shi'ite Education in Qom"; and Mottahedeh, "Najaf Hawzah Curriculum." See also Fischer and Abedi, *Debating Muslims*.

4. See, for example, Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*; Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut*; and Mirsepassi, *Political Islam*.

5. See Hallaq, *Impossible State*.

6. "All concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated elude definition; only that which has no history is definable." Nietzsche, *On the Genealogies of Morals*, 80.

7. For a critical historiography of the specific traditions and times that constitute modern Iran as well as of their disharmonies, see Tabatabai, *Meditation on Iran*, vols. 1 and 2.

8. "Every historical state of affairs presented dialectically polarizes and becomes a force field in which the conflict between fore- and after-history plays itself out. It becomes that field as it is penetrated by actuality." Benjamin, "N," 60.

9. Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben, Chantal Mouffe, Seyla Benhabib, and Wendy Brown are leading critical theorists who have engaged Schmitt in their writings.

10. For the background of Schmitt's work, see Bates, "Legitimität and Légalité."

11. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5.

12. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

13. Over the course of 2014, Morad Farhadpour, the leading Persian translator of Euro-American critical theory, offered a number of seminars on Carl Schmitt at the Porsesh Institute of Political and Economic Research in Tehran. Porsesh is a private space of teaching and learning that offers to the paying public seminars by current or purged academics, seminarians, and translators.

14. In July 2016, for example, the BBC's Persian Service published a research essay by commentator Yasir Mirdamadi titled "Ilahiyat-i siyasi usul-garayan be kodam samt miravad?" ("Where Is the Political Theology of Principalists Headed?"), which examined the politi-

cal theology of the so-called conservative current within the Islamic Republic's politics divisions.

15. As it was reported to me, part of this process might include questions about technical aspects of Islamic ritual practice, the students' "sources of emulation," or about their views on *velayat-i faqih* (the guardianship of the jurist) to test their adherence.

16. *Dars-e kharij* is also referred to as *bahs-e kharij* or, in Arabic, *al-bahth al-kharij* (literally, "a discussion of outside") and *kharij az-sutuh* ("beyond the texts" or, more literally, "beyond the surfaces"). "After the set texts, students begin the stage called *al-bahth al-kharij*. In this stage the teacher speaks from a raised bench and pursues for several weeks or months a subject not necessarily treated in the textbooks. He gives a survey of views that support or contradict his own, which he presents last, with the arguments and proofs that he considers decisive. After his talks, students question him and the discussion can become so heated that the professor has to demand quiet. Some few teachers did not encourage much disputation, such as Ayatollah al-Khuy, who taught *al-bahth al-kharij* for sixty years with four to five hundred students at his lectures" (Mottahedeh, "The Najaf Hawzah Curriculum," 345).

17. For a study of time and authority in relation to sharia-based family law courts in contemporary Egypt, see Agrama, *Questioning Secularism*. While Agrama performs an anthropological translation of his ethnographic study into a critical historiography of secularism and sovereignty, *translation* (also of these very concepts) remains a question in my inquiry.

18. Allama al-Hilli (1250–1325), the great Shi'i *mujtahid*, addressed the practice of *ijtihad* in the following terms: "In ordinary language *ijtihad* means 'exerting oneself to the utmost of one's ability in order to accomplish a difficult action,' and in the technical language, 'the jurist exerting himself to the utmost of his ability to attain a probable opinion (*zann*) about a ruling in the Sacred Law.'" Hilli, "Imamate and Ijtihad," 243.

19. For a take on this last question, see Devji, *Terrorist in Search of Humanity*.

20. While Levinas's works have yet to be translated into Persian, his series of interviews with Philippe Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity*, is available in translation. In addition, Raoul Mortley's *French Philosophers in Conversation*, which offers a sketch of Levinas's life and works, is available in translation.

21. Shariati, "Jihad and Shahādat: A Discussion of Shahid"; Abedi and Legenhausen, *Jihād and Shahādat*; Talebi, "Iranian Martyr's Dilemma."

22. Mottahedeh, "Wilāyat al-Faqih"; Mottahedeh, *Mantle of the Prophet*.

23. In part by associating discontented postrevolutionary Islamic thinkers with the late 1990s *eslahat* (reform) political movement and with what at first glance appears a more democratic and liberal Islam, recent studies describe these thinkers as "reformers" and suggest their thinking constitutes reform, innovation, or an "intellectual revolution" within the tradition. Professor Q could be described in these terms. From the point of view of this study, however, insofar as concepts such as reform, innovation, and democracy are not grounded within tradition and in relation to orthodoxy, they have very little explanatory power. See, for example, Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution*; Kamrava, "Iranian Shi'ism"; and Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Islam and Dissent*.

24. The right "to make live and to let die" is Michel Foucault's now-famous formulation of biopolitical sovereignty in *Society Must Be*

Defended. It contrasts with the right “to cause death or let live” that he attributes to classical sovereignty. My question, with that of my interlocutors, is one of translatability of these conceptions of sovereignty across distinct histories and traditions.

25. On the political authority of Shi'i scholars, in addition to Motahedeh, see the entries in Amir Arjomand, *Authority and Political Culture*.

26. Foucault's concept of *episteme*, and nonrelativistic anthropological theorizations of culture such as that of Claude Lévi-Strauss, are examples of ways to conceive of the kind of difference that I have in mind. Foucault, *Order of Things*; Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind*.

27. See Tabatabai, *Meditation on Iran*, vol. 2.

28. Tabatabai, *Meditation on Iran*, vol. 1. On *roshanfekri*, see Ghasemi, *Roshanfekri*. On modern Iranian intellectual culture, see Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals*; and Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*.

29. See Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian*; and Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, for thorough studies of Shariati and Al-e Ahmad, respectively.

30. What I identify and describe as the elision of incommensurability and a forgetful politics is not unique to Iran. Albert Hourani makes similar observations in relation to nineteenth- and twentieth-century reformers such as Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, Khayr al-Din Pasha al-Tunisi, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and Muhammad Abduh. These thinkers set out to prove the compatibility of Islam with the modern European discourses that confronted them, and in the process of translating European concepts and practices into Islamic ones they transformed Islamic concepts and redefined the tradition as a whole. “In this line of thought, *maslaha* gradually turns into utility, *shura* into parliamentary democracy, *ijma'* into public opinion; Islam itself becomes identical with civilization and activity, the norms of nineteenth-century social thought. It was, of course, easy in this way to distort if not destroy the precise meaning of the Islamic concepts, to lose that which distinguished Islam from other religions and even from non-religious humanism” (Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 144).

31. I have in mind the work of contemporary scholars who draw on original insights of Marcel Mauss, Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and psychoanalytic and phenomenological discourses in their approach to the body and the psyche. The work of Talal Asad (*Genealogies of Religion, Formations of the Secular*), William Hanks (*Converting Words*), Charles Hirschkind (*The Ethical Soundscape*), and Saba Mahmood (*Politics of Piety, “Religious Reason”*), whose studies thematize the question of historical difference, emphasize the discursive dimensions of embodiment and of ethical and political subject formation. In different ways, Michel de Certeau (*Heterologies, Mystic Fables, The Possession*), Veena Das (*Life and Words*), David Marriott (*Whither Fanon?*) and Stefania Pandolfo (*Impasse, The Knot*), whose work on the body and the psyche addresses historical transformations and the question of violence, emphasize the limits of discursivity and take that limit as a point of departure of their thinking on ethics and politics. Despite their different approaches, however, these scholars help denaturalize the body and the psyche and consider them as sites of the unfolding of different historical memories and ethical and political tendencies.

32. In a more recent essay, “Thinking about Tradition, Religion, and Politics in Egypt Today,” Asad summarizes the two ways in which the term *tradition* appears in his work: “First, as a theoretical location for raising questions about authority, time, language use, and embodiment; and second, as an empirical arrangement in which discursivity and materiality are connected through the minutiae of everyday living” (166). The studies that background this assess-

ment span three decades and have contributed to a more reflexive turn in anthropology. They move between critical examinations of European categories and modes of inquiry, on one hand, and specific predicaments of Islam and politics on the other, generating new questions and novel ways of thinking anthropologically. In addition to the essay cited above, see, particularly, Asad, “Idea of an Anthropology of Islam”; Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*; Asad, *Formations of the Secular*; Asad, “Muhammad Asad between Religion and Politics”; Asad and Scott, “Trouble of Thinking”; Asad and Bardawil, “Solitary Analyst of Doxas”; Asad and Anjum, “Interview”; and Asad and Iqbal, “Thinking about Method.”

33. Asad, “Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism”; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*; Mahmood, “Religious Reason and Secular Affect”; Brown, Butler, and Mahmood, “Preface, 2013.”

34. For a discussion of pain as a form of relationship and as agentive, *constitutive* of a relationship, see Asad, *Formations*, chap. 2, “Thinking about Agency and Pain.” Asad writes, for example, that when a mother is confronted by her wounded child, the suffering that she experiences is not primarily a reaction to the evidence of the child's injury but indicative of her relationship with the child. See also Veena Das, “Language and Body,” cited in Asad, which similarly moves away from an interpretative paradigm that treats expressions of pain as referential statements and instead draws on Ludwig Wittgenstein to conceive of pain as part of an embodied social relation.

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