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# **The Return of the Volksgemeinschaft**

## ***On Islam and European Identity***

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### **Abstract**

There is a struggle within post-secular Europe over two competing ways of thinking about who and what belongs to Europe. This struggle manifests itself within two competing German concepts of community: *volksgemeinschaft* and *willensgemeinschaft*. The first, defined as the “ethnic community,” argues that what it means to be European is inseparable from Europe’s “pre-political foundations,” i.e. race, language, shared history, shared culture, and memory. The second concept, understood as the “willed community,” is rooted in the universalism of the European Enlightenment; it argues against defining the community by pre-political foundations, and rather advocates an “achieved” nationhood. From the perspective of non-European immigrant Muslims and immigrant descendent Muslims in Europe, their existence as Europeans depends on the latter sense of community, for it is an “achieved” nation that allows their “non-identity” to be wholly assumed within the modern “achieved identity.” Nevertheless, openness to the assimilation of the non-identical is precisely what those who advocate for the *volksgemeinschaft* say will transform Europe into something other than Europe: an amalgamated America-like *vivre-ensemble* (living together), wherein the non-identical becomes identical not with Europe, but with the post-*volksgemeinschaft* amalgamation. This essay is meant to explore and interrogate the heated discourse between these two concepts of community, with the practical intent of understanding their fundamental antagonisms and where it points in the near-future.

**Key Words:** Volksgemeinschaft, Willensgemeinschaft, Pre-Political Foundations, Enlightenment, Identitarianism, Immigration.

## Introduction

The continual and growing presence of Muslims in the European ethnosphere, especially after the Syrian refugee crisis of 2014-2015, has led to bitter divisions within Europe. The increase in culture, racia<sup>8</sup>

681, ethnic, and religious diversity, the multi-cultural reality of modern Europe, and its “threat” to the traditional identity of Europe as a Greco-Roman, Christian-cum-Enlightenment civilization, has bolstered the ranks of far-right identitarian groups and nationalist anti-immigrant political parties. It has also contributed to the rise of newer forms of “palingenetic ultra-nationalism,” i.e. fascism (Griffin, 1993). What these group have in common is that they all believe Europe has entered into a severe *ernstfall* – a crisis situation – wherein the cumulative particularities that constitute Europe as a civilization distinguishable from other civilizations is under threat of being lost by its increasing cosmopolitanism. Europe, in other words, by its openness towards the Resten world in the form of mass immigration and multiculturalism, is producing the conditions for its own population replacement, its own cultural demise, its own civilizational suicide: The “Great Erasure” and the “Great Replacement” (Kurtagic, 2016; Camus, 2018). For the identitarians, the agent that is most representative of this *untergang* (downfall) is the growing Muslim *ummah* (community) living within the traditional borders of the European ethnosphere. In their thought, the Muslims are the eternal “non-identical,” an anti-identity, in that they cannot by way of their own pre-political foundations, including their religious traditions, be made identical with the traditional identity of Europe (Adorno, 1999: 362). Thus, they remain “anatotists,” those dwelling within the “wrong place.” However, what has given them the legal right to claim to be “topical,” i.e. those dwelling within their “rightful place,” is the concept of *willensgemeinschaft*, the Enlightenment ideal of an “achieved” community – an “achieved” nation of citizens.

In order to understand the antagonism between the Muslim *ummah* in Europe, and by extension North America, and those who argue that they are anatopists, we must first examine thoroughly the idea of *willensgemeinschaft* and *volksgemeinschaft*.

## The Ethnic Community versus the Multi-Ethnic Citizens

The struggle for Europe’s identity centers around the discussion of what it means to be a “nation.” According to the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, the term “nation”

itself “reflects the historical genesis of the nation-state,” as the Roman word “Natio” was the name of the “goddess of birth and origin” (Habermas, 1996: 494). In the classical sense, the term “nation” refers predominantly to “peoples and tribes who were not yet organized in political associations,” but were related through kinship relations conditioned by geographical proximity (Ibid.). As such, they are united by the pre-political foundations of “common language, customs, and traditions,” which serve as the basis of their common identity, but not their common polity (Ibid.). In other words, their common descent, expressed through their shared cultural, linguistic, and historical resources, had not yet united them into a common political state. When the “nations” began to construct the state from within themselves and their common resources, the “nation-state” was born, as it sealed governance and ethnos in a symbiotic relationship. In this sense, the state, regardless of its form, reflected the ethnically homogeneous nation in its wholeness. For most of history, those that were “non-identical” to the nation, i.e. those foreign to the pre-political foundations in some way or another, were either persecuted by the state or, at minimum, left unrepresented by the state. The state, in its identity, was the highest most reflection of the identity of the homogeneous nation.

Although the supra-national state determinately negated the ethnos-bound state in the Christian and Muslim empires, the aforementioned conception of the ethnically-bound nation persisted within Europe up to the beginning of the modern age. The Bourgeois Enlightenment, with its humanistic universalism, crafted a competing form of nationhood that undermined the pre-modern nation-state. Again, according to Habermas, “with the French Revolution, the ‘nation’ became the source of state sovereignty... Each nation is now supposed to be granted the right to political self-determination” (Ibid.). This “self-determination” of the state includes the autonomy to decide who is and is not a member of the nation. In other words, the state that arises from the ethnic complex of the demos is replaced with the state that self-determines its own membership via the will. No longer does the state automatically include all members of the ethnic complex within its ranks. Likewise, no longer does the autonomous state exclude all members that are outside of the historical ethnic complex. Rather, the “democratic state,” divorced from the imperative of ethnic homogeneity, creates its own demos: the *political demos*. This post-ethnic political demos, predicated on membership through the assent to certain *political* ideals, as opposed to pre-political foundations, is what is called the *willensgemeinschaft*: the “democratic community” or the “willed community.” With the severance of the demos from the ethnos, what is born is the *nation of citizens*; what is left behind is the *nation of ethnic descent*. That is not to say that modern

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willensgemeinschaften are not populated predominantly by those within the homogenous ethnic community. Even until today, the population of the European states are predominantly constituted by those who share within the traditional pre-political foundations. Even France, where the concept of the modern willensgemeinschaft originated, and which has the highest level of non-ethnically French citizens, the ethnically French remain the dominant ethnic group. Rather, it is to say that ethnic homogeneity, which once was the origins and basis of the nation-state, no longer serves in that capacity, and therefore those who are non-identical to the historical ethnic complex are capable of enjoining themselves to the achieved “citizenship” (*staatsbürgerschaft*) of the modern willensgemeinschaft. Thus, the citizens, in all their identity-complexities, find their identity *as citizens* not within their pre-political foundations, but rather in their common political practices – their rights and responsibilities as citizens of a given state and members of an achieved demos.

The reality of this move from the ethnically-bound nation-state to the achieved citizenship via the assent to political values, coupled with the dictates of European capitalism, has opened up the formally homogenous European ethnosphere to an ethnic, religious, and racial complexity hitherto unforeseen. As such, those who in prior times would be understood to be non-identical, or anatopic, are able to now claim full citizenship within the European ethnosphere whilst retaining their own cultural, religious, and ethnically-bound practices, which originated outside of the traditional European ethnosphere. Citizenship via the assent to political ideals, values, and principles, divorced from the historically-bound ethnos, allows the “new” citizens to claim both their “homeland’s” ethnically-bound identity as well as their European citizenship in both their fullnesses, at least in theory. This leads to many citizens of the European states to claim full political rights and obligations of those states, while remaining differentiated and distinguishable from the dominant European culture and identity. This chasm between the political citizen and the cultural anatopist – being united within one person – has caused many conservatives and nationalists within the European ethnosphere to question this modern (or postmodern) identity of Europe. If one can claim the political and economic fruits of the modern willensgemeinschaft without being from, or sufficiently reflecting any of European pre-political foundations, then what really does it mean to be a European, or in its particularity, German, French, Dutch, Italian, etc.? Can one truly belong to Europe if one is merely a political citizen without having any of the pre-political foundations? Is being European only a matter of citizenship, or is it still enrooted in ethnos?

The ever-increasing problems associated with multiculturalism, multi-racialism, and the neutrality of the state towards religion, has motivated some to reintroduce the concept of *volks-gemeinschaft* back into the public sphere as well as into national politics. It is feared that if there is no insistence on some level of pre-political foundations, then Europe will eventually cease to be Europe, as it will in time cease to have a distinguishable identity rooted *in its own* cultural, historical, and ethnic resources. It will, in a sense, become another America; a *willens-gemeinschaft* crafted by the amalgamation of numerous ethnicities, races, and cultures: the democratic “melting-pot.”

### **Return of the Volksgemeinschaft**

In response to what the far-right views as the *überfremdung* (over-foreignization) that is taking place within the European ethnosphere, social conservatives, especially far-right identitarians and ultra-nationalists, have argued for the implementation of the *volks-gemeinschaft* as a way of reconfiguring and reorienting the nation back towards a premodern, pre-Bourgeois definition of a nation – one that is either in part or in whole defined by pre-political foundations (Johnson, 2018). In arguing for the reversal of the Enlightenment’s concept of *willens-gemeinschaft*, they believe that they may be able to not only remove Europe from the path of self-identity-destruction, but that they will be able to restore a level of homogeneity that Europe took for granted prior to the modern period. In this sense, the resurgence of the concept of *volks-gemeinschaft* is an attempt to produce a future homogenous or near-homogenous *ethnstate*, one that is predicated not on the democratic assent to liberal political values, but one that is rooted firmly in the soil of the pre-political – the soil of the historically and biologically given: *blut, boden, und kultur* (blood, soil, and culture).

Because the *völkisch* community is predicated and defined by the complexities of pre-political foundations, which have inherent exclusionary parameters, the nature of the *volksstaat* (ethnic state) is also exclusionary. What was the natural state of the ethnic-bound society before the modern nation-state, i.e. ethnic homogeneity, is within modernity weaponized against the non-identical. That is not to say that there were no ethnic or religious minorities residing within pre-modern Europe; rather, it is that the natural state of Europe in regards to its “white” ethnicities (Aryan and Slav predominantly) were simply the given – it was the non-political default that needed not to be politicized for any given reason, as it was the natural state-of-being that was left relatively undisturbed, with only a few major

disruptions (Ottoman Turks in the Balkans, Islamic Iberia, Mongol Invasion, etc.). However, with the growing sense of *überfremdung*, such a call for the return to ethnic homogeneity takes on a political role: it is now the concept and method by which the former default-situation can serve as a future rescue for a modern dysgenic situation, wherein the former homogeneity is no longer the default ethnic setting.

The desire to flee from the present and return to an idealized past is rooted in what I call *apóleiaphobia*, the “fear of loss,” or “fear of losing.” This agonizing fear stems from the universal fantasy of life without loss, life without the pain of loss, and life without the suffering of loss. The wish-fulfillment that speaks of the restoration of lost things, is translated into a political vision of a return to a pre-loss state-of-being, which provides the calming illusion that we as a people will no longer have to face the agonizing loss of what we loved and desire to have back: our idealized past. Thus, the call to return to the past, even through impotent day-dreams, attempts to avoid the reality of mourning, grieving, and our innate sense of loss for a way-of-being-in-the-world that was always destined to pass through history. This nostalgic longing, translated into political language, is one of the sources of the retrotopian-restorative politics of the *volksgemeinschaft*, and it is one that, paradoxically, would ultimately fail to be satiated by retrotopian political schemes, as all “restorations” of idealized pasts are anachronistic and therefore doomed to experiential impotence.

The insistence of reinstituting a *volksgemeinschaft* also follows the logic of Carl Schmitt, Hitler’s theological jurist, and what he viewed as the *essence of politics*: the friend-enemy distinction (Schmitt, 1996). The *volksgemeinschaft*, being defined by that which is outside of the political, i.e. that which one finds oneself “thrown into” (*geworfenheit*) through history and nature (ethnicity, language, shared history, religion), identifies and stigmatizes those who find themselves unable to adopt and/or appropriate such results of history and nature (especially race and ethnicity). Unlike in the *willensgemeinschaft*, wherein that which defines the nation can be adopted and appropriated through the intellect and will – both of which are conceptually non-dependent upon the results of nature and history – within the *volksgemeinschaft*, the nation is defined by that which cannot be adopted and/or appropriated by the intellect of will. Trans-racialism, the idea that one can “identify” oneself as being a member of another race or ethnicity through an act of conscious decision, does not cancel the reality of genetics and biological racial differences, even if such differences are miniscule in comparison to the overall

uniformity of human genetics. Consciousness does not dictate reality of ethnicity or race in this sense. For those in favor of the *volksgemeinschaft*, the institutionalization of the pre-political foundations inherently excludes those from outside those foundations, and therefore Muslims, especially those coming from outside of the European ethnosphere, cannot find a way to claim “Europeanity” without doing so inauthentically (*uneigentlichkeit*). Thus, they are thus systematically barred – by the inheritance of nature and history – from claiming to be a genuine member of the *volk* within the parameters of the *volksgemeinschaft*.

This begs the question: What about ethnic Europeans who convert to Islam? Aren’t they inheritors of the same pre-political foundations that define the *volksgemeinschaft* whilst choosing another religion? Nationalist thought has an argument for this scenario too. However, the argument against this kind of “corroded” ethnic-identity has a metaphysical response, one that has little to do with pre-political foundations found within the material realm that we’ve discussed thus far.

## The Particularity of Geist and Seele

Hegel famously thought that history was the explicit manifestation of the movement of *geist* (spirit) through time and space. History, for Hegel, was defined by the dialectical unfolding of reason/mind within the realm of mankind and his affairs. When one learned to read history, one learned to understand and appreciate the wisdom of *weltgeist* (world spirit). Another German idealist philosopher had a similar but more localized version of such a *geist* – one that fully accounted for the particularity of *geist* within a given ethnically-bound nation.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte, in his *Thirteenth Address of the German Nation*, spells out his understanding of the unique spirituality of each nation; he argued that all nations have a spirit that guided their development, expressed their inner-most being, and was differentiated from all other nation’s *geistes* (spirits). As such, a particular *geist* of a particular nation cannot be mixed with others *geistes* without producing necrogenic effects. He says,

Spiritual nature was able to present the essence of humanity in extremely diverse gradations in individuals and in individuality as a whole, in peoples. Only when each people, left to itself, develops and forms itself in accordance with its own peculiarity, and only when in every people each individual develops himself in accordance with

that common quality, as well as in accordance with his own peculiar quality – then, and then only, does the manifestation of divinity appear in its true mirror as it ought to be; and only a man who either entirely lacks the notion of the rule of law and divine order, or else is an obdurate enemy thereto, could take upon himself to want to interfere with that law, which is the highest law in the spiritual world. Only in the invisible qualities of nations, which are hidden from their own eyes – qualities as the means whereby these nations remain in touch with the source of original life – only therein is to be found the guarantee of their present and future worth, virtue, and merit (Fichte, 2017: 114-115).

After establishing his perspective that all of humanity, separated by the nations they form on the basis of their natural kinship and geography, have a “spiritual nature,” he argues that the amalgamation of such differentiated nations will have a deleterious effect:

If these qualities are dulled by admixture and worn away by friction, the flatness that results will bring about a separation from spiritual nature, and this in its turn will cause all men to be fused together to their uniform and conjoint destruction (Ibid.).

For Fichte, the quickest way to lose contact with the spirit of one’s ethnic nation was the “admixture” of such a nation with another. Although he is unclear as to how this “admixture” occurs, one can assume that by “admixture” Fichte means either co-habitation of various peoples within a particular geographic territory, and/or the miscegenation of ethnicities. Either way, “separation from the spiritual nature” leads to the “conjoint destruction” of peoples’ particularity as ethnos-bound communities, and therefore the mutual destruction of their geistes. Fichte does not take into account the possibility of a dialectical process occurring through such an admixture. In other words, he couldn’t see how it would be possible to give birth to a new spirit through the determinate negation of the old spirits. In his formal logic, that which was negated is negated abstractly, with no remainder to be preserved in a new and higher form (Hegel, 1993: 54). The amalgamation is not a new and “fresher form” of the idea, representing new possibilities within the history of mankind, as Hegelian dialectics would argue, but rather is an abstract negation leading to the deaths of multiple spirits (Ibid.).

Fichte was not the only philosopher to argue that the particular geist of a given ethnicity ought not to be blended with the spirit of another. The German

Nietzschian philosopher Ludwig Klages, also thought that history was defined by certain bio-centric life forces (Klages, 2013). In reaction to what he thought was Hegel's insufferable optimism, Klages argued that in the case of the Germans, which was his primary concern, life forces were divided into two opposing camps: *geist* (spirit), which is indicative of modern worldviews, as it reduces all life to mere materialism, instrumental-reason, and the cult of efficiency, and *seele* (soul), which enhances life in all its mysterious vigor and wonder. Rooted in Nietzsche's *lebensphilosophie* (life philosophy), Klages believed that *geist* must be overcome by *seele*; modernity must be overcome by pre-modernity, Christianity must be overcome by paganism, "linear progress" must be overcome by a retrotopia: a return to an idealized former way-of-being-in-the-world, including one that rejects the modern notions of *willensgemeinschaft*. Today's *völkerchaos* (chaos of mixed peoples) is the product of the multi-ethnic and multi-racial post-secular state, which in turn is the product of modernity's destructive and dysgenic *geist* (in the name of progress). In this state, much like in Fichte's address, the Germans suffer a loss of their particularity, their life-giving force, and become a people without a soul: efficient in instrumental-reasoning, but cold, calculating, and soulless. As such, for reactionary philosophers such as Klages and his followers, such a modern *geist* must be abstractly negated in the Western nations. *Seele*, in all of its ethno-differentiated forms, must replace the monolithic-universalizing-*geist* as the polytheistic *animi* of Western societies.

It is no stretch to argue that since the *willensgemeinschaft* is a product of the modern world, with its rejection of pre-political foundations as the basis of the modern state, that an updated version of Klages' *lebensphilosophie* would argue for the rejection of the state predicated on such a non-biocentric conception of a nation, as such peoples would not retain, nurture, and fulfill the *seele* of their homogeneous ancestors, but would rather embody the universalizing *geist* of an amalgamated materialist-minded modernist peoples – the very dysgenic essence of modernist "progress." The fact that Klages can be read in such a way is evidenced in the fact that certain members of the far-right intelligentsia, who advocate for the "Whitopia" (white ethnostate) of the *volksgemeinschaft*, have begun to appropriate him in their anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim politics (Andersen, 2018), both in Europe and North America.

Against Klages, there have been other philosophers on the Right, such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, who have rejected the idea of a bio-centric spirit that is metaphysically instilled – or is accessible – in all members of a given ethnos. For

example, Nietzsche believed it was the great individuals, the heroic geniuses, who were what he called the *übertmenschen* (Nietzsche, 2005: 11-16). His disdain for Germans as an ethnic group was renown, and he brooked no idea of the Germanic people as-a-whole as being somehow the carrier of a great and triumphant spirit. That belonged exclusively with the individuals who transcended the dictatorship of the herd, the masses, the mediocrity. Similarly, the student of Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, believed that Germans were the carriers of a particular spirit, but he stopped short of saying that all Germans, by mere virtue of their ethnic appearance (*erscheinung*), i.e. the immediacy of their shared blut und boden, were animated by that *rassengeist* (racial spirit). Race, for Heidegger, was also about national particularity and its requisite *eigentlichkeit* (authenticity). There must be both blut, boden (*autochthonous*) and an authentic identity with the geist born from such blut and boden (Tawney, 2015: 38-46). His disdain for German communism, as well as the biological “vulgarity” of the Nazis’ *rassenpolitik*, convinced him that the *Deutsche geist* (German spirit) did not animate the totality of the German peoples. Those Germans who emphasized the universality of the human race over the particularity of the German ethnicity, or even Aryanism over German-ness, lived and thought in an *uneigentlichkeit* (inauthentic) state. They were not reconciled to their inherited geist and therefore were in a state of exile from their particular *rassengeist* (ethnic spirit). This lack of particularity was the precondition for the destruction of ethnic uniqueness (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, the philosophical argument, that each peoples have within their own ethnic community a particular geist, which should not be amalgamated with other peoples and their geistes, is a form of metaphysics that accomplishes the same result as the materially bio-centric argument: it erects a non-political barrier that attempts to make a successful willensgemeinschaft impossible, as the intangible yet ever-present geist of a particular people can be denied to the non-identical. Since they do not share the same pre-political foundations from which the European geist proceeds from, their pre-political foundations are a physical marker that announces that they do not, and cannot, possess any of Europe’s various geistes, no matter how integrated and assimilated they think they are. Muslims, according to this logic, belong to a different geist, and thus can only assimilate within Western societies in a superficial way; they can adopt the language; share in national holidays and festivities; they can eat the national cuisine; they can share in all the rights and responsibilities of being a political-citizen within the democratic state, but since their origins are in another ethnic nation’s geist, they are forever barred from being fully integrated and assimilated. This, it is argued, is a metaphysical reality that

cannot be transcended by intellect or will. As such, the ethnically-bound *geist* is an impenetrable metaphysics, which ensures the permanent alienation of the non-identical within the Western ethnosphere.

For traditional liberal theorists, the *geist* of a nation, if it exists at all, is not necessarily rooted within any bio-centric pre-political foundation. Rather, *geist* can be detached from *ethnos*. The democratically-derived *geist* of the modern *willensgemeinschaft* resides within its political philosophy, i.e. its foundational ideals, values, and principles. Thus, detached from race, ethnicity, language, religion, common history and descent, it remains open to all that consent to such values. In that consent, embodiment, and fulfillment, the democratically-derived *geist* is made apparent in history. For the critics of this liberal conception of *geist*, such a democratically-derived spirit seems fickle, confused, or even contrived, for what concrete people does it represent? Is it not just wishful thinking of a people who are in need of a *political* adhesive after the *natural* adhesive of *ethnos* is removed?

### **Critique of the Willensgemeinschaft**

For those on the far-right, the identitarians, nationalists, and alt-fascists, it is this openness that is decidedly the exposed flank of the West. They argue that all ethnically-bound people have their homelands, and such homelands are (and should be) respected as being their exclusive homelands. Why should this not also apply to the West – the homelands of the Western peoples? Rooted in the works of Alain de Benoist, the “right to differ,” i.e. the right to remain homogenous within their own geographic territories, is a right that is granted to all nations. No nation has the right to interfere and or colonize the territory of the others. As the white nationalist Greg Johnson has written, “we believe that all peoples have the right to their own homogeneous sovereign homelands, wherever that is possible. We want ethnostates for ourselves, and on the Lockean principle that we will take what we need for ourselves but leave other people the option of doing the same, we wish all peoples well and will honor the ethnonationalist principle wherever it is asserted” (Johnson, 2018: 56). Thus, in pursuing the ethno-nationalist principle of the right to differ, Europe has the right to insist that the foreign-born citizens, immigrants, and refugees, return to their own nations, as their presence in the West is a violation of the West’s homogeneity and sovereignty.

*Vivre-ensemble*, or the “friendly living together,” is viewed as a corruption of the eternal connection between the pre-political foundations and the *geist/seele* of the people. In other words, the far-right sees immigration as the destruction of their nation-state’s historical pre-political foundations, but also destroys the metaphysical element that proceeds from and binds together that ethnic nation-state. Without such a metaphysical adhesive, all the state is left with is “civil patriotism,” or “constitutional patriotism,” which, as many in the post-secular multi-cultural democratic states experience, might not be strong enough to produce the level of social solidarity required for a democratic society to remain democratic. Democracy, they argue, works well within a culturally and ethnically homogenous society; it does not work well within an ethnically polyphonic society, wherein a cacophony of racial, ethnic, or religious factions struggle amongst themselves for control of the apparatus and resources of the state. It is perceived that each group vies for their own particular interest (the interest of their particular ethnic-matrix), which exists as an abiding factor above the universality of national citizenship. In this sense, the perception of “divided loyalties” undermines solidarity within the citizenry.

“Social trust,” it is argued, remains consistently low within ethnically and culturally diverse nations, especially among the less-educated working class. The “reptilian brain” (basal ganglia) in much of the masses inhibits their ability to trust those whom they view as inherently different from themselves. For example, when someone who shares the same ethnic-matrix as oneself is unemployed and on government provided welfare, the high level of social trust allows one to give the benefit of the doubt to that person, precisely because that person is perceived positively due to the fact that they share the same pre-political foundations. Those shared pre-political foundations allows the perceiver to see himself within the suffering of the neighbor. As such, they are viewed as being good people who are “down on their luck,” and thus deserving of moral consideration by both the state and the neighbor. However, when the individual is of a different ethnic-matrix, especially a minority ethnic-matrix, the low social trust level determines a radically different conclusion. They are unemployed because they are a member of a “foreign” race or ethnicity, who are inherently lazy, parasitic, and unintelligent. The perceiver cannot visualize themselves in the suffering of the foreigner, therefore there can be no sympathy or empathy for their plight, no matter how legitimate it is. Being so, they are not only undeserving of moral consideration from the state and the neighbor, the very fact that they are on welfare is a crime against both the state

and the neighbor, as their benefits are considered to be theft from the hard working members of the perceivers' own ethnic-matrix.

With this in mind, the far-right argues that ethnic homogeneity is the precondition for a successful democracy, since democracy is predicated upon social trust. Additionally, it is argued that ethnic homogeneity is not only the precondition for a *volksgemeinschaft*, but also for a successful *willensgemeinschaft*, as it is the introduction of foreign others that exaggerates the inherent differences within a single ethnic group. All nations, regardless of their ethnic-matrix, will have differences and disagreements, and within the democratic *volksgemeinschaft*, as well as the *willensgemeinschaft*, those differences will be adjudicated through democratic deliberations. However, when social trust is very low due to a high degree of racial, ethnic, and religious diversity within the *willensgemeinschaft*, such inherent differences are magnified and exaggerated, often times beyond reconciliation. Since the oppositional voices are often from a different ethnic-matrix, regardless of their citizenship, the motivations for their oppositional positions are considered suspect, as the change in policies they advocate appears to be clever attempts to undermine the nation and its "traditional identity," i.e. its assumed normative ethnic-matrix identity. The "others," it is thought, represent an entirely different people, a different *geist*, a different civilization, and within thus are the origins of their attempts to change the status quo. A state of suspicion remains normative within a highly diversified *willensgemeinschaft*, because the reptilian brain, which drives the suspicion of what many perceive as "foreigners," even if they are fellow citizens, fails to overcome inherent bias, even when such change is beneficial to the historically dominant ethnic complex (Metzl, 2019). Nevertheless, the nationalists say, "they may be citizens, but they're not of us. We must be on guard against their suspicious actions."

## **Unbehagen in der Willensgemeinschaft: The Future of Islam in Europe**

The struggle that is currently at the forefront of the civil discourse through Europe – more so than in the United States, even despite its growing nationalism – is one that the Muslim community should pay close attention to. Because of (1) the weakness of confidence in regards to Europe's contemporary identity and how it relates to its pre-political foundations, (2) the growing presence of Muslims within the public sphere, and (3) the growing backlash against the rapidly changing face of Europe – its diversification due to "outside" influences, the Muslims of Europe will remain in

a precarious position for some time to come. As long as the democratic willensgemeinschaft of the Western states holds, Muslims can continue to claim their full rights as citizens and members of the body politic within Europe. However, as we've seen in some countries, especially France, the völkisch sentiment can bleed from the Far-Right into mainstream liberalism and even, in a few cases, the Left. As we witnessed in the rhetoric immediately following the *L'affaire Charlie Hebdo* (2015) and France's Burkini ban (2016), the insistence on the "national culture" as being the normative culture, to which all members of the democratic nation-state will have to abide, can take on a political character: the suppression of substantive freedom in the name of abstract freedom. The xenophobic far-right is expected to always call for a *xenelasia* (expulsion of "foreigners") in some form or another. However, when that call becomes mainstream, and migrates from the far-right into the otherwise "tolerant" center-left, the successful yet unstable willensgemeinschaft is threatened. When the equilibrium is upset, and the balance of public opinion turns against the freedom of conscious, autonomous thought, and cosmopolitan cultural expression, the future of the willensgemeinschaft is in question.

The modern experiment with "nation-building," i.e. *E Pluribus Unum* as an "achieved unity" within a diverse population, has always been a tenuous social experiment. Throughout human history, nations have been bound by their pre-political foundations, and those pre-political foundations have served as the basis for their state, which has been the highest expression and manifestation of their nationhood. The metaphysical concept of *geist* or *seele*, rooted also in those pre-political foundations, served as an additional adhesive to the nation, allowing it to tolerate severe disagreements within itself without sacrificing an equilibrium of social trust. The relative homogeneity of the nation-state allowed for the traditional nation-state to project its own negativity outside of itself – onto the distant other, for whom it could build cultural, social, and even physical barriers against (Hegel, 2010: 359-363). The willensgemeinschaft is another issue; achieved unity via constitutional patriotism can be found to be weak when the willensgemeinschaft has no metaphysical adhesive outside of the political values, principles, and ideals that it is founded upon. Since the bio-centric adhesive has been removed from the political-constitutional realm, it is left merely with its political ideals, which are haphazardly accepted by the masses, who too often are willing to accept those ideals for themselves and for those who share in their own pre-political foundations, but are unwilling to extend those ideals to those fellow citizens who do not share their pre-political foundations. In this case, the negativity of the dominant ethnic-

matrix is thrown not against others *outside* of the national-community (per se), but against the others *within* the national-community, the “anatomists.” This lack of social trust is the Achilles heel of the democratic willensgemeinschaft, and one of the driving factors for the calls for the return of the volksgemeinschaft.

The call to return to a volksgemeinschaft, or the “ethnic community,” which was once the default norm, is a call for a retrotopian return to an age before the modern detachment of demos and ethnos. It is a dream of those who are frustrated by the dysgenic and dynomic nature of the modern democratic and multicultural society. As the Muslim community continues to grow in Europe, so too will the backlash among the nationalist minded. The worst thing the Muslims could do is to retreat from their commitment to the willensgemeinschaft into a fundamentalist tribalism that mirrors those who call for a return to the volksgemeinschaft, and call for the end of democracy, the end of political freedoms, and the Islamicization of Europe. If the experiment of the modern democratic willensgemeinschaft is to be successful, it will need the Muslims of Europe to be fully engaged in the democratic discourses and debates, in order for the majority of those Europeans from within the historical pre-political foundations to see that their Muslim neighbors, in all their fullness, actually contribute to the furthering of a better European geist. Such a modern geist will not be the same as it was before modernity; it will be determinately negated by modern Europe’s polyphonic population, and will be better for it, as it will transcend the tribalism of Europe’s past, and the neo-tribalism that some call for today.

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## **Dislocated Society**

### ***Novel Concept-Formation in the Shariatian Social Theory***

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#### **Abstract**

In the *Collected Work* of Shariati, there is a volume entitled as *Ensan* (Human Being) where in the fourth chapter Ali Shariati elaborates on *Free Man* and the *Freedom of Man*. This discussion is related to Shariati's reflections on *History of Religions* which were published in two volumes of 14 and 15 where he discusses the *epistemological dimensions* of religions of China, India, Iran and the ancient world up to the very birth of Islam. However the volume 24 is dedicated to *human being* or *Ensan* (as it is conceptualized in Persian) and Shariati is concerned about the *condition of humanity* in contemporary context but in order to fathom the complexities of *contemporary conditions of humanity* he takes into considerations the relation between *humanity* and *history* both in mythological and philosophical forms. At any rate, this book is not of significant for me in what it purports to carry on but I am interested in this discourse from a conceptual point of reference. In the chapter on *Free Man* there is a footnote in page 259 where Shariati talks about a *new type of emerging social orders* which he does not dwell upon them long enough but it seems here we are faced with an issue worth working on as far as concept-formation is concerned. In other words, if we agree that Ali Shariati is a *classical sociologist* and a *critical social theorist a la* Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm, and Marcuse outside the pantheon

of classics of eurocentric social sciences then we should ask about concepts which he contributed to the discipline of sociology. Did he, at all, have any contribution to the discipline of sociology (and critical social theory)? If the answer is affirmative then we should be able to demonstrate this in concrete terms by introducing his novel concepts as well as conceptual frameworks. Some argue that Shariati is not a sociologist or social theorist but a *religious orator* who successfully incited the Iranian youth and turned them against the *Shah* and paved the way for the revolution of 1979. Following this narrative, it is argued that Shariati was not a sociologist but a demagogical ideologue who earned the epithet of *the Teacher of the Revolution* up to the first decade of post-revolutionary era in the Islamic Republic of Iran. But this narrative seems to be of a *reconstructive nature* which is premised upon a *linear narrative of history* without any critical reference to the *textual legacy* of Ali Shariati. Here we are more interested in the concept-formation in relation to Shariati's social theory.

**Keywords:** Dislocated Society, Ali Shariati, Social Theory, Classical Sociology, Eurocentrism Religion.

## Introduction

In the *Collected Work* of Shariati, there is a volume entitled as *Ensan* (Human Being) where in the fourth chapter Ali Shariati elaborates on *Free Man* and the *Freedom of Man*. This discussion is related to Shariati's reflections on *History of Religions* which were published in two volumes of 14 and 15 where he discusses the *epistemological dimensions* of religions of China, India, Iran and the ancient world up to the very birth of Islam. However the volume 24 is dedicated to *human being* or *Ensan* (as it is conceptualized in Persian) and Shariati is concerned about the *condition of humanity* in contemporary context but in order to fathom the complexities of *contemporary conditions of humanity* he takes into considerations the relation between *humanity* and *history* both in mythological and philosophical forms. At any rate, this book is not of significant for me in what it purports to carry on but I am interested in this discourse from a conceptual point of reference. In the chapter on *Free Man* there is a footnote in page 259 where Shariati talks about a *new type of emerging social orders* which he does not dwell upon them long enough but it seems here we are faced with an issue worth working on as far as concept-formation is concerned. In other words, if we agree that Ali Shariati is a *classical*

*sociologist* outside the pantheon of classics of eurocentric social sciences then we should ask about concepts which he contributed to the discipline of sociology. Did he, at all, have any contribution to the discipline of sociology? If the answer is affirmative then we should be able to demonstrate this in concrete terms by introducing his novel concepts as well as conceptual frameworks. Some argue that Shariati is not a sociologist or social theorist but a *religious orator* who successfully incited the Iranian youth and turned them against the *Shah* and paved the way for the revolution of 1979. Following this narrative, it is argued that Shariati was not a sociologist but a demagogical ideologue who earned the epithet of *the Teacher of the Revolution* up to the first decade of post-revolutionary era in the Islamic Republic of Iran. But this narrative seems to be of a *reconstructive nature* which is premised upon a *linear narrative of history* without any critical reference to the *textual legacy* of Ali Shariati.

To put it differently, I am not very much interested in history of ideas in this context but my main focus is on the textual legacy of Shariati rather than reconstruction of his role in the formation of ideology of the revolution as a historical event in Iran. By distancing myself from the first approach, I am attempting consciously to conceptualize the textual legacy of Shariati as a *hermeneutical problematique* rather than a *historical relic* which could be conceptualized as objects of study by a social scientist. This is to argue that I rather enter into a dialogue with Shariati's textual frame of reference and am aware that this dialogue is of a *spiralwise* nature which requires *hermeneutical empathy*. By *empathy*, I am not referring to a sentimental modality of encountering the other but highlighting a *specific capacity* in understanding the other from within their *experiential frame of reference*. However it should be clarified that this specific capacity is not a mystical quality but a form of *self-awareness* that the *text* is not an *object* but a conceptual form of an experiential frame of reference that may have *captured* a glimpse of reality worth dialoging with. In my view, the textual legacy of Ali Shariati has not been encountered in this fashion in the context of global sociology and social theory yet. Some may think that this is due to *language barrier* at the global stage but the problem is not solely of linguistic nature as the society of social scientists in Iran who are proficient in Persian have not engaged with the *Shariatian Legacy* in sociological mode either. This is to state that although we do not have critically edited translations of Shariati in English yet but the *disengagement strategy* seems to have deeper reasons. One of the most significant of those reasons is the question of *monopoly of defining the discipline*, i.e. the right to set the rules/forms/styles/rituals/characters/types of *imagination of sociological*

*reasoning*. Eurocentrism is the standard concept in designating this type of monopoly in social sciences and humanities but in *restern academic circles* we are not only encountered by eurocentrism as popularized in contemporary postmodern literatures. On the contrary, in restern academic contexts we are faced with other forms of monopolies such as *indigenization* and *islamization* in whose views Shariati looks as a *westoxifcated intellectual* who did not have enough training in *seminary form of knowledge*. However, as I mentioned elsewhere (Miri, 2019 Qatar), Shariati is a *classic* and as a classic social theorist he does not need to fit in the frames of references put forward by either eurocentrists or islamized indigenizers as he represents *another form of classicity* in the context of sociological discipline. Of course, this statement needs to be backed up by arguments and textual proofs so we do not end up by waffling about sociological credentials of Ali Shariati. Therefore, in this chapter, I am going to focus on the concept of *dislocated society* as conceptualized by Shariati in his book on *Human Being* in early seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Iran.

### **Dislocated Society: Don't get Lost in Translation!**

It is an evident fact that Shariati did not use English as his medium of scholarly enterprise but Persian was the language which he employed to form sociological concepts in depicting problems and issues which he reflected upon. By stating this, I would like to make a remark about the *original concept* which he coined in Persian while discussing *new types of emerging systems and societies* (Shariati, 2011. 259) which are different from *developed societies which are civilized* (Shariati, 2011. 259). Before discussing the conceptual relevance of Shariati's notion we need to focus on the very terms that he used in Persian in order to convey his ideas and thought and then apply the *relevancy criterion* as far as the concept-formation is concerned. The keyword in Shariati's text is the term "Avazi" but this term is not an easy word to translate from Persian into English as the first thing which may come to mind is the colloquial meaning of this word which reads as *bastard, prick or jerk*. For instance, in Persian this word (Avazi) is used in describing a person's negative character such as "O Hamishe Avazi Bodeh Ast", which means *he's always been a jerk*. Surely, this is not the meaning which was intended by Shariati in the context we are discussing about here. However, there are other meanings which are associated with this word, namely

Avazi as *Eshtebahi*=Mistaken

Avazi as *Bad Kholgh*=Nasty

Avazi as *Na Layegh*=Incapable

Avazi as *Badal*=Replaced

But I think none of these translations could do justice to what Shariati intended by the use of the term 'Avazi' in relation to the concept of *society*. Although the *new types of emerging systems and societies* which Shariati refers to them may have all these forms of being a mis-taken, nasty, in-capable and re-placed societies and systems but these characteristics are *effects* of something and should not be ranked as *causes*. In other words, we may count all these translations of the term as grammatically correct but they do not match to the conceptual framework which Shariati developed in order to explain the problematique which he focused on. The term *Avazi* could be used in other contexts too which if discussed it may help us to understand what Shariati intended by this word. For instance, a physician may diagnose a patient wrongly and in this context you may use the word *Avazi* in Persian by saying that *Pezeshk Bimari Ra Avazi Tashkhis Dad*, i.e. *the doctor misdiagnosed the disease*; *Vakil Dadkhahi Avazi Kard*, i.e. *the lawyer misleded*; and finally there is another form when we can use *Avazi* in relation to historical narrative, i.e. *Dadan Tarikh Avazi*, i.e. *being anachronistic*. This last form seems to be very relevant in relation to Shariati's framework as far as restern societies are concerned as in this meaning one can discern *a type of chronological inconsistency*, i.e. a particular period that is placed outside its proper temporal domain. This is to argue that the word 'Avazi' in relation to the concept of *society* seems to be referring a type of society which is *misplaced* or *dislocated* outside its proper temporal domain. But how a society could be dislocated or misplaced? This is a question which needs to be passed as we are not attempting to discuss linguistic issues in Shariati's discourse. On the contrary, the linguistic discussion was carried out in order to get a grip of conceptual problems.

## Misplaced or Dislocated Society

In the twenty fourth *Collected Volumes* entitled as *Human Being* Shariati levels a critique on *consumer society* in the *developed societies of the civilized world* by arguing that these societies reduce human being into one-dimensional man. It is in this context that he attempts to speak on another kind of societies which are different than the developed societies of the civilized world but he does not use the common word of the 'Third World Countries'. Shariati does not refer to non-

western societies as third world countries and it seems he does so by purpose. In other words, he does not succumb to the linear historiography of the eurocentric vision of the history where the sojourn of humanity is interpreted in progressive fashion and in accordance to the evolutionary mode designed from a western vista. If they are not third world countries then how does Shariati conceptualize these restern societies? In the footnote number 1 on the page 259 in the book *Ensan* (Human Being) Shariati argues that

*Of course, here, we are talking about developed societies of the civilized world where there is law and order ... otherwise, in backward or colonized societies and new types of emerging systems and dislocated societies ... we cannot apply the kind of sociology which we employ for the developed societies of the civilized world. Because for the aforementioned types of societies we need to apply different kind of sociology as they have distinct forms of their own sociology. There [i.e. in the dislocated societies which have been misplaced] ... you cannot find human beings ... even their numbers are not recorded in the statistics. In these kinds of societies ... you can only see one subject and the rest [are objects] ... who work for that only person who rules over them ... and by one decree ... suddenly declares that ... the country has become developed ... and [these people who lack any authentic subjectivity of their own] ... find themselves content ... and whomsoever doubts a little bit ... may unpredictably disappear ... (CW: 24; 2011. 259).*

It is in this context that Shariati mentions the concept of *dislocated society* in contrast to *developed societies of the civilized world*. But I think we need to analyze this part in depth in order to understand what Shariati means exactly by this concept-formation as this concept is not developed in details by him in his entire collected work of 36 volumes. Although this section is very short but I think it is worth to dwell upon as it is evident that this type of society shall be of relevant for the time being in the Shariatian parlance. In this passage, Shariati mentions five types of society, i.e.

1. Developed Society
2. Regressive Society
3. Colonized Society
4. New Type of Emerging Systems and Orders

## 5. Dislocated Society

But we can see that Shariati does not distinguish between regressive society and colonized society as he uses the term "Ya" (or) when he mentions these two types as though they are similar to each other and different from the developed societies and the other types. How do we take this conclusion? In the text as one may see, Shariati employs the logical conjunction of "Va" (and) when he talks about new emerging types of systems (and social orders) and grammatically speaking there is a difference between the *logical conjunctions of or* with *and* as the former refers to alternatives of the same order. Then Shariati moves on and mentions the last kind of society and that is the misplaced society which I conceptualize it as dislocated society. He does not develop the overall characteristics of all these five types of society but in brief draws the contours of the last type which is conceptualized as *dislocated* or *misplaced society*. Shariati states that in dislocated societies " ... we cannot find 'Ensanha' (Human Beings) ... they are not even counted in census" (2011. 259). But what does he mean by this sentence that in the dislocated societies you cannot even find human beings? How is this possible? Shariati is referring to the distinction between *man as a subject* and *man as an object* or man who has *subjectivity* and the one who lacks subjectivity and is solely an object of the other. Here we are faced with another question and that is how come these types of societies are conceptualized as *misplaced* or *dislocated* societies?

Earlier I referred to the dislocated society as a type of society which is entangled with anachronism, i.e. a type of society that suffers from a chronological inconsistency and this inconsistency results in falling outside the proper temporal domain. To put it differently; this type of society is not synonymous with the third world country, decolonized society or new emerging systems and even regressive social order but it is conceptualized as a dislocated society which needs to be studied by a *different kind of sociology*. Is it Iran a dislocated society in Shariati's view?

### **Social Time and Chronological Time**

What kind of society is the misplaced/dislocated society? This type of society is anachronistic configuration as it is *against* the spirit of the *time*. But what does this mean really? Shariati proposes two concepts of *social time* and *chronological time* in order to draw the contours of a dislocated society which is *misplaced*. Of course, this misplacement should not be thought of as a spatial problem but it has to do with

the temporal dimension of reality. Social time, or what Shariati conceptualizes as *Temp Social*, is a product of society and the temporal quality of all societies are not similar but they demonstrate various different kinds of temporality. For instance, communities of hunter-gatherer might chronologically exist in 21<sup>st</sup> century but this sheer physical presence in the current context of the world does not entail that these communities are *living* in terms of *social time of modernity*. Thus Shariati makes a distinction between the social time and the chronological time of a society and related to this distinction he coins the concept of misplaced societies which are spatially present now but their presence is *dislocated* in temporal sense.

How can we find out that Iran is a dislocated society and temporally misplaced in the continuum of modernity? In *Understanding History of Religions* (Vol. 14, 2011) Shariati refers to two movements in the history of Europe, i.e. *Protestantism Movement* in the Middle Ages and *Anti-Religious Movement* in the Modern time. Then he argues that due to the dislocated mind of the Iranian intellectuals they are unable to understand their own society and the social stage where they are and live. In order to clarify this *mental dislocatedness* he argues that

... if we are going to follow at the footsteps of Europe ... then we should learn from their good experiences and one of the good experiences of Europeans is ... that ... what destructed the Middle Ages ... and gave birth to modern epochs ... is new form of religion ... or religious intellectual transformation ... . [This is to argue that ... unlike what secular Iranian intellectuals emphasize ...] ... the European social change ... is not explainable by reference to anti-religious struggle ... . It is Protestantism that gave birth to modern era and civilization and Max Weber has analyzed this better than any other sociologist ... (CW: 14. 2011. 52).

But intellectuals in the dislocated society cannot understand their own temporal misplacement and therefore they do not ask the *right questions* and therefore choose *wrong paths*. What does this mean? It means that in Europe during 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> the intellectuals and scholars were fighting against religion but in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries where *angst* is driving humanity towards nihilism the *dislocated intellectuals* do not know how to speak about religion in their own societies and therefore attack religion in an anachronistic fashion. Shariati gives an example of how a dislocated society may look like by focusing on intellectuals in Iran. In his reading of anti-religious discourse, Shariati argues that

*... intellectuals in [dislocated society] ... need to know their society ... but as a matter of fact they do not know the societal condition they live in ... . You should know your own society ... and learn about its religion ... and inquire upon the belief system and study their canons and then start your struggle. But now intellectuals [in the dislocated societies] talk about issues which the contrary is discerned by people in their own religion and ... they realize that intellectuals are absentminded. What do I mean by that? For instance, the intellectuals argue that religion is a factor that makes individual anti-social but a Muslim observes that all the instructions of Islam is premised upon the principle of collectivity: pilgrimage ... it is on specific days when all people from all races and from all corners of the world gather together and make up a community of pilgrims ... and its mosque is not like a temple ... but it is a place where the collective get together and its name is Jame', i.e. where people get together ... (CW: 14. 59).*

Here Shariati is clearly demonstrating that how dislocated intellectuals are unable to understand the stage of their own societies and by incorrect form of imitation from Europe cause deep-seated problems. He states that

*... even if you want to assail religion ... you need to read Koran ... not La Vie Primitive ... written by Levy Bruhl. As a matter of fact, you have acquainted yourself with someone else and wrongly assailing something else and trying to deny it ... but these people believe in another thing ... then how do you expect that they will desert their religion and follow you ... (CW: 14. 58).*

In his view, there is a division between the chronological and social time of Iran and this is a salient sign of a dislocated society and the consequences of this division is visible in various dimensions of the society. Iran is chronologically in 21<sup>st</sup> century but in terms of *social time* is at the threshold of 15<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. around the same time that Luther found himself in Europe. Of course, we should bear in mind that Shariati conceptualized the Iranian society in 1970 and did not survive the 1979 revolution in Iran. In other words, the question could be differently problematized after revolution where a form of revolutionary subject has been born and it could be questioned what the consequences of the birth of such subjectivity in a dislocated society are.

## **Universalizing the concept of "dislocated society"**

There is a tendency among social scientists to view concepts and ideas of restern social theorists and sociologists in local terms as though whatever relevant restern scholars produce are not of universal values but applicable to local contexts. But the same principle does not apply to western social scientists and sociologists such as Weber, Marx or Durkheim and Giddens. This myth needs to be critiqued and overcome by demonstrating the *universal capacity* of *restern concepts* in non-restern contexts. Syed Farid Alatas has carried out this project by applying Ibn Khaldun in a universal fashion in terms of historical (the rise and fall of the Safavid Dynasty) and contemporary contexts (the rise of the Saudi Dynasty in Saudi Arabia) but this should not be solely confined to the Khaldunian concept-formations. On the contrary, we should galvanize other restern concepts at the global sociological contexts. Having said this, I think it is possible to apply the Shariatian concept of *dislocated society* to other contexts than the Iranian one. First of all, I think we should expand on this concept by arguing that *dislocation* is a quality which could be applied to both individual and society and we should not confine that only to the social dimension. On the contrary, *dislocative tendencies* could be discerned at the individual levels too and one could even conceive of *dislocated mentalité*.

In other words, what Shariati referred to as *dislocated societies* -in contrast to *developed societies of the civilized world*- could be expanded through its conceptual derivatives not only applicable to restern societies but across the globe. However this claim cannot be solely proved theoretically but it should be substantiated empirically. Here I would like to give an example of how to apply the conceptual derivatives of the Shariatian framework, i.e. *dislocated mentalité* to the Russian context. Russia fought against Hitler during the Second World War and suffered the most from the Nazism in comparison to England and USA. But today we can witness that youth in European parts of Russia are inclining towards Nazism as a part of racist ideology of the White Supremacist. If this happened in Germany, then one could find reasonable explanations for the return of Nazism but how could one explain the return of an ideology where 70 years ago forefathers of present youth in Russia fought a bloody battle? I think the concept of *dislocated society* could be relevant in this context where *dislocated mentalité* has emerged and the connection between chronological time and social time has been broken down and communication between generations seems to be impossible. In other words, the facts of past generation turn into the myths of present generation and in this context a form of *misplaced social order* takes place. This is another way to argue that in a misplaced social order the power of subjectivity diminishes and human beings tend to be-come human objects at the disposal " ... of the sole *Ensan* (Human Being) ...

for whom the others are untermenschen and tamed ... and ready to be at the disposal of the Übermensch ... and all these sub-humans work for him and ... by a sudden decree ... they feel content ..." (CW: 24. 259). This could be reformulated as a social order where the *cultural joints* are *dislocated* and people find themselves suspended as they have lost mental proficiency in reading the signs related to the collective memory of their own society. Although Shariati did not talk about the Russian context but his concept of *dislocated societies* (Jamehaye Avazi) is capable of being applied universally and in other contexts than Iran. This is only an example for demonstrating how to universalize *restern* sociological concepts in *unrestern* contexts. Elsewhere I have discussed the concept of *Estehmar* (Stupefaction) of Shariati in comparison to Durkheim's Anomie, Marx's Alienation, and Weber's Disenchantment. (Miri, 2018) This is to restate that if we could establish a dialogue through the *hermeneutical empathy* to the Shariatian theoretical legacy then there are conceptual possibilities within *restern* sociological canon that are not only of indigenous significance but have universal importance too and shall enrich the global sociological canon as well. This is only an example of how to apply the *hermeneutical empathy* on *restern* texts and classics. Surely, this should not be taken as the last step of its kind but as a preliminary attempt in reconstructing Ali Shariati within the context of sociology and social theory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## **An Examination of Moderateness in the Qur'an Based on Immamiyah Theology**

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### **Abstract**

“Moderateness” is defined based on two various terms in Arabic, both of which refer to “being just” and “not exceeding the middle way”. It refers to the notion of putting all things at their rightful place so to provide harmony for both ends. Moderateness can be individually or publically practiced and if one follows the Moderate path, indeed they follow the Truth.

Two concepts of Moderateness are mentioned in Quran. First, some verses order or recommend Moderateness to the individuals, whereas some other verses lead to attitudes which show the society to be moderate. Moreover, it can be found as in five categories according to Imamiyah Teachings: 1) Domestic or personal-affairs; 2) Social behavior; 3) Financial affairs; 4) Political affairs; and 5) Ideological issues.

Imamiyah theology calls for Moderateness as pivotal issue in understanding other theological norms. Imamiyah examines all theological issues as compared to Ration, which is rooted in the Qur'an and Traditions. Therefore, to be moderate is purely theological and helps one understand theological concepts more effectively. One would deduce that Moderateness is firstly a sign of being part of the Islamic Nation, as the Moderate Nation; and secondly, it refers to many individual traits and social precepts for Muslims.

**Keywords:** Moderateness; Extremism; Quran

## Introduction

The nature of Islam does not pledge to promote hostility or extremism. While the Quran orders to “*fight against those People of the Book who have no faith in God ...*” (Quran, 9:29), it also emphasizes that the Holy Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) was a messenger from Allah to spread “Mercy” in the world: “*We have not sent you except as a mercy to all the worlds.*” (Quran, 21:107). This essence of Mercy and Universality is well-presented throughout Quran and also well-defended in Narrations of Shiite Infallible Imams (A.S).

The pivotal theme in Quran is worshiping Allah, the One God, who is the only One who should be worshiped. The Quran declares that the only Truth is Allah Himself, and the human being is ordered to “*worship Him*” because “*This is the right path*” (Quran, 3:51; 19:36; 43:64). The expression “the Right Path” is repeated more than thirty times in Quran, most of the time being accompanied by a commandment of either to follow that or not to follow any other path. The Right Path is, therefore, a criterion to which Muslims should arrange their lives and that is why, as true Muslims, they ask Allah to guide them towards that “*Lord; guide us to the right path*” (Quran, 1:6). Any deviation from this Path would lead them astray, and true Muslims would ask Allah not to include them into “*those who are neither subject to Allah's anger nor those who have gone astray*”. (Quran, 1:6)

Putting extremism at one side, one finds moderateness standing on the other side as opposed to extremism. Moderateness is more of an approach or methodology than an abstract concept, and it can lead all other ethical issues. In other words, moderateness is not a motif that can be repeated in ones' lifestyle, but rather a theme which pervades it. It needs not to be followed as an example, since it cannot be an objective sample, but rather, it should be enforced as a practical rule in all aspects of life.

In the Quran, references to moderateness are twofold. First, there are certain verses or orders that suggest being moderate in distinct ways. Second, some verses recommend or lead to attitudes or perspectives which show the society how to be moderate. These indirect cases of mentioning moderateness or reference to attitudes finally bring up moderateness as a norm, mostly of an interpretive nature. Nevertheless, all these references have a theological background which can elaborate the ethical or social “Moderateness”.

In the meanwhile, Islam recommends many ethical orders in terms of personal affairs, like “*Walk modestly! And lower your voice!*” (Quran, 31:19). In

expenditures and when talking about charity, it orders in the form of a simile to be moderate: “*and do not keep your hand chained to your neck (when spending), nor open it completely, so that you will sit blamed and destitute.*” (Quran, 17:29) The Quran also blames those who waste and lavish: “... *eat and drink, and do not waste. He (=Allah) does not love the wasteful*”. (Quran, 7:31) In the form of social orders, it clarifies moderateness in trusting others, social relations; even in defense, it suggests moderateness: “... *if anyone aggresses against you, so aggress against him with the likeness of that which he has aggressed against you. Fear Allah, and know that Allah is with the cautious*”. (Quran, 2:194)

“Moderateness” is a crucial concept in modern terminology of Humanities and can be ratified within five elements: rationality, realism, expediency, holistic attitude, and gradual change. “Rationality” examines and prepares indispensable means and conditions to fulfil certain goals. It is blended with dialogue and negotiation. Rationality plays a pivotal role in “Realism”. Being realistic means recognition and understanding of real issues in order to solve and manage them. Managing problems in a realistic way necessitates that some “expediency” be taken into account. Meanwhile, recognizing expediency requires a “holistic attitude” towards any social concern. All of these features of “Moderateness” will be fulfilled through “gradual change”. The nature of “Moderateness”, as avoiding any extreme side, is ironically formed gradually.

### **Etymology and definition of “Moderateness”**

The first step to elaborate the concept of Moderateness in the Quran is to determine its meanings and roots in Arabic and English, as this study touches the notion of Moderateness in Shiia Islam, or more specifically Imamiyah, and hence, its equivalent in English needs to be sought.

The lexical meaning of “moderateness” is “*avoidance of extremes of opinion, feeling, or personal conduct*”. “Moderateness” is the noun form for the adjective “moderate” and can be defined as “*being within reasonable limits; not excessive or extreme; not violent or subject to extremes; mild or calm; temperate*”. This adjective is the modern English form of Latin adjective “*moderatus*” (past participle of *moderari* meaning “*to restrain or to control*”).

“Moderate” comes as an adjective, a verb and a noun in English language. The adjective “moderate” originally refers to something related to “*weather and other physical conditions,*” and also figuratively to the Latin verb “*moderari*” which means “*to regulate, mitigate, restrain, temper, set a measure, or keep (something)*”

*within measure*". It is also related to "modus" which means "measure" or "keeping within due measure." The verb "to moderate" means "to abate excessiveness". Moreover, "moderate" as a noun refers to a person "who holds moderate opinions on controversial subjects" or a person "who holds or champions moderate views or opinions, especially in politics or religion". We can call something "moderate" when it is "of medium or average quantity or extent" or "of limited or average quality". A moderate idea is "opposed to radical or extreme views or measures, especially in politics or religion".

As the suffix "-ness" refers to "property, quality or state of being", "moderateness" can be considered synonymous with "balance, calmness, coolness, equanimity, fairness, forbearance, judiciousness, justice, justness, lenity, mildness, patience, reasonableness, sedateness, sobriety, steadiness, temperance and tolerance". It is also related to "control, discipline, self-control, self-discipline, asceticism, austerity, frugality and forbearance".

In Arabic, the term "moderateness" is equivalent to the word "I'tedal" (= اعتدال) or "Ightisad" (= اقتصاد). It can be used meaning "not expending excessively or too much" as in economics or financial situations. In this meaning, moderateness stands next to "a state of being economical". In Persian, the word refers to "mild weather, modest temper, not radical attitudes and a range of similar concepts". It denotes the middle way in quantity and quality, whether in expenditures or in climate. In behavioural and social sciences, "I'tedal" refers to "avoiding extremes of any kind".

The term "Moderateness" can be more elaborated through its counterpart, i.e. "Extremism". Extremism, of any kind and in any field, deals with the concept of "the more the better". (Liebman 1983, 75-86). In the realm of religion, those who are labelled with this motto believe that "the more they act in accordance with religious orders, the truer and purer their faith shall be". In fact, no one claims to be a Religious Extremist, but rather, they insist on being the true believers and followers of their faith. In other words, they consider "others" as apostates and heretics, the followers of Falsehood.<sup>1</sup>

## **Theological Aspects**

There is indeed a theological notion of "Moderateness" which stands opposite to Extremist and fundamental religious zeal. Extremists define their worldview as "a truth-seeking one" which cherishes ideas taken to be as worthy as the absolute Truth. All Extremist standpoints share some issues which can be summarized as

“having unquestioned certainty about their position, demonizing ‘Others’, i.e. those who disagree with them, and having a desire for a kind of ‘Holy War’ against ‘Others’”. (Lurie 2011) Ardent discussions and dogmatic zeal that flow in polemic debates are evident in Extremism.

Furthermore, Extremists tend to defend their passionate actions and ideology through their presumed dogma. A kind of rationality with a glamorous faithfulness might radiate through their ideas as they preach their way to be the only way towards the Truth. Being legitimized and supported by religious zeal, such characteristics of Extremism can be naively justified as true virtues.

Another form of “religious extremism” is Fundamentalism which can be differentiated by its concept of exceeding all the limits and relying exclusively on the Fundamental basis of religious attitude. According to fundamental theologies, the only path which ends in Truth is the pure and absolute way they preach and introduce. Although there is a slight difference between the two terms, Extremism and Fundamentalism are two sides of the same coin, which trades the normal and rational way of life with terror and inhumanity. Among Muslims, the new name for them is Salafi or Jihadi.

As being debated by Salafis and Wahhabis, Islamic rules should be followed by everyone and civil law and legislations must comply with Sharia. This attitude does not originate from a nuanced and authentic understanding of Islam as it is not a religion of compulsory worship or mandatory acting whatsoever. The Quran teaches that “*there is no compulsion in religion.*” (Quran: 2, 256) However, once one accepts Islam, they should obey all orders of Sharia given by Allah, as the word “Muslim” literary means the “one who surrenders to Allah”.

Islamic tradition contains the concept of “the Ansar” or the local tribes of Medina who supported Prophet Mohammed (p.b.u.h.) by welcoming his followers into their homes after Muslims’ Emigration (Hijra) from Mecca. They accepted Islam, shared their houses and possessions with the new-comers and formed the Muslim Nation or “Ummah”. At times of war and attacks of the non-Muslim tribes, they defended their city alongside other fellow citizens, the Meccan guests. They well defended Islamic state which Prophet Mohammed (p.b.u.h.) had established. The Extremist movements like Salafi-Jihadis preserve this concept and the practice of a local base in support of foreign fighters. (Zimmerman 2017, 6). Therefore, their ideology has the stance of forming a Unitarian government based on Sharia to fulfil Islam in the most complete and most flourished way.

Islam has never meant to be extreme from the beginning; on the contrary, it has always ordered people to live a moderate life economically, socially and religiously. (Quran, 31:19 and 17:29) Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) brought Islam with a famous confession "*Say there is no god but Allah so you shall be redeemed*". This motto is in the form of a positive invitation: it gives the good news of redemption. In fact, it asks people to do something for their own wellness. In another verse as mentioned earlier, the Quran preaches the no-obligatory nature of Islam: "*There is no compulsion in religion*" (Quran, 2: 256). From this very confession motto Islam takes a moderate approach even in its invitation for potential converts. Nonetheless, the affirmation or invitation to Islam can be interpreted as a distinct segmentation between worshipping "the One God" and worshipping "more than one god". It highlights the way to redemption as a way of worshipping "Allah", the only God and not any other God.

Certain Quranic reasoning, directly or indirectly, supports the idea of moderateness. Such reasons, being exclusively taken from Quran, can be put into two categories of ethical and theological reasoning. The ethical reasoning touches upon the realm of individual or social orders which fall into the category of behaviours, politics, lifestyle and all social and psychological trends which one might follow in life. On the other hand, theological reasoning tries to focus on quintessential concepts related to a "supreme being", and hence, examines ontological, eschatological and epistemological notions.

In Shiite theology and history, a tendency towards balancing the odds and moderating all sides in difficult situations have been always evident. Shiite theology is as old as Shiite history and has been relying on three sources of attaining knowledge, which can be categorized as Quran, Tradition and Ration. As soon as the idea of "Shiite" was introduced in terminology and political scene of early Islam, theological explanation and justification bloomed and took over the history of Shiite people. Key ideas of Shiism, which distinguish them from the mainstream Sunni sect, can be traced in the Quran, and it seems, notwithstanding, that Shiites have been well able to defend their theological points of view with reference to Quran.

The moderate viewpoint in Shiism is of an intrinsic nature as Shiite theology is pillared on Oneness of Allah's attributes with His nature. This Oneness is projected as the obvious result of Oneness of Allah's nature. Allah is One in nature and hence is his presence One. Independent existence of Allah requires Him to be purely away from any kind of description, beyond all attributes that we may count separately.

(Tabarsi 2002, 433). This attitude has been challenged by other Muslim sects, most significantly by Salafis. According to Salafi theology any attribute of God which has been mentioned in Quran should be taken into account as it is, not being questioned whatsoever. (Allahbedashti 2014). The result is elimination of role of Ration in the analysis and interpretation of Quran, Shiism follows the more moderate way of rational exegesis; whereas Salafism takes the rigorous attitude of not manipulating the exegesis by human Ration or conception.

### **“Moderateness” in Quran**

In Islam, the term “Moderateness” is a method to incorporate all individual, ethical, social, and economic traits. Moderateness saves human being from going to either of the extremes and helps live a fortunate life. Imam Ali (A.S.) highlights the characteristic of the ignorant as “at either side of the extremes” (Nahj-al-Balaghah. Saying 70). The Quran introduces enormous cases related to Moderateness, and this proves the importance of the subject in Islam. In the Quran, you can find various derivations of the word which simply refer to a range of ideas including economy, social life, domestic life, etc.

#### **Muslims: The Moderate Nation**

Moderateness is a key behavioural principle for not hurting others or getting hurt by others. In social norms, moderateness can be sought as an innate and integral part of social life. The Quran directly indicates that Allah has made Muslims as the nation of Moderateness, “*We have made you (true Muslims) a moderate nation so that you could be an example for all people and the Prophet an example for you...; God is Compassionate and All-merciful.*” (Quran; 2:143)

Here, the context in which this verse occurs should be elaborated. The Holy Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) received his mission from Allah in Mecca in the year 610 A.D., and he publically invited people three years later in 613 A.D. In the year 622, he and his followers migrated from Mecca to Yathrib, which was later called Medina-al-Nabi (the City of the Prophet) or simply Medina.

From the outset, Muslims were ordered to pray towards Jerusalem and called it Qibla (meaning direction or something towards which one faces). In the second year of Hegira, i.e. almost fourteen years after the Holy Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) started his Mission, Allah ordered him to change his direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca; and verses 144-150 of Sura 2 indicate this event. In fact, verse 144 is a reaction to people who asked about this change in the direction of Qibla

(non-Muslims and maybe the Jews of Medina). The Quran calls those who ask why the Holy Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) changed his direction "the Fools", and then highlights the moderateness of Muslims in reacting to them. The verse refers to the Jews of Medina who lived with Muslims but mocked them for not having a genuine reference of prayer, as Jerusalem has been the holy place of the Jews for a long time. Noteworthy, the verse is not in imperative form. It is indicative and provokes the idea that Muslims, who followed certain rules and orders, are also moderate in their actions and reactions.

#### **“Moderateness” in social life: Justice and Middle-Way**

As mentioned before, there are two words in Arabic for Moderateness that are utterly related to “justice” and “being moderate”. Hence, wherever Moderateness is mentioned in Quran, there is either a relation to “justice” or “the middle way” in that verse. Being just in manner and judgement is highly valued in Islam. The Quran suggests that one should not spend excessively all their money but follow a moderate way in their expenditure. *“And do not keep your hand chained to your neck (when spending), nor open it completely, so that you will sit blamed and destitute.”* (Quran, 17:29) or *“[The worshipers of the Merciful are those] who in their spending are neither extravagant nor stingy but maintain moderation.”* (Quran, 25:67) Moreover, all social behaviour like speaking, walking and, even praying should be conducted moderately, *“Be moderate in your walking and your talking.”* (Quran, 31:19)

The Quran remarkably values and highlights the just behaviour *“And Allah strikes a parable. Two men, one is dumb and powerless, a burden to his master wherever he sends him he returns with no good. Is he equal with one who orders justice and follows the Straight Path?”* (Quran, 16:76)

Treating others justly is highly recommended in the Quran. Any party that is in a fragile and weak position is a mere subject of being treated in a just manner. *“God commands you to maintain justice with the orphans.”* (Quran, 4:127) Women should be also subject to just behaviour, *“If you fear that you cannot act justly towards the orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you; two, three, four of them. But if you fear that you cannot do justice, then one only, or, those you possess.”* (Quran, 4:3) Trading with others also requires being just. *“Give just weight and full measure, We never charge a soul with more than it can bear. When you speak, be just, even if it affects your own kinsmen.”* (Quran, 6:152)

Following the path of justice is considered the same as Truth; and thus, we are advised to be just and follow the Truth. In other words, being just and moderate,

and following the truth are intertwined: *“Among those whom We created there is a nation who guide with the truth and with it they are just.”* (Quran, 7:181)

Passing judgement among people is a serious issue that should be handled thoroughly. The person who is making the judgment should be aware of his weighty responsibility; nonetheless, the reward is being loved by Allah. *“If they come to you, judge between them or turn away from them. If you avoid them they cannot harm you in anything; but if you judge, judge between them with fairness. Allah loves the just.”* (Quran, 5:42) The Quran enjoins us to be just even if our loved ones are concerned: *“Believers! Be dutiful to Allah and bearers of just witness. Do not allow your hatred for other people to turn you away from justice. Deal justly; it is nearer to piety.”* (Quran, 5:8)

However, when a fight occurs between two groups of people, there might be the most volatile situation where one should make peace. This peace-making role should be done with justice. *“If two parties of believers fight, reform between them. If either of them is insolent against the other, fight the insolent one till they revert to the order of Allah. If they revert, reform between them with justice, and weigh with justice. Allah loves those who weigh with justice.”* (Quran, 9:49)

### **Imamiyah Theological interpretation of Moderateness**

As “Moderateness” can be monitored on the social and individual level, with reference to the Quran its theological aspect lies in the fact that the cornerstone of society is to behave in a just manner. (Makarem Shirazi 2000, 1: 488-489) *“Allah orders justice, and good deeds, and giving to one's kindred. He forbids indecency, dishonour and insolence. He admonishes you in order that you take heed.”* (Quran, 16:90) This verse focuses on three significant orders. (Hashemi Rafsanjani 2000, 49). Apart from the moral issues ordered in this verse, a theological aspect is hidden as well. Tabatabaei believes that the most significant goal that Islam seeks in its doctrines is the wellness and correction of the public or Society. (Tabatabaei 2000, 478) He argues that human beings are individual and they act individually; however, they also live a social life by nature and their wellness relies on that of the society in which they live. He suggests that based on the lexical meaning of “Moderateness” and “Just”, to be just is exactly the same as being moderate, since when you are moderate you take the middle way and do not exceed any extreme, which definitely means to be just.

He mentions two sides of being just which is individual and social, and the above verse refers to the social one. He also points out to a fine point about why the order "to be just" is followed by the order "to be kind". As "being just" means to be moderate in our actions and reactions, to be kind means to react to "the good" with "more good" and to "the bad" with "less bad". (Tabatabaei 2000, 479)

The theological reference to this idea revokes the concept of following the middle way as Muslims are referred to as the "Moderate Nation". (Quran; 2:143) They are summoned to be just and kind, caring about their relatives and do not trespass others.

## **Conclusion**

"Moderateness" is a controversial term which can be considered as being just, taking the middle way and even following the path of Truth. It refers to the notion of putting all things at their rightful place so that both ends stand in equality and harmony. Moderateness can be individually or publically practiced, and if one follows the Moderate path, indeed she/he follows the Truth. Being moderate in social manner and lifestyle ensures the goodness of the individual or the society as the right path would not be trespassed.

Although some Muslims may interpret the terms "Just and Moderate" based on their lexical meanings and stress their denotative meaning, the Imamiyah interpret "Moderateness" basically with reference to the rational analysis of the individual and social aspects of the term.

In the Quran, references to moderateness are of two natures. First, there are certain verses or orders that recommend the individual to be moderate in distinct ways. Second, some verses order or lead to attitudes which show the society to be moderate. These indirect cases of mentioning moderateness or reference to attitudes, finally, bring up moderateness as a norm, mostly of an interpretive nature. Nevertheless, all these references have a theological background that can elaborate the ethical or social "Moderateness".

Apart from the two mentioned natures or essences of "Moderateness" in the Quran, it can be found as in five categories according to the Imamiyah Teachings: 1) Domestic or personal-affairs; 2) Social behaviour; 3) Financial affairs; 4) Political affairs; and 5) Ideological issues. Such categories indicate the width and depth of this notion in the Imamiyah doctrine.

However, Imamiyah theology also calls for Moderateness as a pivotal issue in understanding other theological norms. The Imamiyah examines all theological issues as compared to Ration which is rooted in the Quran and Traditions. Therefore, to be moderate is purely theological, and helps one understand theological concepts more effectively.

To sum up, reviewing various verses of Quran referring to Moderateness and its derivatives, one would deduce that Moderateness is firstly a sign of being part of the Islamic Nation, as the Moderate Nation; and secondly, it refers to many individual traits and social conducts for Muslims.

## Note

1. In this paper, “Extremism” is used as a general term to indicate “Religious Extremism”.

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## **The Crisis of the Human Sciences:** *The Case of Kazakhstan*

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### **Abstract**

A deep crisis of the economy of Kazakhstan resulted in significant reduction of the employees working in the field of science and tech industry. 0.1% of GDP allocated for science in 2016 does not promote any scientific endeavor. The more vivid these crises phenomena appear in Social sciences and Humanities. Social sciences and Humanities, however, do not value efficiency. As humanities do not produce profit, students and universities tend to neglect them. Therefore, there is less young inflow in science too. The state of affairs in the field is dreary. Firstly, rather small projects which do not communicate with each other and sometimes even ignore and contradict each other diminish consistency of the science. Variety of topics and tasks destroys solidity and efficiency. Secondly, social sciences focus on descriptive concepts and theories. We also need to make a conceptual apparatus of social science to be more universal to all social sciences and humanities. Moreover, science is managed by the bureaucrats who are not interested and even do not understand the content of the scientific projects they handle. International indexation rate is very low in Kazakhstani publications and represents low quality of research. Obsession of ministerial

bureaucrats with indexation makes a bad service for science causing fraudulent publications. Of course, there is no immediate solution, i.e. it is almost impossible to reduce crisis in several months or years. One of the main objectives of the society in the future is to change the approach to the system of education in general and to teaching science in particular. That is to develop methods which teach active learning, to teach to learn novelty. No one knows what kind of knowledge to be demanded in fifteen-twenty years. A good specialist is the one who is above just craft and is able to quickly switch to the new knowledge, innovation. These standards are to be born not in the Ministries but in the science itself, as a new paradigm is born, according to Thomas Kuhn.

**Key Words:** Social Sciences, Humanities, education, science, indexing, Kazakhstan, social initiatives.

## The Crisis of the Human Sciences

The idea of economic crisis dominates in the modern society while not many think of the influence of crises in the Social Sciences on their lives. All over the world we read about economic crises, social crises, ethnic conflicts and crises, national conflicts and crises, crises in family life, crises of poverty, crises of exploitation, crises of homelessness, crises of governmental oppression, crises of man's inhumanity to man and so on. So, there is a trend in the world to worry the most about financial or political crises where fundamental crises are things happening to humanity. Moreover, more concerns have been rising about the declining status of the Human Sciences in the modern world. Marjorie Perloff refers to Robert Weisbuch, a distinguished professor of English at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation who refers to the state of affairs in the human sciences in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*:

Today's consensus about the state of the humanities—it's bad, it's getting worse, and no one is doing much about it— is supported by dismal facts. The percentage of undergraduates majoring in humanities fields has been halved over the past three decades. Financing for faculty research has decreased. As doctoral programs in the humanities proliferate irresponsibly, turning out more and more graduates who cannot find jobs, the waste of human talent becomes enormous, intolerable. We have lost the respect of our colleagues in other fields, as well as the attention of an intelligent public. The

action is elsewhere. No one's even angry with us now, just bored (Marjorie Perloff. In *Defense of Poetry. Put the literature back into literary studies*. February/March 2000 issue of *Boston Review*).

Although Kazakhstan has clear goals to build a competitive system of education and research, the problems of crises existing in the world did not get around it causing more deep contradictions in the society living on income from raw materials. People are motivated by wrong principles, causing the threat of lost moral values. Whereas both education and research have much in common with the tendencies taking place in the world, apart from that there exist some specific problems caused by the legacy of the Soviet state and the traditional mentality of people. The number of students majoring in social sciences and humanities does not decrease in contrast with the major world tendencies but the quality of graduates is very low because of the teaching methodology which is still based on lecturing and repeating. The percentage of postgraduate students also shows rise but the output of dissertations demonstrates low results. There is a gap between school and science so that young researchers are not able to produce any research independently both because of the lack of skills and lack of finance in the research institutions. The purpose of this paper is to define the problems and analyze the Kazakhstani situation in education and research in science in general and in social sciences in particular in order to determine some solutions.

Nowadays, we live in the world of materialism, where competition between people to get efficiency has reached its highest level, furthermore universities entered this race either. If your job, present or future, your actions are not paid well or do not bring the material opportunities or success the modern man would not do this. The same principles drive universities. If your criteria, as head of the university, are productivity, efficiency and consumer satisfaction, it makes perfect sense to withdraw funds and material support from the humanities. The students do not choose to study humanities for the same reason that it will not pay them well in the future. This works both ways in Kazakhstan where diploma is obtained just for the sake of diploma itself based on mentality of parents to do their best in helping their offspring to get access to higher education. Looking even further, we see that humanity has reached the state of anomie, the problem raised by Emile Durkheim back in late XIX century. Anomie in societies or individuals is a condition of instability resulting from a breakdown of standards and values or from a lack of purpose or ideals. That is what happening nowadays. Many scientists analyzing the causes of the current systemic crisis surprisingly come to the same conclusions, the essence of which is that many modern fundamental concepts about reality, about

consciousness, about man, about society and other processes today do not quite adequately reflect reality. What is meant here is that the modern world has changed so radically over the past few decades that it is quite natural that many old concepts have lost their explanatory potential and methodological consistency to a large extent. Understanding this fact today is becoming generally known.

In the well-known hierarchy of levels of scientific knowledge, "observation-description-analysis-systematization-generalization-forecasting-the discovery of laws-the creation of theories", social sciences in general have only sufficiently mastered the levels of observation and description. In analysis, systematization and generalization, they are still far from the level reached by the natural sciences. In forecasting, they are able to produce relatively reliable products only in narrow (sectoral and regional) frameworks and in short-term periods. At the two highest levels, they are, for the time being, helpless. By now the social sciences have not given a single accurate global long-term forecast, have not opened any macrosociological law of inevitable action, they have not created a single macro-theory that has stood the test of historical practice. Social Sciences continue to confirm long-term accusations in their address, according to which subjectivism in them not simply takes place, as in any other sciences, but is decisive. And, if in the natural sciences this is mainly the subjectivism of the researcher, then in the social sciences it is the subjectivism of the customer. Scientific research, whether in the natural, or in social disciplines, in the overwhelming majority of cases has a customer or sponsor. However, in the fundamental natural sciences it is an order for a base for subsequent research and results, in applied natural sciences - for a specific product. In the social sciences it is, for the most part, an order to meet expectations, to confirm submissions, to justify the planned actions of the customer.

Along with the theoretical and methodological crisis in the social sciences, the instrumental crisis is increasingly asserting itself. This is most clearly seen in applied sociology. Social sciences after the collapse of the USSR were in a much worse situation than the natural sciences. The problems that confronted science as a whole were financial, personnel and institutional but the social sciences had an additional burden - ideological. And, nevertheless, modern social science, sociology in particular, cannot be absolutely helpless and useless at all, at least because of the cruel market laws of today's world. Therefore, an unprecedented total theoretical and methodological revision has to begin. It is accompanied by unprecedented criticism of universalism and Euro centrism of social theories. It needs such a revision that creates a unique external factor, thanks to which, by pushing the already described internal factors, Kazakhstani social science can break out of the

framework of provincialism, local and functional limitations (Gurevich L.Ya., 2017)

Having adopted the definition of science formed in the depths of the exact sciences, the science of man was placed in an unpleasantly ambiguous situation: either it meets all the requirements of scientific character worked out in natural sciences (where physics more often than others serves as a model); or he has to confess in the lack of scientificity. If you follow the first path, numerous social, psychological and communicative phenomena of real life fall out of sight. If we follow the second path, then humanitarian knowledge is deprived of the much-desired halo of reliability, social awareness and prestige traditionally attributed to the exact sciences<sup>6</sup>. And only turning to the non-material world of consciousness, we begin to find weaknesses in it. Science demonstrates its powerlessness when it comes to human feelings. The model of the description of physical bodies unfortunately cannot describe human consciousness. In the humanities, the phenomenon that constitutes the object of research, that is, man in relation to the world and other people, possesses essentially the same consciousness as the researcher himself. Trying to become scientific, Humanities began to imitate the methods and theoretical approaches of the natural sciences, without critically assessing the impact that the conscious individual has on the scientific apparatus as an object of investigation (it is not necessary to confuse this problem with the problem of subjective analysis). (Gurevich L.Ya., 2017).

Humanities and Social Sciences are a special case for the development of society because they form a personality. They have nothing to do with profit-making activities. Humanities, however, does not value efficiency. As Humanities do not produce profits, students and universities tend to neglect it. The science of importance is the science of profit. Back in the fifties of the last century Charles Percy Snow, British novelist and scientist wrote about a gap formed between education in Natural sciences and Humanities. Moreover, he drew our attention to the formation of two cultures and two ways of thinking emerged from two kinds of education. Modern world has changed radically for the last few decades. Technologies are galloping forward but old concepts of social and human sciences sometimes are not able to describe and explain new phenomena. Problems of social sciences and humanities like genuine philosophical problems are rooted outside the science growing out of society itself:

Of course, what I am saying here has been said by philosophers before, at least by the real ones. The degeneration of philosophical

schools in its turn is the consequence of the mistaken belief that one can philosophize without having been compelled to philosophize by problems outside philosophy. . . . Genuine philosophical problems are always rooted outside philosophy and they die if these roots decay. These roots are easily forgotten by philosophers who "study" philosophy instead of being forced into philosophy by the pressure of non-philosophical problems (Taleb, Nassim 2007).

The current state of affairs in Kazakhstan repeats in many cases the state of affairs in this sphere in Russia although Kazakhstani reality is even worse. Most of the scientific works of Kazakhstani social scientists are a description of the context with the involvement of documentary, statistical and literary sources, together with traditional methods of collecting primary information. In the best case, it is an attempt of scientific information support for economic and political strategies. Practically, they do not contain any contribution to the theory, methodology, and instruments of the social science. Why all of this is happening? Why young people are no longer interested in the development of humanities? In our opinion, humanity schools and departments have turned out into collector of theories that have already been outdated before these theories are taught in the classrooms. It does not enhance students to register these courses. Students prefer subjects that are not associated with the past and obsolete knowledge, as the majority thinks. Normal science identified and elaborated on by Thomas Samuel Kuhn in "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" is the regular work of scientists theorizing, observing, and experimenting within a settled paradigm or explanatory framework. It is at this stage when science goes into the classrooms hence into the masses (society) making a liaison between science and education. This very liaison seems to be missing because of the situation in the science in Kazakhstan. The state of education directly depends on the state of science and vice versa, the development of education is the result of the development of science. The role and the status of Academy decreased correspondingly diminishing the place of the science in the society. Moreover, there is no National Academy of Sciences anymore, just Public Association "Republican Academy of Sciences". "Brain drain" is a well known phenomenon worldwide and it is very dangerous for the state of affairs in science in developing countries like Kazakhstan. Very little resources are invested in science despite the fact that expenditures for science have been increasing for the last decade. According to the Ministry of Finance report, the state budget of 2017 allocated 34.7 billion tenge which is a miserable 0.84 % of total budget expenses to finance research and innovative activity but there is unbearable misbalance of resources spent in favor of

natural sciences not humanities. Twenty two thousand scientists and technicians were cut in this field in 2016 (Zubov Andrey, 29.09. 2016).

The basic principle of education is in integrity of knowledge – knowledge of nature and society. We cannot just continuously study the natural phenomena, i.e. the world around us without understanding of who we are, without understanding of ourselves. Human being is the subject to constant changes; his behavior is unpredictable, which raises so many opportunities for the studies, which makes them so interesting and hopeful. In our opinion, each man needs to start to explore himself/herself, what drives him, what drives his mind, what makes us who we are and what makes us be individuals, only after that will he be able to understand what is around us. Society cannot survive without knowledge of the house it lives in, that means not knowing the external world. But this knowledge is useless if society cannot develop its behavior in accordance with the laws of the world and their cause and effect relations. Natural sciences would not survive on their own without the developments in the social sciences. The world today cannot be studied only through logical speculations.

One of the main objectives of the society in the future is to change the approach to the system of education in general and to teaching science in particular. That is to develop methods which teach active learning, to teach to learn novelty. New skills and new knowledge will be asked for in fifteen-twenty years. A good specialist is the one who is above just craft and is able to quickly switch to the new knowledge, innovation. These standards are to be temporary and should be born not in the Ministries but in the science itself, as a new paradigm is born, according to Thomas Kuhn because science and education are inextricably linked. Among five social initiatives of the President of Kazakhstan the third one is about education. Increasing the accessibility and quality of higher education and improving the living conditions of tertiary institution students are becoming a call of the day. Today, more than 530,000 young people study in the country's universities, of which almost 30% are on grants allocated by the state. In the academic year 2018-19 additional 20,000 grants are to be allocated to 54,000 grants annually (Yelyubayeva Aigul, 07.03.18). This will educate thousands of specialists who will be in demand in the new economy in conditions of the fourth industrial revolution. And because of the current economic situation most of the grants are given for technical specialties although it is a great investment into the future of education in general. Moreover, increase of the salaries of people working in the corresponding fields: social workers, teachers, doctors, sociologists will cause popularity of social work. Further, working places for graduates need to be increased to provide incentives for

students. In addition, teaching hours of such disciplines could be increased in the schools and universities. Another way to contribute in the improvement of people's values is to develop the average level of culture. Very interesting incentives are being introduced under the new state program "Spiritual Revival" based on the Address of the President of Kazakhstan "Looking to the Future: Modernizing the Public Consciousness". There are the sections "Homeland", "Modern Kazakhstani culture", "New humanitarian knowledge. 100 textbooks in the Kazakh language", "The transition of the present Kazakh alphabet to the Latin alphabet," "100 new faces" and "Sacral Geography". It will result in the revival of values, national traditional morality (Zhanuzakov Amir. 05.09.2017). But there is a long way between idea and its implementation especially taking into consideration the bureaucracy of the ministries and unreasonable distribution of budgets.

Our results are in general agreement with the studies done in the world about the state of Social Sciences and Humanities but there are some contradictory trends in science and education spheres in Kazakhstan. The number of students is increasing whereas the quality of knowledge decreases. Although the diversity of topics and tasks of scientific research is increasing by contrast its universality is diminishing. Social sciences focus on the objective explanatory concepts and theories resulting in the emergence of a large number of passive studies. It is obvious that there is a necessity to design new social models, new ways of social life. Further more mathematization of social knowledge and bureaucratization of science will play negative role in the development of Social Sciences and Humanities. Dramatic changes in human societies revoke human ideals being instrumental to the crises of culture and spiritual values which in its turn lead to the crisis in social sciences. Information era calls for new methods since the world is intelligible and information is transparent.

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## **Red Shariati vs. Black Shariati;** *Comparing the Relevance of Ali Shariati for International and Iranian Sociologists*

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### **Abstract**

In this article, I discuss the relevance and newfound relevance of Ali Shariati at the international level in the field of social science, particularly left-leaning and Islamic sociology and political sociology. Then, I will attempt to explain why on the other side of the spectrum, Iranian scholars, particularly certain section of critical sociologists, have developed a sense of fatigue towards Shariati and find his social thought irrelevant in the political, cultural and economic conditions and situation in Iran. Using a comparative approach, I identify five reasons to explain the difference between Shariati's relevance for Iranian and international sociologists: 1) language difference; his usage of literature in Persian and English translations of his works that are given a more coherent, systematic and logical structure and tone by translators and editors; 2) the lack of using comparative studies as research methods among Iranian sociologists and therefore being limited to re-visiting and critiquing his works; 3) Euro-centrism among Iranian sociologists; 4) the dominance of postcolonial theory among international sociologists focusing on the Global South; and 5) the critique of Islamization of knowledge in Iran.

**Key Words:** Ali Shariati, alternative sociology, the global south, Iran, comparative perspective.

## **Introduction: Ali Shariati, the Global South, and the Context of the Present**

“Shariati writes romantic and superficial,” “Shariati was not a sociologist,” “Shariati’s writing is rhetorical,” “Shariati’s era ended with the 1979 Iranian revolution”; such notions have increasingly become accepted and common among Iranian sociologists, particularly critical sociologists, and, in general, a certain section of the Iranian academia. Does the work of Ali Shariati belong to the history of social thought in Iran, the Middle East, or the Muslim World? If Shariati’s era has come to an end, how is it that, translations of his works are widely read among international sociologists? Why is there a significant amount of academic work written about his ideas? And why has Ali Shariati as a thinker gained new popularity among social science communities, and his name is increasingly heard in conferences, workshops, and academic events, particularly those focusing on the Global South? I seek to assess and address these questions.

In this article, I discuss the relevance and newfound relevance of Ali Shariati at the international level in the field of social science, particularly left-leaning and Islamic sociology and political sociology. Then, I will attempt to explain why on the other side of the spectrum, Iranian scholars have developed a sense of fatigue towards Shariati and find his social thought irrelevant in the political, cultural and economic conditions and situation in Iran.

In doing so, my analysis is based on observation, using textual analysis, comparative approaches, as well as through interactions with academics and researchers who are undertaking research on Shariati or using him as a social theorist in their research. I identify five reasons for the difference between Shariati’s relevance for Iranian and international sociologists: 1) language difference; his usage of literature in Persian and English translations of his works that are given a more coherent, systematic and logical structure and tone by translators and editors; 2) the lack of using comparative studies as research methods among Iranian sociologists and therefore being limited to re-visiting and critiquing his works; 3) Euro-centrism among Iranian sociologists; 4) the dominance of postcolonial theory among international sociologists focusing on the Global South; and 5) the critique of Islamization of knowledge in Iran.

Finally, I argue that such difference of popularity and relevance itself is not necessarily worth discussing. Nevertheless, why such phenomenon occurs in the present social and political context is important. Failing to acknowledge so by

scholars and researchers – Iranian and international sociologists alike – especially reducing Shariati to the history of social thought by Iranian sociologists is dangerous and short-sighted.

In this article, I do not intend to perpetuate the dichotomy of Iranian sociology vs. international sociology that falls into the ideological narrative of Iran vs. the World. I however, intend to highlight a wide new significance of Shariati as a social thinker for Islamic left-leaning social thought that studies the Global South. Such significance, which is not happening in a vacuum and is entangled with the situation and conditions of the cultural and political economy of the world, is a question itself that needs to be researched on and written about by political sociologists, especially Iranians. For Iranians, Shariati was an ideologue of the 1979 Iranian revolution that constructed revolutionary ideals based on Islamic literature and an anti-imperialist interpretation of socialist discourses. Four decades after the birth of the Islamic Republic, considering its evolution, developments, and transitions, Shariati's interpretation of Marxism or his writings on Shi'ism, Islam, and justice have no relevance or implications for the socio-political situation of the Iranian society in the eyes of many Iranian sociologists. Therefore, if not dismissed as outdated, his theories are reduced to the history of the Islamic revolution, and history of social thought in Iran. The only exception is where his theories are deconstructed and reconstructed, to be used as the basis or justifications for the policies of the state of the Islamic Republic of Iran and also when deemed relevant and expedient in the context of present-day Iran.

On the other hand and on the international level, Shariati is not only read and talked about as a Muslim leftist thinker, but within the context of anti-imperialist revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and uprisings in the Middle East he is relevant and pivotal. For those who are interested in postcolonial theory and are aware of the critique of Euro-centrism and orientalism in social science, Shariati is that sociologist from the Global South who wrote about the socialist human in contrast to the capitalist human. He actively thought in an alternative paradigm. In the world of politics where progressive ideas receive a vast amount of attention, Shariati was the architect of and managed to contribute to the building of an Islamic worldview as an alternative idea. This worldview was based on Islamic values but at the same time compatible with modern social science. Hence, one could argue that Shariati established a form of analysis which is relevant and important in the contemporary context of ideas.

Overall, the relation between Shariati's and the Islamic Republic of Iran's anti-Western positions raises a contradiction, for Shariati is attractive for sociologists outside Iran who are in favor of a contextualization of anti-capitalist critique. At the same time, it is problematic for those in Iran who are critiquing the very same ideological relation that is associated to the State.

### **Making Sense of the Differences of Views and Relevance**

Thus far, I have argued that there is a new relevance and popularity towards Ali Shariati among international sociologists with a focus on the Global South. On the other hand, I have highlighted that in Iran, the native country of Shariati, he is increasingly considered irrelevant or pseudo-sociologist by a significant number of critical sociologists and researchers. Among more recent scholars, one can name Eshan Naraghi who states that Shariati's approach is "sensational" and includes "historical deviance" (Etemad, 2009). Seyed Javad Tababaei, during his speeches has questioned whether Shariati was an intellectual and academic rather than an ideologist or populist (ISNA, 2013 & ASRIRAN, 2016).

As argued above, it is more important to explain why these views are not aligned rather than exploring the opinion of sociologists, on both sides, about Shariati's relevance or irrelevance, popularity or unpopularity. This is however not to dismiss the critique of Shariati's teachings, Marxism, and the ideology of the Iranian revolution (Abrahamian, 1993). Instead, I argue that if the discussed differences of views among Iranian and international sociologists are situated and compared in the cultural, political and economic context of the social sciences inside and outside Iran, five main reasons can be identified to explain them:

#### ***1. Language difference in original writing and English translation***

The title of this article is inspired by Shariati's book, "Red Shi'ism vs. Black Shi'ism". In Persian, the book is called "*Tashayo' Alavi, Tashayo' Safavi*", or Alavid Shi'ism vs Safavid Shi'ism. One of the critiques raised against Shariati is that he was an ideologue who idealized his constructed non-historical interpretation of Shi'ism, and Islam in general. It went against the passive prejudice and oppressive interpretation of Shi'ism that dominated the popular view of Islam in the eyes of the Iranian people and was pushed by a significant segment of the clergy class. He connected the latter interpretation to the kind of Shi'ism used by the Safavid Empire to create a state religion for Iran in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Using this comparison, Shariati is identified as contributing to the revival of Islam in the context of social politics and justice. However, for Iranian critical sociologists

today, such work is not seen as social science, but political activism or even in some cases pseudo-sociology. In this critique, sociologists refer to the sensational, rhetorical, and motivational language that Shariati used in his writing of this account of Shi'ism.

However, in a different context, interestingly Shariati's view of Shi'ism is presented in the community of Islamic social sciences, during conferences, and forums. Considering how Shi'a scholarship is already persecuted and seen only as the current political view of the State in Iran, Shariati's account is actually useful in situating Shi'ism in a much-needed historical context and is attractive for scholars and young researchers in favor of a more inclusive, relevant, and social Islam.

But how does the difference of languages in the original version (Persian) and English translation also contribute to this divergence? It is often believed that to fully understand a text, one needs to be able to read it in its original written language. It needs to be noted that Shariati comes from a background in Persian literature and therefore his writing carries that literal poetic feeling of romantic Persian literature.

For example, when he writes about the human catastrophe that the "pyramids of colonialism, despotism, exploitation, and stupefaction" have caused around the world, it poetically reads as it poetically reads as "*ahram e este'mar va estebdad va estesmar va estehmar*" (Shariati, 1980) in Persian. When he describes capitalism, he uses the wordplay "*salaase zar o zoor o tazvir*" (Shariati, 1980b) meaning "the triad of wealth, power, and pretentiousness". I argue, it is highly significant, that when one reads Shariati in English, which is often done in comprehensive, relatable language of contemporary social sciences the asserted critique of writing rhetorically, sensationally, and pseudo-scientifically does not come to one's mind. As it would seem, this point is in the matter of form and content.

## ***2. The lack of using comparative studies as research methods among Iranian sociologists and therefore being limited to re-visiting and critiquing his works***

When Iranian sociologists criticized their international colleagues of obsession and blindly turning to Shariati, many times the area of comparative studies remains unnoticed. In the context of revolutionary thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the influences of social theorists on each other, as well as how they interpreted each other's works are important questions and issues. The comparisons between the West and the

Muslim world, as well as the idea of global connectedness are significant. All these questions and subject matters form an important part of comparative studies.

Hence, when sociologists in Iran neglect comparative approaches, not just in the case of Shariati but in general in the social sciences, it can be understood that when they encounter patriotic, nationalistic, and irrelevant books and articles on Shariati done by their counterparts, Shariati apologists, and disciples, their only reaction is to deem those dangerous and dismiss them as being not good writing.

### ***3. Euro-centrism among Iranian sociologists***

By presenting this point, I do not mean at all to argue that Iranian sociologists are Westernized and Westoxicated (Al Ahmad, 2012) as many of their critiques in particular derive from the field of the Islamic social sciences in Iran. However, I would argue that the dominated Euro-centric mentality of Iranian sociologists does not allow them to use Shariati as a theorist for their research. Therefore, when Shariati is only the subject of their studies and research is done on him in the same way and within the same discourse and context, it leads to the discussed fatigue and reluctance towards writings about him. Because of this mentality, Iranian sociologists fail to engage in active theory-building and act in limiting the work done on Shariati to the history of social thought and similar fields which are not important for sociologists.

Whereas, international sociologists who are aware of the critique of Euro-centrism and Orientalism are keen on finding alternative thinkers from the Global South and that is exactly the path that leads them to Shariati, Ibn Khaldun, Farabi, Said Nursi and similar figures from the Muslim world. For example, one can mention the work of Seyed Javad Miri and Dustin J Byrd on Shariati and the future of social theory (2017), Seyed Farid Alatas's theory-building on applying Ibn Khaldun in sociological research (2013, 2017), or Lutfi Sunar's Eurocentrism at the Margins (2016).

### ***4. The domination of postcolonial theory among international sociologists focusing on the Global South.***

The fourth point I am raising is a political one. There is a significant international rightwing shift that is taking place. Centrist and liberal ideologies are failing in many countries, and there is a great amount of anti-Islam and anti-left rhetoric that are being used to construct and support rightwing socio-political discourses. It is natural that sociologists focusing on the Global South that are already dominated by postcolonial theory are turning to theorists from the Global South that are both left-

leaning and pro-Islam. When it comes to Iran, notwithstanding the fact there is a much-needed critique of the anti-Western nature of the Islamic Republic, it can be understood for those sociologists to turn to thinkers such as Shariati and Jalal Al Ahmad (2012). The perception and coverage of Shariati will occur unevenly, unless Iranian sociologists acknowledged the new relevance of Shariati in the sociopolitical context of the present and start engaging in alternative theory-building, as well as revisiting, developing, deconstructing and re-constructing the already existing non-Eurocentric and non-orientalist thinkers.

### 5. *The critique of Islamization of knowledge in Iran*

Finally, one must note that there is an established and ongoing process of Islamization of knowledge in Iran that is promoted in the academia by a certain section of the institution of education within the Iranian state. This process is a response against the idea that modern social science is the carrier of western and secular values in post-revolutionary Iran (Mohaddesi, 2018). The process of Islamization of Social Science (*Islamisasi olum e ensani*) that was developed and promoted by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution in Iran was actually drawn from the themes of Islamization of Knowledge discussed by scholars such as Murteza Mutahari, Mehdi Golshani, and Ali Shariati himself (Shamsaei, 2012), but also reconstructed through diverse transitions, contradictions, transformation during different eras of Islamic Republic. Such approach that Mohaddesi (2018) has called “the Trouble of Islamization of Sociology in Iran” today is particularly enforced on social scientists associated with the critical school and cultural studies. Unlike the international tendency to move against the current and search for alternative sociology and sociologists, in Iran scholars that are censored, excluded, and depowered by the top-down project of Islamization of knowledge have developed a sense of hysteria against what is associated with Islamic social science, of which Shariati has been linked to and become a key part, and Islamic theology. For them, resisting Shariati is resisting backwardness and academic oppression.

## **Conclusion**

A question that I have been increasingly hearing, is Iranian sociologists asking international researchers who are interested in Shariati during conferences, academic events, and forums, “why, why are you reading Shariati?” The main purpose of writing this article stems from what this question represents - unawareness, ignorance, and unwillingness to connect to the international academic community and therefore getting out of context and becoming irrelevant.

A phenomenon, a new phenomenon I would say, is happening in front of our eyes. As Iranian sociologists, we live in the global world with all its connectedness and effects on our social life as individuals, academics, and societies. It is therefore necessary to critique, study and take part in the way Ali Shariati is being read and written about. And it is imperative to understand how his theories are contributing to shaping and reshaping the Global South, and the wider world, in the context of sociology and political sociology.

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## **Asbab al-Nuzul and Irfan A. Khan**

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*Neither considerations of occasions of revelations nor commentaries of earlier people will be permitted to block the further growth of Quranic understanding  
(Irfan Khan)<sup>1</sup>*

### **Abstract**

Irfan A. Khan (d. 2018) believes the use of asbab al-nuzul (occasions of the revelation) is not only a mistaken methodology to understand the Quran but it is “most fatal to receiving any illumination or guidance from the Quran.” His solution is to understand the Quran as if it were revealed to the current readers just now in their socio-historic circumstance primarily for them for the first time. Khan believes that the Quran and Sunnah/hadith (deeds and written speech of the Prophet) are the two main sources of guidance for Muslims. For Khan the Sunnah/hadith is the Prophet’s guidance to solve the practical demands of God’s commands in the Prophet’s socio-historic circumstance. Since that socio-historic circumstance does not exist, therefore Sunnah/hadith has no legislative value for the generations to follow him. The paper will explain Khan’s position, ‘ulama’s (religious scholars) critique of his proposal, authenticity of the asbab al-nuzul material, and a case study of surah al-Kauthar (108) as a concrete example to understand the Quran with and without the help of asbab al-nuzul material and how its use impacts interpretation.

**Keywords:** asbab al-nuzul, occasions of revelation, hadith, interpretation, exegeses, understanding.

## Introduction

Irfan A. Khan (d. 2018)<sup>2</sup> is a scholar of the Quran and modern Western philosophy. He seems to present a dynamic Quranic hermeneutic theory and methodology that has potential to answer most of Quranic interpretive problems faced by Muslims today. He belongs to the Farahi school of Quranic interpretation that gives utmost importance to literary contextual interpretation of the Quran. It considers the Quran a highly thematically coherent book. Khan's opening caption in the above informs two obstacles that block the growth of Quranic understanding: use of *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of revelation) and Quranic commentaries of Muslim exegetes. According to him, the obstacles result in the stagnation of Islamic thought. This paper will consider only *asbab al-nuzul* and their negative or positive impact on Quranic understanding based on Khan's analysis. It will skip the obstacles caused by the use of Muslim exegetical works in understanding the Quran for another paper. Challenges to Khan's proposal may mostly come from *'ulama* (religious scholars), who believe to correctly understanding the Quran requires the knowledge and use of *asbab al-nuzul* genre. Therefore, we will use their critique to Khan's proposal. The paper will evaluate the authenticity of *asbab al-nuzul* material through Andrew Rippin's (d. 2016) seminal paper, "The Exegetical Genre 'asbab al-nuzul:' A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey." Finally, the paper will explore *surah al-Kauthar* (108) as a concrete example to demonstrate how Quranic thought becomes stagnant with the use of *asbab al-nuzul*.

## Khan's Position on Asbab al-Nuzul

When Khan states, "considerations of occasions of revelations" will not "be permitted to block the further growth of Quranic understanding," he points to "a very strange, mistaken approach" that blocks the growth of Quranic thought. According to this approach, Khan believes that some Muslims insist "understanding the Quranic *ayat* [verses, sing. *ayah*] in the light of the situation which these *ayat* first addressed," i.e. as understood by the Prophet and his Companions. According to Khan, they believe "there is something wrong in studying these *ayat* as addressing us directly in our present situation" (Khan, 2005. 28). Khan spells out the mistaken approach as follows: "1) first find out what situation was prevailing when an *ayah* or a set of *ayahs* was actually revealed, 2) then understand the *ayah* or *ayahs* in that perspective, 3) once you have, what is according to them the only correct understanding of this part of the Quran, you may relate it to your own situation and, indirectly, derive what would be the Quranic guidance for you"

(Khan, 2005. 28). In order to understand the circumstances in which an *ayah* or a set of *ayat* were revealed, the current readers are required to know and use *asbab al-nuzul* materials.

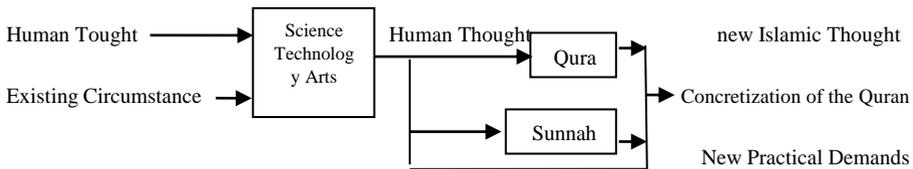
The above methodology creates two problems for Khan: 1) the Quran becomes an indirect source of guidance for all generations except the first generation, 2) it makes the Text static. Regarding the first problem, Khan believes that the Quran is a primary guidance for each new generation till the Day of Judgment (Khan, 1987. 40). For him when we make the knowledge of *asbab al-nuzul* a necessary condition to understand the Quran, it implies that the Quran is primary guidance only for the first readers and secondary or indirect guidance for all other generations. He drives his rationale to consider the Quran as a primary source of guidance for all generations to come from the Quran. According to him, God “has a two-fold relationship with His world: He creates as well as guides (20:50; 87:1-3)” (Khan, 2005. 7). Further, the divine activity of creation and guidance take place continuously (Q 29:55). Implying, that every moment is a new created moment that requires new and fresh guidance. Khan’s Quranic study informs that God has taken upon Himself to guide all of His creations including the humankind.<sup>3</sup> The paper agrees with Khan to believe that only God is responsible to provide fresh guidance to the humankind. However, we may wonder how God accomplishes this task in the post-prophetic period in which we live as the Prophet Muhammad is the last prophet and no new prophet will come after him (Q 33: 40). In the absence of a new prophet, Muslims are left only with the Quran as a divine text and the *Sunnah/hadith* of the Prophet as human acts or words to get guidance from. Khan’s solution is to understand the Quran as if it were revealed just now for us in our *current* socio-historical context as a *primary* source of guidance, just as the Prophet understood the Quran in his socio-historic situation. Does this mean that the problems faced by the Prophet and his solutions have no value or relevance to the current readers? Khan believes they are valuable for the current readers also in the sense as the stories of the earlier prophets were beneficial to the Prophet and his Companions. Meaning, for the current readers of the Quran, the Prophet’s and his Companions’ stories are one additional source of stories available to them and the future generation of Muslims (Khan, 2005. 29). In the following we will discuss the nature and relationship between the Quran and the *Sunnah* to get guidance from them as Khan sees it. For Khan the two sources of guidance require two different methodologies of understating them. If the difference in methodologies is comprehended, it eliminates the need to understand the Quran through *asbab al-*

*nuzul* material which Khan considers a road block in correctly understanding the Quran.

For Khan the Quran is the Divine Text while the *Sunnah* implements divine commands by fulfilling the practical demands of the revelation in the Prophet's *particular socio-historic situation* (Khan, 2005, 8,10, 12). In other words, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet emerges when the Quran is concretized in the Prophet's socio-historic context. In Khan's view the Text has immense possibilities of meaning being the word of God and the *Sunnah* is one meaning free of any mistake concretized in the Prophet's socio-historic situation. For Khan the concretization of the Quran is a continuous process and each successive generation concretizes the Quran in its socio-historic context that may be unique to them but never free of mistakes and thus always subject to change. When Khan sees the *Sunnah* as the fulfillment of the practical demands of the Text, then he does not consider the Prophet's commands as legislation for all other generations except his own. He sees the practical demands in the Prophet's concretization of the Quran "quite independent of the Book." As a matter of fact, Khan categorically states that seeing the Prophet fulfilling the practical demands in his circumstance as legislation for coming generations is a mistake (Khan, 2005. 10-11).<sup>4</sup> For example, God commands "so whosoever observes the month, should fast during it (Q 2:185)." The Quran does not tell how to determine the start and end of the month of fasting. In the Prophet's historic circumstance, the most accurate way of finding the beginning and end of a month was to sight the birth of a new moon. Therefore, the Prophet announced to observe the birth of new moon and establish the start and end of the fasting month. Khan says that we shall follow the *Sunnah*, i.e. look for the most accurate way of determining the birth of the moon in our socio-historic context. For us the most accurate way of finding birth of the new moon is astronomical calculation. Therefore, we should use it to announce the beginning and end of the month of fasting. According to him, "Only if the *Ummah* and its scholars keep this point before themselves, will they be able to face the great challenges in their way due to possible radical changes in human situations with the advancement of science and technology" (Khan, 2005. 14).

The above point is made by Khan in a different way in his article, "Authenticity and Development of Islamic Thought." By authenticity he means that Islamic thought should be according to the Quran and *Sunnah*, and by development he means growth in which something from the old remains but something new emerges. Khan asks: "What is the dynamic element in Islamic thought" (Khan, 1987. 31)? Interestingly, he finds human thought the dynamic element of Islamic

thought. For him Islamic thought emerges when the human thought filters through the revelation. While this filtering puts a break on the “unrestricted progressive movement of [human] thought,” it is also a source of immense possibilities of the development of Islamic thought when we read the Quran in *our* socio-historic context. Khan believes the source of all human thought is *sam‘-başar-fuad‘ad* (hearing, seeing, thinking/intuiting) (Khan, 1987. 32). All development in human thought happens due to the use of *sam‘-başar-fuad‘ad* as we progress in physical sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Thus, continuous increase in humankind’s knowledge and constantly changing socio-historic circumstance make the human thought dynamic. When we apply our more developed *sam‘-başar-fuad‘ad* due to the development of human thought and in new situations on the Quran, according to Khan, we get new inspiration and guidance from it. This self-reinforcing development in human thought and Islamic thought continues infinitum and we understand the Book better and better as time passes. As far as the *Sunnah* is concerned, when we try to concretize the Quran in our socio-historic circumstance, the *Sunnah* comes to our help and provides guidance as to how we can meet the practical demands of the divine commands in our socio-historic circumstance. Thus, for Khan to gain guidance from the Quran we understand it in our socio-historic circumstance afresh, and to get guidance from the *Sunnah* we understand it in the socio-historic context of the Prophet and learn from it how we should meet the practical demands of God’s commands in our changed socio-historic circumstance. The above understanding can be schematically depicted as follows:<sup>5</sup>



According to Khan, when we read the Quran as a secondary source of guidance for all generations to come after the Prophet, we have to use analogical reasoning to develop solutions from the same or similar first situations. This blocks the growth of Islamic thought as an understanding fixed in time always remains the basis of all future understandings. Further, the first situations cannot cover all coming situations as there may arise entirely new situations that could not have been previously conceived. Khan believes it is logical to face such entirely new situations never conceived before due to humankind’s experiences and continuously increasing new

knowledge through scientific and technological developments. The end result is that “justice cannot be done to all situations that have been deprived of being direct addressees of the Text” (Khan, 1987. 41).

Finally, to understand the first situations *asbab al-nuzul* narratives become a source of preconceived opinions even before the reading of the Text starts. For him to seek guidance from the Quran it is necessary that “no preconceived opinions should direct (or in any way manipulate with) our understanding of it,” as it is “most fatal to receiving any illumination or guidance from the Quran” (Khan, 1987. 38). The sources of opinion can be of others, readers’ own “innovations” or “from some narrow perspectives.” Khan sees *asbab al-nuzul* as others’ opinions or narrow perspectives. It is so as *asbab al-nuzul* data is not reliable according to Muslim’s own critique of the sources. In the later part of the paper we will look into the issue of *asbab al-nuzul* data’s integrity. For Khan, studying the Quran through *asbab al-nuzul* materials’ glasses is decremental for correct Quranic understanding for another reason. He differentiates between “developing within one’s own self an ever growing capacity to understand the Book and understanding the Book in the light of some preconceived opinions” or perspectives. He does not want someone’s pre-packaged understanding of the Quran that is spoon fed to the reader. To him the Quran is a communication between reader and God, a continuous dialog between them. This happens when the reader keeps on developing personal relationship with the Book and through it with God. Therefore, “*Having* a particular understanding, and *developing a capacity to have* such understanding are two very different states of affairs” (Khan, 1987. 38). Let us now review potential traditionalists’ concerns and critique of Khan’s position about understanding the Quran using *asbab al-nuzul* methodology.

### **‘Ulama ’s or Traditionalist Position**

Traditionalists may be sympathetic to some of Khan’s conceptions like reading the Quran as if it were just revealed for the reader, but for them the most difficult aspect of his proposal is to accept Khan’s concept of *Sunnah*, especially when he does not consider *Sunnah* the source of equal legislation as the Quran. Khan does not reject *Sunnah* so he cannot be included in the Quranist groups who reject *Sunnah* of the Prophet. His concern is that the Quran and *Sunnah* cannot be placed in parallel such that the *Sunnah/hadith* becomes judge over the Quran instead of vice-versa. Further, he considers two different methodologies to get guidance from them. With this

cautionary note let us consider traditionalist's view of the *Sunnah* as a critique to Khan's proposal.

Hafiz Anas Nazar in his PhD dissertation, "Hameeduddin Farahi *awr Jamhur kay usul al-tafsir: A Research and Comparative Study*, [Hameeduddin Farahi and Majority '*ulama's usul al-tafsir*]" (Nazar, 2010), presents traditionalist's view in great detail with reference to fully documented traditional sources. We can therefore use his dissertation to present traditionalist's views about understanding the Quran, and in particular the relationship between the Quran and *Sunnah/hadith* of the Prophet. In his dissertation, Nazar critiques Farahi's methodology of understanding the Quran. His critique also applies to Khan, as Khan follows Farahi school's methodology of understanding the Quran. The difference between Farahi and Khan is that Farahi considers *hadith* to understand the Quran only if a particular *hadith* supports Quranic position. Khan, on the other hand, totally overlooks *hadith* when understanding the Quran. Secondly, since *asbab al-nuzul* is part of *hadith* literature, therefore the critique of *hadith* literature can also be considered a critique of *asbab al-nuzul* genre. In his critique, Nazar points out that the Quran and *Sunnah* are primary and *equal* sources of legislation according to the '*ulama* of the *Ummah* (Nazar, 2010. 384). It is so as the Quran is *Wahy-e-Matlu* (revelation from God to the Prophet in God's words) and the *Sunnah/hadith* is *Wahy-e-Ghair Matlu* (revelation from God as an idea expressed in the Prophet's words). According to him, since both are from the same source, therefore rejecting one means rejecting the other. Both must be believed, acted upon, and used to gain guidance from the Quran (Nazar, 2010. 384). This conception of *Sunnah/hadith* is unacceptable to Khan as we noted in the above. Khan accepts that there were communications between God and the Prophet besides Quranic revelations and that some of them were reported to us through *hadith* literature. However, he believes "the texts of these reports do not have the status of Divine Words" (Khan, 2005, 34). To call these extra Quranic communications "revelation" is a definitional matter. If some people want to call this communication "revelation" is not problematic for Khan as long as it is understood they do not have equal status. Let us review in the following if traditional concept of *Sunnah/hadith* can be justified by the historical development of the concept of *Sunnah/hadith*.

## **Historical Developments in the Concept of Sunnah/hadith**

Let us review the development history of the *Sunnah/hadith* through the eyes of an eminent scholar, Fazul Rahman (d. 1988). He is a historian of the Muslim tradition

among other things. He researched the historical development of the concept of *Sunnah/hadith* in great detail in a series of articles from March, 1962 to June, 1963 in the journal, *Islamic Studies*, published by the Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan. His seminal work, *Islamic Methodology in History*, is mostly based on those articles (Rahman, 1995. v). In this study, Rahman considers the *Sunnah* a “behavioral concept.” As a behavioral concept it is “not just a law of behavior (as law of natural objects) but a normative moral law” (Rahman, 1995. 1). Further, for the prophetic *Sunnah*, “the element of normativeness must be prior” to the practice of the community, i.e. the practice of community over long term does not become *Sunnah* unless from the beginning of the Prophet’s prophet-hood his Companions considered his deeds and words normative. Rahman informs that the idea of *Sunnah* in the sense of “exemplary conduct” existed in Arabia before the Prophet, but it was considered neither normative nor in the sense of following it. According to Rahman, after the death of the Prophet up to about the third quarter of the second Muslim century, the *Sunnah* of the Prophet was considered normative but *not intrinsically something to be followed*. However, when someone decided to fulfill a *sunnah* (exemplary conduct) the sense of fulfillment came into being both in the pre-prophetic Arabia and through about the third quarter of the second Muslim century, according to Rahman.

Rahman claims that the Prophetic *Sunnah* was normative but not intrinsically something to be followed up to the third quarter of the second Muslim century can be demonstrated by “numerous” examples in the early Muslims sources. For example, “Abu Yusuf [d. 181/798] admonishes Harun al-Rashid [d. 809] (see his *Kitab al-Khiraj*, the chapter on Sadaqat) asking the Caliph ‘to introduce (as distinguished from ‘to follow’) some good sunnahs’” (Rahman, 1995. 2-3). In the same passage, Abu Yusuf quotes a *hadith*: “‘whoever introduces a good sunnah will be rewarded ... and whoever introduces a bad sunnah ... etc.’ Meaning a bad *sunnah* can be introduced” but the meaning of following it is not included in the concept of *sunnah* as no one establishes a bad *sunnah* expecting it to be followed. Further, “From the concept of normative or exemplary conduct” emerges the concept of a standard of “correctness” or “straightness.” For example, Rahman points out the Arabic idiom, “*sananal-tariq*” means “the path straight ahead,” or “the path with no deviations.” According to Rahman, the implication of normative conduct as standard of “correctness” or “straightness” does not lead to the “prevalent view that in its *primary* sense (my emphasis) *sunnah* means ‘the trodden path’ is not supported by any unique evidence.” Though Rahman acknowledges logically and secondarily “a straight path without deviations implies that the path is

already chalked out which it cannot be unless it has been already trodden.” Hence, *Sunnah* in its meaning can imply a trodden path, but it does not automatically mean that it must be followed. Rahman explains another shade of meaning from the term *Sunnah* as “mean between extremes.” Since from a “straight path without deviations to the right or to the left also gives the meaning of ‘mean between extremes’ or the ‘middle way’” (Rahman, 1995. 3-4). Again, the concept of “the middle way” can be attributed to *Sunnah* but it also does not require automatically following it. Rahman provides many more examples to make this point. The next development in the concept of *Sunnah* emerged with a new sense of *Sunnah* having legislative value in the Muslim history. Let us consider it in the following.

Rahman’s analysis shows that in the early post-prophetic era, i.e. the end of the third quarter of the second Muslim century, the concept of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet remained “an exemplary [‘authoritative’ or ‘normative’] precedent” with no legal binding of following it or giving it a legislative value. By the time of Malik B. Anas (d. 179 A.H.), it became “an agreed practice” of the “Companion or a subsequent authority although it is not divorced by the general concept of the prophetic *Sunnah*” (Rahman, 1995. 14). By the general concept of the prophetic *Sunnah*, at a theoretical level, Rahman means an “umbrella concept, rather than filled with an absolutely specific content.” At the practical level, the *Sunnah* as a behavioral term implied that “since no two cases, in particular, are ever exactly identical in their situational setting – moral, psychological and material – *Sunnah* must, of necessity, allow of interpretation and adoption” (Rahman, 1995. 12). Rahman notes that there is “abundant historical evidence” to demonstrate this understanding. This “Living *Sunnah*” or “Ideal *Sunnah*,” i.e. “a pointer in a direction rather than an exactly planned laid-out series of rules” was the result of rational “personal free thought” activity called “Ra’y” or “personal considered opinion” that produced an immense wealth of legal, religious, or moral ideas during the first century and a half approximately” (Rahman, 1995. 14-5). The instrument that generated the Living *Sunnah* was *Sunnah-Ijtihad-Ijma*‘complex, (*Ijtihad*: personal mental effort, *Ijma*‘: consensus). This means when a new problem emerged, first the Ideal *Sunnah* was looked at then the Ideal *Sunnah* (“under the direction, of the spirit (not the absolute letter) in which the Prophet acted in a given historical situation”) was interpreted through *Ijtihad* or *Qiyas* (analogical reasoning) that was firmed over time through the process of *Ijma*” (Rahman, 1995. 15). According to Rahman, the *Sunnah* in this sense allowed second century “aphorism: The *Sunnah* decides upon the Quran; the Quran does not decide upon the *Sunnah*” (Rahman, 1995. 19). Without Rahman’s sense of the *Sunnah*, Rahman considers the

second century aphorism not only “shocking” but “blasphemous.” Due to the democratic nature of the process, *Ijma’* was never absolute. The voices of difference remained with the general acceptability of the dominant opinion agreed upon by the community over time. The downside of this process was that “the product of this activity became rather chaotic, i.e. the ‘*Sunnah*’ of different regions – Hijaz, Iraq, Egypt, etc. became divergent on almost every issue” (Rahman, 1995. 15). This situation required stability and uniformity that was achieved through a different sense of the *Sunnah* which worked well to address the existing instability but it turned the *Sunnah* into a static rule-based *Sunnah* through the *ḥadīth* movement led by Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi’i (d. 204/820). The instrument of change was achieved when the *Sunnah-Ijtihad-Ijma’* complex changed into *Sunnah-Ijma’-Ijtihad*. The *Ijma’-Ijtihad* pair “instead of being a process and something forward-looking – coming at the end of free *Ijtihad*” having to accomplish in future became “something static and backward looking (Rahman, 1995. 24). Secondly, the *Sunnah* no longer remained “a general directive but [became] as something absolutely literal and specific and whose only vehicle is the transmission of *ḥadīth*” (Rahman, 1995. 23). The *Sunnah* of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be on him), in particular, the first four *Chaliphs* also required the same “something absolutely literal and specific” with *ḥadīth* only its vehicle of transmission at this stage. Hence, when the concept of the *Sunnah* and *Ijma’* became fixed, *Ijtihad* generated from them was static and with no space for disagreement. From the above historical analysis, Rahman’s position comes close to Khan’s position. Both consider the *Sunnah* as a normative and directional concept with the exception that Khan does not want to use it in understanding the Quran but accepts it to provide guidance about the practical demands of God’s commands when the Quran is concretized in the current and future generations in their socio-historic circumstances. The traditionalists on the other hand, according to Rahman’s analysis, hold a concept of *Sunnah* which developed in the fourth decade of second Muslim century. Thus, Nazar as a representative of the traditional Muslim position about the Quran and *Sunnah* being primary and equal sources of legislation is a concept almost two hundred years Muslim century’s position (Nazar, 2010. 384).

Rahman’s above analysis shows that by the time of al-Shafi’i there was a need to achieve stability and uniformity in legal decisions. This was accomplished by changing *Sunnah-Ijtihad-Ijma’* complex to *Sunnah-Ijma’-Ijtihad* complex. The methodology worked and it controlled geographic variations in legal decisions. However, one must realize that it was achieved by finite prone to mistake actors and hence can never be taken as permanent or sacred. The unintended consequence of

the change was to make the concept of the *Sunnah* static from dynamic “Living *Sunnah*.” Khan believes that due to a totally new situation that the Muslims face today after the advent of modernity, development of physical and social sciences, Muslims need to return to the original conception of “Living *Sunnah*” as practiced by the *salaf* (Caliphs and early generation of scholars). One may ask would reverting back to the original understanding of the *Sunnah* will once again open the door of instability and chaos in legal decisions as it did the first time? Khan in his corpus has generally restricted himself to problems and solutions in understanding the Quran and seldom spoke about legal issues. However, he is very clear in his conception that the Prophet’s fulfilling the practical demands of the divine revelation in his historic situation cannot be considered having legal value for the coming generations. As a matter of fact, he proposes that this principle should also apply to all past *Shari’ah* solutions (Khan, 2005. 11). It can be argued that chaos in legal decisions will not exist in our time as we live in the political boundaries of nation-states. There would be uniformity of legal derivation within one nation-state, though there may be variations in legal opinions from one nation-state to another. The inter nation-state legal diversity in opinions can be seen as a blessing in disguise, because after some time it may become clear which nation-state’s legal judgement about a legal matter is the best and other nation-states may also adopt it if they so desire. A final note to close this discussion is that Rahman presented his research on the historical development of the concept of the *Sunnah* in 1962. His research results made some people upset at that time but no one since then has proven him wrong. Khan would agree to some of Rahman’s conclusions regarding the nature and purposes of the Living *Sunnah*. This Living *Sunnah* is not only authentic but it is also progressive. It may open the gates for using reason within an Islamic framework. Let us now turn our attention to another dimension of *asbab al-nuzul* genre, the authenticity of this material that traditionalists want us to depend upon to understand the Quran and which Khan considers a mistaken methodology.

### **Authenticity of asbab al-nuzul Literature**

Andrew Rippin<sup>6</sup> provides an extensive bibliographical and terminological survey of the exegetical genre *asbab al-nuzul* works written in Arabic by Muslims (Rippin, 1985. 1-15). Rippin critically evaluates the historical value of the sources starting from Ibn ‘Abbas (d. 68/687) up to ‘Attiya Allah ibn ‘Atiya al-Ujhuri (d. 1190/1776). He believes that sources beyond the twelfth/eighteenth century onwards have no independent value as they are “culled” from the classical sources.

Rippin's survey concludes that only four texts are valuable that contribute to *asbab al-nuzul* genre from the classical sources as of today.<sup>7</sup> Among the four texts 'Ali ibn Ahmad Allah al-Wahidi (d. 430/1038) is the earliest who contributes the most.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we will only detail his work. Al-Wahidi's book, *Kitab asbab al-nuzul al-Qur'an*, contains *asbab* for various verses in the eighty-three *surahs* of the Qur'an. Among the individual *asbab*, the reports "are in the form of *hadith* reports, with full *isnad*," going back to a companion of the Prophet or an early authority (Rippin, 1985. 5). The sources of the *hadith* reports are by Bukhari (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875), and al- Hakim (d. 404/1014). According to Rippin, "Frequently one encounters a truncated *isnad*, the report simply being ascribed to Mujahid (d. 104/722), Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 150/767), al-Kalbi (d. 146/763) or the like" (Rippin, 1985. 5). Finally, "At other times, absolutely no ascription is given to a *sabab* report." Yousef Waleed Meri,<sup>9</sup> a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, agrees with Rippin's findings. However, he goes further. Meri in the English translation of al-Wahidi's *Asbab* book's introduction quotes al-Wahidi that if an occasion was transmitted without "narration and transmission from those who have witnessed the revelation and were aware of the occasions," such people may face hell fire (Meri, 2008. viii). Meri exclaims, "It is therefore remarkable and surprising to discover that al-Wahidi did not always heed his own warning." Not only some occasions from him are "pure guess work" but the "book is replete with expressions such as: "'Qala al-Mufassirun' [the commentators of the Quran said], 'Qala Ahlu al-'Ilm' [the scholars said], 'Qala al-Suddi' [al-Suddi said] and 'Qala al-Kalbi' [al-Kalbi said]" (Meri, 2008. viii). Meri considers these expressions "personal opinion rather than transmission." According to Meri, "Al-Wahidi was never recognized as a scholar of *hadith*, but his lack of expertise in this field is clearly manifest in his book *Asbab al-Nuzul*. This is indeed the main and most serious drawback of the book" (Meri, 2008. x). Despite all these flaws, Meri still considers his *Asbab al-Nuzul* "an invaluable piece of scholarship" from a historical point of view as it remains the first extant source of *asbab al-nuzul* genre that collects the *asbab* in one single volume.

Rippin's research on the development of this genre is also important to understand the authenticity of the *asbab al-nuzul* genre. His study "indicates a late rise in the use of the term" (Rippin, 1985. 14). His first observation is that the terms like "'and the *sabab* of that verse being revealed was' or 'that was the *sabab* of that verse'" is not found in early exegetical works, e.g. in the exegesis of Mujahid (d. 104/722), Muqatil (d. 150/767), Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 161/778), or early *sira* works of Ibn Ishaq (d. 151/768), al-Waqidi (d. 207/823), or in the *Kitab al-tafsir* sections

of *ḥadīth* collections of *Bukhari* or *Muslim* (Rippin, 1985. 14). This is remarkable. Why is it that these relatively early sources do not use *asbab* literature? Rippin determines, "The actual term *sabab* seems to begin to make its appearance in the *tafsir* of al-Tabari (d. 310/922) and the *naskh* work of al-Nahhas (d. 338/950)" (Rippin, 1985. 14). In these works the term seems to be in its evolution to the eventual technical term of *sabab*: "the transmission of the *sabab* of the revelation of a *sura* or verse and the time, place and so forth of its revelation."<sup>10</sup> For example, al-Tabari in his "discussion of the banishment of the word *ra'ina* in Q. 2:104" uses *sabab* in the sense of "the prohibition of the word" and not as "the reason (*sabab*) for the revelation of the verse" which according to Rippin is "later technical sense of the term" (Rippin, 1985. 14) literature. Rippin finds many "other instances of this same kind of semi-technical-but not-quite usage ... throughout the *tafsir*." According to Rippin, "It is only with al-Jassas (d. 370/981) that the term *sabab* would appear to be used with any regularity and to win its fully technical sense and phraseology in introducing reports about the revelation of the Quran" (Rippin, 1985. 15). Rippin concludes: "it was perhaps only a century earlier [than al-Wahidi, i.e. after around 368 A.H.] that the term *sabab* became fixed" and "marked out" (Rippin, 1985. 15). It can be argued that technical sense of different terms in general takes time for their development. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that the term *sabab* got fixed after about three hundred seventy years. The problem in this case is that even the concept of *sabab* is not found in early exegetical works or in the *ḥadīth* collections of *Bukhari* or *Muslim*.

It is also interesting that al-Wahidi's understanding or description of *asbab* is still challenged. According to Meri, "Muslim scholars, especially in the last three centuries" have been "more critical in their assessment of the usefulness and importance of the occasions of revelation."<sup>11</sup> For example, the latest understanding that has emerged over this period and to which Khan also scribes is that *sabab* occasions "the revelation of this part of the Book at that time," instead of "any situation, which the Prophet or his people faced, occasioned any part of the Divine Book" (Khan, 2005. 29). While these scholars have questioned and modified this genre's understanding, Khan is unique who totally rejects *asbab al-nuzul* for understanding the Quran.

It is for the above reasons, (unreliable *sabab* materials, late sources, and late development of the genre), that Khan objects judging something that is firm and authentic, i.e. the Quran, with something uncertain, i.e. *asbab al-nuzul* literature. He considers it a great injustice to the Quran to read it through the eyes of *asbab al-nuzul* literature (Khan, 1987. x). Further, he sees using *asbab al-nuzul* to understand

the Quran, mixing divine words with the human words. When Khan reads the Text, he finds himself in the divine world of the Text that he wants to understand through the divine words only. After gaining insights, inspirations, and guidance by the reading, he brings them down to the human world. He looks to the human Prophet how he concretized the insights in his socio-historic circumstance for guidance. This differentiation and separation of the divine world and human world is an important contribution of Khan's hermeneutics and a major reason to avoid *asbab al-nuzul* literature to understand the Quran.

### **Asbab al-Nuzul: A Case Study in the Light of Surah al-Kauthar**

Let us explore the case of *surah al-Kauthar* when understood with and without *asbab al-nuzul* genre to realize Khan's concerns concretely. The choice of *al-Kauthar* is pertinent due to its short length and some of its terms that beg clarification through *asbab al-nuzul* literature. In the case study, we will examine key issues in the *surah* by four scholars, Ibn Kathir (d. 1373), Farahi (1930), Maududi (d. 1979), and Muhammad Asad (d. 1992). The four scholars represent important aspects of *asbab al-nuzul* literature use. Three key issues in the *surah* are taken as representative of subjects requiring the use of *asbab al-nuzul* literature: where the *surah* was revealed, how *al-Kauthar* and *abtar* are understood, and what guidance current readers can get from the exegeses of the four scholars. After this review we will take up Khan's understanding of the *surah* for the same issues without the use of *asbab al-nuzul* literature.

Ibn Kathir considers this *surah* Meccan and Medinan (Kathir, 606). He explains the *surah* through *hadith* literature and uses only authentic *hadiths* in his explanations. Ibn Kathir narrates two authentic *hadiths* – one *hadith* tells the *surah* is Meccan and the other tells the *surah* is Medinan.<sup>12</sup> The obvious contradiction does not bother him nor does he try to reconcile it. What seems to matter to him is that if a *hadith* is authentic, it should be narrated and explained with respect to the *surah* or *ayah* under study. The result is utter confusion in terms of what to believe as contradictory explanations may be present side by side, as is the case with the place of the revelation of *surah al-Kauthar*. Farahi believes the *surah* was revealed during Medinan period at the occasion of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah but considers the *surah* Meccan (Farahi, 1991. 456). His rationale is that '*ulama*' agree when a *surah* is revealed after *hijrah* but close to Mecca then the *surah* is considered Meccan. Hudaibiyyah is close to Mecca and hence the *surah* is Meccan. For Maududi, the *surah* is Meccan but for a different reason (Maududi, 1989. 488-89).<sup>13</sup>

He narrates Anas bin Malik's two *ḥadiths* that are considered authentic and which Ibn Kathir also explained. One *ḥadith* calls the *surah* Meccan and the other Medinan. However, Maududi's project is to remove any contradictions in understanding the Quran. He resolves the contradiction by stating that Anas's *ḥadith* which calls the *surah* Medinan must be a misunderstanding on Anas' part. According to Maududi, the *ḥadith* does not tell the subject of discussion between the Prophet and his Companions when Anas arrived. Therefore, when the Prophet said that *surah al-Kauthar* was revealed to him just now, the Prophet meant that he remembered the *surah* for the occasion at hand as it perfectly applied to the issues at hand (Maududi, 1989. 488-89). Since Anas only heard the Prophet say the *surah* was just revealed to him, he could not have understood the real purpose of the Prophet saying that. Therefore, Maududi concludes the *surah* cannot be Medinan. Finally, Asad mentions the period of revelation of the *surah* "uncertain" and does not refer to any *asbab al-nuzul* material about the *surah* in his translation and explanation (Asad, 1984. 980). Let us continue our review of the four scholars about other issues in the *surah* in relation to *asbab al-nuzul* literature.

Ibn Kathir translates *al-Kauthar* as *hawuz* (pond), a canal in the heaven, and "a lot more [good]" given to the Prophet." Among the many goods, *Kauthar* as a pond is also included (Kathir, 5668). For Farahi, *al-Kauthar* is the *Ka'ba* which is the source of all blessing for the Prophet and his *Ummah*. He sees the *surah* as the fulfillment of Abraham's prayer, Q 2: 126-27, in favor of the Prophet and his *Ummah*. The second *ayah* of the *surah* is a clue for Farahi that *al-Kauthar* is *Ka'ba* as the *ayah* speaks about prayer and *naḥar* (animal sacrifice) that are performed near *Ka'ba*. Since he sees the *surah* revealed at the occasion of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, therefore he also considers it was the Prophet's command to slaughter the animals to indicate 'umrah (pilgrimage) would not be performed that year (Farahi, 1991. 454). Maududi considers *al-Kauthar* the good of every kind in this world and in the hereafter. He lists all the goods given to the Prophet as noted in *ḥadith* literature on the meaning of *Kauthar* including *hawuz* and the heavenly canal. However, Maududi finds an additional good not mentioned by the other scholars: "The good of system of life based on easily understandable principles that are according to human reason and nature. These principles are concise and universal and have the power to spread all over the world forever and ever" (Maududi, 1989. 492). For Asad *Kauthar* is "all that is good in an abstract, spiritual sense, like revelation, knowledge, wisdom, the doing of good works, and dignity in this world and in the hereafter" given to the Prophet (Asad, 1984. 980). Further, through the Prophet the good is given to "every believing man and women" (Asad,

1984. 980). For him the highest good is the “*ability* to acquire knowledge, to do good works, to be kind towards all living beings, and thus to attain inner peace and dignity” (Asad, 1984. 980). However, we do not find any mention of “the canal Kawthar” or “pond” on the earth in Asad’s explanation.

Ibn Kathir considers *abtar* as one or all of the following persons: 1) Al-‘As bin Wa’il who hated the Prophet because the Prophet came with “guidance, truth, clear proof and manifest light.” Such people are “the most cut off, meanest, lowliest” persons who would be forgotten, 2) The *surah* was revealed for ‘Uqbah bin Abi Mu‘ayt, Ka‘b bin Al-Ashraf, “a group of the disbelievers of the Quraysh,” and Abu Lahab (Kathir, 5670-671); Farahi considers *abtar* the demise of Quraysh - good news of coming victory for the Muslims; Maududi takes it to mean “a person from whom all hope is gone and no good is expected to come,” also *abtar* are all persons pointed by different *hadiths* as noted by Ibn Kathir above; for Asad, “it is he that is cut off,” i.e. one who hates the Prophet and hence is “cut off” from “all that is good” (Asad, 1984. 980). Asad seems to imply we can find *abtar* persons among us today and its meaning is not limited to the Prophet’s era. In the case of *abtar*, all exegetes agree on the meaning of *abtar* as a person, though the identity of this person is different for each exegete.

What do our scholars say about getting guidance from this *surah*? None of the scholars talk about guidance or even a lesson learned from the *surah*. Ibn Kathir lists contradictory aspects with no clarification what the reader should believe after reading the *surah*. Maududi quotes largest number of *hadiths* and points to a clear understanding of the *surah*. He shows us how the Prophet and his Companions would have understood the *surah*. Leaving the current reader with no guidance that could be used in his socio-historical circumstance. Asad also explains the whole *surah* as the Prophet would have understood it, though in a shorter narrative. The result is that today’s readers when try to understand the *surah* through our four scholars, all of them come out knowing some historical information but no guidance. Khan would consider it a big loss as generally most believers read scripture to get guidance from it and live their lives accordingly. Let us now turn to Khan about the above issues and see how he understands them in the following.

Khan understands the *surah* in five steps. Each step leads to deeper meaning and guidance. In the first step he looks at the Arabic text of the *surah* in one visual field.<sup>14</sup> This allows him to view the Arabic text without any pollution of human words. Interestingly, he does not mention if the *surah* was Meccan or Medinan. The reason is Khan does not want to consider even this small human addition to the

word of God.<sup>15</sup> Further, determining the *surah* as Meccan or Medinan blocks to understand the *surah* as a fresh new revelation just revealed for the reader in his/her socio-historic context. In the second step Khan translates each word independent of the *ayah*'s or the *surah*'s literary context. This step would have been unnecessary if all his readers were Arabic speakers. The word by word translation helps to some extent break the language barrier for non-Arabic readers. Khan in his methodology of understanding the *surah* emphasizes to reflect on the *surah*. His word by word translation provides the opportunity to non-Arab listeners or readers to reflect on the translated words, though knowing the reflection will be at a lower level than reflecting on the *surah* in Arabic. His word by word translation of the words of the *surah* is: *innaa* ("Verily We"), *a'taina* ("We have given"), *ka* ("you"), *al-Kauthar* ("al-Kawthar"). *Fa* (therefore), *salli* (pray), *li* (for), *Rabbi* (Lord), *ka* (your), *wa* (and) *anhar* (sacrifice). *Inna* ("Verily"), *shanika* ("one who hates you") *huwa* ("is the one (who) is"), *alabtar* (lopped off). For all three *ayahs*, the word by word translation seems to have general meanings of the Arabic words in English. In this step, Khan does not clarify who "you" is and what is "*al-Kauthar*" in the first *ayah*; *nahar* is translated as "sacrifice" instead "to cut the throat (of an animal), slaughter, butcher [or] kill (an animal)" in the second *ayah* (Wehr, 1979. 1111); and "abtar" is translated as "this person who hates you" but we do not know the identity of the person yet. In the third step, Khan sees the meaning of each *ayah* in the *surah* independent of other *ayahs*, as for him an *ayah* is the smallest unit of meaning/sign in the Quran.<sup>16</sup> The *ayah* conscious translation is: "1). Verily, We have given you (O Prophet) *al-Kawthar* (The Abundance of Good). 2). Therefore, pray (offer *ṣalah*) to your Lord and sacrifice. 3). Surely, one who hates you is the one that is lopped off" (Khan, 2013. 173). At the *ayah* level we find out "you" is the Prophet and *al-Kauthar* is "the abundance of Good." Other elements still remain unknown. The fourth step consists of *ayahs* and the *surah* hermeneutical circle.<sup>17</sup> According to Khan, "the *surah* makes its point in three stages: **"A. [Ayah 1] Proclamation from the Divine Authority**, the Prophet is given *al-Kauthar* which is something whose blessing will keep on increasing. The something is identified as the Quran whose blessings will keep on increasing as its understanding will grow with increasing human knowledge and there will be increasing peace, justice and happiness; **"B. [Ayah 2] ... the Recipient should, therefore, do:** i) make *ṣalah* ..., ii) make sacrifice ...;" **"C. [Ayah 3] ... the Recipient of Kauthar not to worry"** as the opposition to the Quranic Movement "will wither away." In this step we see Khan's interpretation of *Kauthar* as the Quran. The good news is that the movement which was started with the reading of the Quran will succeed. In the fifth step Khan

understand the *surah* in the hermeneutical circles of adjacent *surahs* and the Quran as a whole. According to him, the “previous *surah* pointed that false religiosity is doomed.” This *surah* shows what the true religiosity is (prayer and sacrifice). If the believing community continues to reflect on the Quran in their increasing abilities to understand due to advances in human knowledge in their changing situation, the Quranic guidance will bring more and more peace and justice in the human world. **“Therefore, it is required that the Quranic Community maintains a living relation with the Divine Words.”** We may note that Khan’s above exposition does not require the historical information from *asbab al-nuzul* or any other source. He seems to read the *surah* in his present circumstance with a clear message and a program of action: the individual Muslim and the community as a whole has the instrument that can change their destiny if they do their job of worshipping God and making sacrifice (e.g. of time, money, etc.), God will take care of their enemies. Their enemies will lose in the end. Therefore, believers should do their work of reading and understanding the Quran and developing personal relationship with God. However, worship only is not enough, sacrifice is also required of them. If we compare our scholars’ understandings and Khan’s, we see they look back to the past with no guidance for today or future, whereas Khan refers to the past but only through the word of the Quran to understand what Quran wants to tell us what it told the Prophet, then understands the *surah* in the present with a concrete agenda of what believers should do in their present circumstance.

## Conclusion

From Rippin’s study and Meri’s discourse it is clear that *asbab al-nuzul* material is not reliable. Further, *asbab al-nuzul* in its technical sense understood as a cause that brought down certain revelations is a late development. In addition, over the last three hundred years this genre is critically reviewed and its importance or use is challenged by Muslims scholars. Khan has questioned the very basis of *Sunnah/hadith* as having legislative value and its use to understand the Quran. Khan’s view is supported by Farahi who wants to understand the Text in its literary context and not from external sources, unless they support the text’s position. Rahman’s analysis showed that the concept of *Sunnah* changed after about one and three quarters Muslim centuries. During these centuries, *Sunnah* had no legislative value. It was only a normative behavioral concept and did not require following it. Rahman’s study in his book, *Islamic Methodology in History*, was published in 1962. Since then it is not challenged by anyone. Khan’s proposal not to use *asbab*

*al-nuzul* to understand the Quran asks the readers to consider divine revelation a communication with God directly and afresh to get illumination, insight, and guidance for the existential problems they face in their socio-historical situation. This is possible when the divine words are read without mixing them with human words or having pre-conceived ideas through human historical understandings. He asks of his readers to look to the human prophet to get guidance how the Prophet concretized divine words in his socio-historic circumstance. As far as ‘*ulama*’s critique of Khan’s ideas is concerned, one may conclude that it does not apply to Khan as their rules to understand the Quran are based on the foundation raised by al-Shafi‘i’s reform. It may have been necessary for the problems al-Shafi‘i faced in his socio-historic circumstance but it cannot be made a permanent understanding or change for the rest of Muslim generations to come. We can therefore conclude Khan has a strong case how the Quran and *Sunnah* are two sources of Islamic guidance and how they require two different methodologies to get guidance from them. Finally, the study of *surah* al-Kauthar case study shows how the use of *asbab al-nuzul* becomes a hinderance in understanding the word of God on its own terms. It is therefore, the paper recommends that the *asbab al-nuzul* genre should be remove from the Ulum al Quran category to get fresh guidance from the Quran.

## Note

1. Irfan A. Khan, “Authenticity and Development of Islamic Thought,” *International Journal of Islamic and Arabic Studies* 4, no. 2 (1987): 38.
2. For details of Khan’s biography, theory and methodology of Qur’anic hermeneutic, please see “An Introduction to the Qur’anic Hermeneutic of Irfan A. Khan,” *Islamic Studies*, 56, no. 1-2 (2017), and my PhD dissertation, “Understanding and Qur’anic Revelation: The Dynamic Hermeneutic of Irfan A. Khan,” Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, (2016).
3. See Q 36:37-40, 87:2-5, 16:68-69, 23:14, 32:9.
4. Khan proposes the same solution for *Shari’ah* (Khan, 2005. 11).
5. The schematic is my depiction.
6. Non-Muslim western scholars’ mechanical research, non-ideological but data driven, as a result of their historical analysis of Muslim sources can be freely used in research by Muslim believers. For example, Andrew Rippin’s paper on the

bibliographical and terminological survey of *asbab al-nuzul* is one such case. Therefore, it is extensively used in the paper for the historical value of *asbab al-nuzul* data.

7. The other three sources are: 1) al-‘Iraqi (d. 567/1171), *Asbab al-nuzul wa qishaṣ al-furqaniyya*; 2) Berlin 3578 (pseudo al-Ja’bari (d. 732/1333); 3) al-Suyuti [d. 911/1505], *Lubab al-nuqul fī asbab al-nuzul*.
8. Among the four, al-Suyuti’s *Lubab al-nuqul* is also important. However, Yousef Waleed Meri says, the work “might be considered a slight improvement on the classical contribution of al-Wahidi.” Hence, it is not mentioned in the paper. Also, al-Suyuti comes about four centuries after al-Wahidi.
9. Meri taught at Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU), Qatar. He is a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development and faculty associate (non-resident) at the Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations in Merrimack College, North Andover, MA, USA.
10. Hajji Khalif, *Kashf al-zunun ‘an asamiy al-kutub wa’l-funun*, as quoted by Rippin in “The exegetical Genre “asbab al-nuzul.” A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey,” 1.
11. Meri mentions various such scholars and their understanding of the use of this genre. For example, Shah Waliullah al-Dahlawi (d. 1176/1762), Hameeduddin Farahi (d. 1930), Amin Ahsan Islahi. (d. 1997), and Muhammad al-Tahir ibn ‘Ashur (d. 1973).
12. Both *ḥadiths* are by Anas bin Malik. In the first *ḥadith*, Anas informs that the Prophet was among us and he dozed off. After that he smiled. When asked why he smiled, the Prophet said that *surah al-Kauthar* was just revealed to him. Since Anas never lived in Mecca, based on this *ḥadith* the *surah* is considered Medinan. The second *ḥadith* by the same Anas informs that the Prophet observed the canal al-Kauthar during *M’raj* which took place in Mecca.
13. All English translations of *Tafhim* are mine.
14. Certainly, it is not possible for longer *surahs*. However, in such *surahs* he tried to look at the smaller units of the *surah* as one unity with its Arabic text.
15. The determination of a *surah*’s place of revelation (Meccan or Medinan) is by the human beings and not God. This is agreed by all in the Muslim tradition.
16. Please see details of this process in my dissertation: “Understanding and Qur’anic Revelation: The Dynamic Hermeneutic of Irfan A. Khan.”

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