

# Islamic Utopian Romanticism and the Foreign Policy Culture of Iran

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The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. . . . Thus, after a long tortuous, but heroic development, just at the highest stage of awareness, when history is ceasing to be blind fate, and is becoming more and more man's own creation, with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it.<sup>1</sup>

On account of his dualistic and contradictory nature, man, this dialectical phenomenon, is compelled to be always in motion. . . . How disgraceful, then, are all fixed standards. Who can ever fix a standard? Man is a 'choice,' a struggle, a constant becoming. He is an infinite migration, a migration within himself, from clay to God; he is a migrant within his own soul.<sup>2</sup>

During the winter of 1978–79, Michel Foucault cogitated about the Iranian Revolution in a series of reports for *Corriere della sera* describing the protests as a revolt against the 'planetary system,' inspired by a 'religion of combat and sacrifice,' a counter-hegemonic mass movement that could bring about the 'transfiguration' of the world. Witnessing the departure of Iran's last shah, few analysts doubted that the demise of the Pahlavi dynasty was one of the central events of post-Second World War history.<sup>3</sup> Like Iranians themselves,

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> Ali Shari'ati, *On the Sociology of Islam: Lectures by Ali Shari'ati*, Hamid Algar (Trans.) (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1979), pp. 92–93.

<sup>3</sup> On Foucault and Iran in English, see among others Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, Betsy Wing (Trans.) (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p. 281ff.; James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 306ff; Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson (2005), *Foucault, Gender, and One Iranian Revolution: The Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). See also Foucault's essays 'Open letter to Mehdi Bazargan' and 'Useless to revolt?,' in: Michel Foucault, *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, vol. 3, Robert Hurley et al. (Trans.) (London: Penguin, 1997).

Foucault perhaps underestimated the authoritarian moment of Iran's Islamic enterprise, whilst overestimating its potencies, but his reports adequately captured the universal claim and 'libidinous' idealism intrinsic to the revolutionary process. Like the French, Russians, Chinese, and Cubans before them, Iranians believed in the imminence of change, brought about by an Islamic international that would shatter the prevalent status quo. Their political and spiritual guide, Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini, who made unmistakably clear that the Islamic Revolution did not belong exclusively to Iran, nurtured this idealism, declaring that 'Islam [was] revealed for mankind and the Muslims. . . . An Islamic movement, therefore, cannot limit itself to any particular country, not even to the Islamic countries; it is the continuation of the revolution by the prophets.'<sup>4</sup>

This article explores how the revolutionary reality of late 1970s Iran transmuted into a new identity for the Iranian state and how core principles of the revolution—radical cultural and political independence, economic autarky, diplomatic and ideological mobilization against Zionism and resistance against US interference in regional and domestic affairs—continue to guide the country's foreign policy elites. My argument is that Iran continues to challenge the international system in general and the US state as its most dominant power in particular, because of a 'utopian-romantic' meta-narrative that constitutes the Iranian foreign policy culture. The way the phrase is used here, 'foreign policy culture' does not refer merely to cognitive filters through which impulses from the international system are processed.<sup>5</sup> Reverting to ideas developed by critical theorists and historical sociologists, I contend that one can attribute analytic autonomy to foreign policy culture as a structured system constituted by intersubjective knowledge, e.g., ideologies, norms, identities, institutions, and other cultural artifacts. Foreign policy culture thus is conceived of as a systemic phenomenon that transcends the concrete minds of its agent—the cultural manifestation of the dominant *Weltanschauungen* carried by elites and which gives meaning to power and content to interest. To deconstruct this culture and to establish how it informed the grand foreign policy preferences of the Islamic Republic is what this narrative tries to demonstrate. To that end, the article is divided into two parts: one, theoretical-abstract, the other, empirical-descriptive.

The first section of this article presents a 'four-dimensional dialectic' of culture and foreign policy preferences. I am aware that some readers will find this part of the argument too abstract, too 'theoretical.' But I found it necessary to sketch the *Herkunft* of culture to its 'base'—human inventions—in order to avoid the perils of cultural reductionism that have sometimes infested 'orientalist' discourse on our subject matter. I found such an interpretative approach toward culture helpful to show that cognitive beliefs about the world are neither predetermined ontologically nor are eternally valid. As it is pursued here, analysis of culture is 'not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning.'<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, a dialectical approach toward culture focuses as much as possible on the manufacturing, reification, theorization and institutionalization of culture. How is culture produced, reproduced, legitimated, ideologized, contested and changed? How is

<sup>4</sup> Sermon delivered on 2 November 1979 and quoted in Farhang Rajaee, *Islamic Values and World View: Khomeini on Man, the State and International Politics*, vol. XIII (London: University Press of America, 1983), p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Most foreign policy theorists rate ideas as secondary to material factors; see further Judith Goldstein & Robert Keohane (Eds) *Ideas and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books: New York, 1993), p. 5.

the meaning of culture fixed or stabilized historically via theory and political practice? How does culture affect strategic preferences? Framing the empirical analysis with a four-dimensional dialectic is helpful to trace historically the emergence and constitution of cultural constructs and their corresponding effects upon collective action. My method is essentially to sketch—and it certainly does not claim to be more than a sketch—the ‘functioning’ of culture in relation to strategic preferences of the post-revolutionary Iranian state. What I contend about Iran’s foreign policy culture is that it is not only a set of ideas but also a mentality, a *Geist*, a systemic phenomenon that is strong enough to penetrate the strategic thinking of Iran’s foreign policy elites to its core. Thus, it is claimed, culture has both an internal consistency and a highly articulated set of relationships to its agents. My analyses consequently try to show the ideational shape of culture as pertinent to Iran’s grand strategic preferences which requires some discussion about the emergence, perseverance, and transformation of culture.

The second part of this article focuses on the emergence of Iran’s grand foreign policy preferences. Primarily, it is addressed to those readers who wonder why Iran is repeatedly challenging central tenets of international society. It demonstrates how utopian-romantic ideals formulated during the revolutionary years, and institutionalized as central narratives of the Islamic Republic, constitute the contemporary grand strategic preferences of the Iranian state. By arguing that the Islamic Republic has not discarded certain core principles formulated during the revolutionary period, I question interpretations of Iranian foreign policies as thoroughly status-quo oriented, ‘pragmatist’ or ‘realist.’<sup>7</sup> It is not at all obvious that challenging the international status quo and the United States as its dominant guardian is considered irrational from the perspective of the Iranian state. Nor is it clear that Iran has discarded the export of the Islamic republican model. Like other revolutionary entities—China, Cuba, France—the Iranian state and Iranians themselves have a nostalgic self-perception about the role of their country in world affairs. While the means to advocate Iran’s international agenda may have changed, the motivational drives toward challenging international realities continue to be strong.

### **Culture and Foreign Policy: Toward a Four-dimensional Dialectic**

If we aspire to look over the shoulders of decision makers, as Hans Morgenthau so famously advocated, we have to strengthen our empathetic understanding of the ‘mindset’ of decision makers, and this in turn requires going through the pains of exploring the cultural fabric producing that mindset.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to political realists, who tend to take existing social structures for granted, cultural and sociological theorists agree that the essential factor of the social world that humans create is socially constructed meaning.<sup>9</sup> Depending on how they order their environment, humans infuse their own meanings or interpretations into reality. The surrounding social order hence is not preordained

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 1995); and Adam Tarock, *Iran’s Foreign Policy since 1990: Pragmatism Supersedes Islamic Ideology* (Cammack: Nova Science Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> See further Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948).

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive critique of (neo)realist methodologies and ontologies, see R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), esp. chap. 5.

or biologically given. It is an 'ongoing human production. It is produced by man in the course of his ongoing externalisation.'<sup>10</sup>

Both Marx and Hegel argued that human externalization, that is the ongoing outpouring of human activity in society, is an act of anthropological necessity. In order to be an acting being, man requires reference to the social world. A comparable dialectic may be established between the nation-state and international society. In order to give meaning to the external, international world, nation-states constitute themselves *in relation to* international society, and more specifically in relation to other members of that society. They interact with other countries (economically, politically, diplomatically) in the course of their ongoing externalization. Like man who is not merely *Homo socius* but also *Homo faber/Homo pictor*, the nation-state is both world and culture maker. In this sense international relations exist only as a human product and—by extension—as a product of the nation-state (itself a product of individual action).

In a second dialectic between man and society, sociological theory suggests that socially constructed meaning attains the status of objective reality. 'Human expressivity,' Berger and Luckmann, observe 'is capable of objectivation, that is, it manifests itself in products of human activity that are available both to their producers and to other men as elements of a common world.'<sup>11</sup> The most obvious signs and symbols of the objectivated world surrounding us are norms, values, traditions or institutions and other cultural artifacts. Ultimately, they tell us what is good and bad and sometimes even who we are. They are *there*, external to us, invented by history, but nonetheless claiming objective validity, commanding a persistence that is beyond our control. This goes to the heart of what Marx meant when he observed that 'Men make their own history . . . not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted.'<sup>12</sup> It also points toward a comparable dialectic in our international world. Both the nation-state and its product, international society, are objectivated human activity. The nation-state, the producer, and international society, the product, exist *only* as human objectivity. Their meaning, importance, legitimacy, indeed their very existence, is mediated to us via their cultures—norms, institutions, traditions, values, etc. These cultural artifacts define subjectively plausible representations of reality, morally sanctioned codes of collective behavior, rules of social discourse and a general plot for the conduct of the day-to-day affairs of the state. Culture in this sense functions as shared, 'factualized' ideational patterns that permit the nation-state to interpret its relationship with the external environment (alter, or international society) and to order the internal self (ego, or self-identity).

### *The Social Construction of Cultural Systems*

It has been suggested that, through the process of externalization, a structured cultural system is constructed that is experienced as an intersubjectively shared object of reality in common with others. To understand culture as externalized, objectivated systems of

<sup>10</sup> Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 69–70.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,' in: Karl Marx, *Survey from Exile*, David Fernbach (Ed.) (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973), p. 146.

knowledge is close to Wilhelm Dilthey's observations regarding the relationship between cultural system and the individual. According to Dilthey:

The individual slant which colours the personal knowledge of life is corrected and enlarged by the common experience. By this I mean the shared beliefs emerging in any coherent circle of people. These are assertions about the passage of life, judgements of value, rules of conduct, definition of goals and of what is good. It is characteristic of them that they are the products of the common life. They apply as much to the life of individuals as to that of communities. As custom, tradition and public opinion they influence individuals and their experience; because the community has the weight of numbers behind it and outlasts the individual, this power usually proves superior to his will.<sup>13</sup>

The last sentence is crucial and introduces the third moment of the dialectic between culture and individual. Dilthey discerns that culture emerges as aggregations of meaning constituted by human experience. Once externalized, objectivated as custom, tradition and values, the cultural structure reacts back on the individual, exercising a power that 'proves superior to his will.' If we attribute structural qualities to interaction, the cultural system under focus develops *emergent* properties that may have causal impacts on its constituent agents. To say that a cultural system has emergent properties refers to a paradox in the dialectic between culture and individual. The cultural system, having emerged as an externalized, objectivated human product, is experienced by man as something other than his own invention. Once externalized through human action and objectivated through reification and institutionalization, culture appears as an externalized product, which implies it has acquired a measure of distinctiveness from the elites who produced it (it has acquired systemic qualities).<sup>14</sup> As an external cultural system, it exercises a certain degree of hegemony over the culture bearer, which at times is overwhelming, at times reformed through consistent resistance, and at times overthrown *in toto* by revolutionary force. Culture conceived of in this sense is objectified as a facticity external to its creators, and hence is experienced as an outer objective reality in common with others.<sup>15</sup> Sociologist Margaret Archer argues in a comparable vein:

As an emergent entity the Cultural System has an objective existence and autonomous relations amongst its components. ... At any moment the CS [Cultural System] is the product of historical Socio-Cultural interaction, but having emerged (emergence being a continuous process) then *qua* product, it has properties of its

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<sup>13</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 179.

<sup>14</sup> Most contemporary sociological and constructivist analyses, in international relations and other disciplines, subscribe to that viewpoint. See further Mlada Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. chap. 4; Margaret S. Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Nicholas Onuf, *The Republican Legacy in International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chap. 8.

<sup>15</sup> I have drawn on sociological theory here; see further Peter Berger & Stanley Pullberg, 'Reification and the sociological critique of consciousness,' *History and Theory*, 4(2) (1965), pp. 196–211; Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966); and Berger & Luckmann, *Social Construction*, n. 8.

own. Like structure, culture is man-made but escapes its makers to act back upon them.<sup>16</sup>

Archer speaks of an objectively existing cultural system that is the product of interaction and acts upon its constituent parts. This idea not only corresponds to my argument about the relative autonomy of the cultural system as an external, objectified reality transcending its makers but also with my second proposal regarding the social construction of culture. If the cultural system is produced, reproduced, and reified in interaction with others, as Archer argues, the formation of culture is an intrinsically social process. Individuals and nation-states do not retain integrity as they engage in interaction; they do not ‘function’ in encapsulated habitats. They have myriad relationships with the international world, with other nation-states, and with other actors in international society. This ‘sociality’ suggests two central characteristics of cultural systems: it is through externalization of socially produced knowledge that culture is a product of individuals; and it is through objectification that culture becomes a reality *sui generis*. What needs to be provided in a third step is the link between that cultural system and the emergence of preferences and interests.

#### *Foreign Policy Culture and Grand Strategic Preference Setting*

If externalization constitutes a cultural system and objectification makes it appear as reality, it should follow that this objectified world is reabsorbed by agents who are the addressees of the reflexive reality. This process is termed ‘internalization’ in sociological theory. Sociologists argue that agents internalize culture through the process of socialization—a dialectic, continuous process whereby the contents and meanings of culture are mediated, and the agent is habituated to accept the ideational attributes of the structure of that cultural system (e.g., identities, roles, norms, institutions). Relating our argument back to the findings in the previous section, this would mean that the third dimension of the production and workings of culture has ‘reactive’ qualities: (1) it is through externalization that culture is a human product; (2) it is through objectification that culture becomes a reality *sui generis*; and (3) it is through internalization that agents are products of culture. The behavioral component—intrinsic to all three moments of this cultural dialectic—manifests itself most forcefully in the dimension of internalization through socialization in culture, because it is during this moment where external structures affect the subjective structures of the consciousness of the agent itself, not only transcending the external-internal divide but also transposing the outer cultural system into the inner self. It is this moment of the cultural process that transforms agents from culture *maker* to culture *taker*.

If cultural systems react to shape their makers, we may talk about a process of ‘introjection,’ in a manner that the ‘radical’ Frankfurt School theorist Herbert Marcuse employed the term. In a provocative form, this quality of culture reveals that socialization in cultural systems has not only mediating or causal impacts but also *constitutive* effects. According to Marcuse:

The efficiency of the system blunts the individuals’ recognition that it contains no facts which do not communicate the repressive power of the whole. If the individuals find themselves in the things which shape their life, they do so, not by

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<sup>16</sup> Archer, *Culture and Agency*, p. 107, n. 14.



giving, but by accepting the law of things—not the law of physics but the law of their society.<sup>17</sup>

Reinterpreted, Marcuse's dramatic argument about the deterministic impact of society on man may be transferred to our cultural milieu. By its very constitution, both as an intersubjectively shared objectified reality and formally institutionalized and codified fact, culture not only penetrates agents but also 'introjects' them with objectivated meanings (fundamentally through language).<sup>18</sup> The invented artifacts of the culture—norms, identities, institutions, etc.—are maintained not simply by their coercive ability but by implicit and sometimes formally explicit claims to legitimacy.<sup>19</sup> They possess a degree of historically legitimated moral authority which signals that conforming to the dominant culture is morally right and dissent is morally wrong. Socialized in such an authoritative yet invented cultural milieu, agents are penetrated ideationally 'all the way down,' shaped to take on the roles and attitudes communicated by the dominant cultural system.<sup>20</sup>

Following the symbolic-interactionist school of social psychology in the tradition of George Herbert Mead, one further may assert that social roles have particular identities (or an identity set) attached to them.<sup>21</sup> These *role identities* are socially constructed representations of the Self (ego), which by implication require representation of an alter Other: 'By taking a particular role identity Ego is at the same time "casting" Alter in a corresponding counter-role that makes Ego's identity meaningful. One cannot be a trader without someone to trade with, a proselytiser without a convert, or a conqueror without a conquest.'<sup>22</sup> Culture in this sense functions as a source for identity, it differentiates 'us' from 'them.' Boundaries of identity expressed by abstract 'typologies' that differentiate the 'in-group' from the 'out-group' would not make sense without reference to shared knowledge or culture. The self-depicted identities would not be recognizable if individuals or states would not constantly act out, reproduce, and legitimate them. Once cognitively internalized and formally institutionalized, the cultural system constitutes the preferred self-identification or identity of the agent in relation to the Other, guiding him in relation to both *goal-oriented preferences* (interest) and *strategy* (means). Reconstituted for our understanding of foreign policy culture, a four dimensional dialectic emerges: (1) it is through externalization that culture is a human product; (2) it is through objectification that culture becomes a reality *sui generis*; (3) it is through internalization that agents are products of culture; and (4) it is through introjection that culture constitutes the identities, interests and preferences of agents. These are, of course, ideal-typical categorizations that are not meant to define separable positions in a causal transmission belt. Here and elsewhere there is no suggestion that there are benchmarks which would define the transformation of one dialectic into another. What has been presented here is a preliminary four-dimensional dialectic of culture that may offer mnemonic (yet ephemeral) value for the relationship between agents (individuals, nation-states) and cultural systems

<sup>17</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 1964), p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> The centrality of language is accentuated by the 'semiotic' approach to culture; see, among others, Ferdinand Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).

<sup>19</sup> For the social construction of legitimacy, see Bukovansky, *Legitimacy*, esp. pp. 2–3, n. 14.

<sup>20</sup> See Wendt, *Social Theory*, chap. 3, p. 92ff., n. 14.

<sup>21</sup> See George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

<sup>22</sup> Wendt, *Social Theory*, p. 329, n. 14.

(society, the international system). Culture conceived of in this sense is ‘not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed causally; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described.’<sup>23</sup>

### Framing Iran’s Foreign Policy Culture

The suggested cultural dialectic offers a general framework to trace the relationship between cultural system, identity construction and the definition of goal-oriented preferences. In this case, we are dealing with a specific manifestation of culture, attempting to address the relationship of one specific agent (Iran) with its external environment (international society). To that end, it makes sense to commence by exploring the emergence of ideas, institutions, and norms as pertinent to the contemporary grand strategic preferences of Iran. But how do we specify the location of them? Where do we ‘look’ for the production and reproduction of shared knowledge? I suggest two interdependent sources of Iran’s foreign policy culture: ‘cognitive-introjective,’ referring to the intellectual production and processing of categories of the Self and the Other; and ‘institutional-introjective,’ denoting the formal institutionalization of cultural artifacts as authoritative narratives of the state. Both moments of cultural production and reproduction claim the quality of objectiveness, resisting attempts to be altered. Both are interdependent, i.e., they ‘inhabit’ the same foreign policy culture. Both are legitimated by authoritative narratives of discourse, wielding mechanisms of social control to enforce their reality. However, both also are under permanent pressure from competing and oppositional ideas, which may succeed in transforming the prevalent culture altogether.

#### *Cognitive-introjective Sources of the Iranian Foreign Policy Culture*

The ideational introjection of masses by intellectuals has figured prominently in discourse about the workings of culture. According to Max Weber, intellectuals are a group of people ‘who by virtue of their peculiarity have special access to certain achievements considered to be “culture values” [*Kulturwerte*] and who therefore usurp the leadership of a “culture community” [*Kulturgemeinschaft*].’<sup>24</sup> It was Antonio Gramsci, of course, who highlighted the hegemonic fulcrum of culture, observing that intellectually produced and legitimated ideologies are particularly deterministic and functional in perpetuating and reproducing the dominant social system. ‘The intellectuals,’ Gramsci observed, ‘are the dominant group’s “deputies” exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government.’<sup>25</sup> The hegemony of the dominant ideas articulated by intellectuals is not, however, unalterable. With the formation of a revolutionary cadre of ‘organic’ intellectuals, Gramsci argued, a counter-hegemonic movement may succeed in spreading ideas that organize the masses against the exploitation of the ruling groups. From

<sup>23</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 14, n. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 176.

<sup>25</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 12. Writing in the Marxist tradition, Gramsci distinguished between ‘organic’ intellectuals and ‘traditional’ intellectuals. Whereas the former are created by dominant social classes to give them homogeneity and awareness of their function, the latter category refers to intellectuals (most notably the clergy, but also administrators, scholars, philosophers, scientists and theorists) who are already in existence and seem to represent historical continuity.



Gramsci's perspective, then, intellectuals are manufacturers, re-manufacturers *and* inventors of culture.

Whereas followers of Gramsci perhaps would accentuate the function of intellectually sanctioned culture primarily as a servant of power, I focus on the formative and inventive moment of the intellectual manufacturing of ideational systems. In the pre-revolutionary Iranian context it was the 'inventive manufacturer' of intellectual ideas who was instrumental in producing a counter-hegemonic political culture that ushered in the revolution in 1979.<sup>26</sup> Whereas the Pahlavi state adhered to the representation of the monarchy and Iran as the heir of pre-Islamic Persian empires at the gates of reconstituting a 'great civilization' (*tamadon-e bozorg*), the opposition to the metaphysics propagated by the Pahlavi state reverted to Shi'i-Islamic anti-imperialist imageries as the dominant narrative of the Iranian self. The actual existing and ongoing order of the Pahlavi state ('topia') was counteracted with 'wish-images' suitable to function as a counter-hegemonic, revolutionary rallying call for the opposition (utopias).<sup>27</sup> Romanticizing, yet frugal in their exaltations of the millenarian cause, erudite, yet bellicose in their manifestos for political emancipation, opprobrious, yet sanctimonious in their language of protest, and passionate, yet myopic in their promises about a better future, pre-revolutionary Iranian intellectuals managed to organize the Iranian population around powerful ideas, advocating not only revolutionary domestic change but also the transformation of the identity of the Iranian state from a monarchic-nationalistic status quo power to a revolutionary-universalistic people's movement perceived to be in the vanguard of the fight for a new, equitable world order. This utopian-romantic, perhaps even hubristic, self-perception constituted the nucleus of the foreign policy culture of post-revolutionary Iran. Employing the outlined theoretical framework, the following paragraphs investigate the cognitive-introjective production and reification of this foreign policy culture, followed by an exploration of its institutional-introjective manifestations.

### *Protesting Identity: Intellectual Foundations of Iran's Foreign Policy Culture*

Carried by a cadre of revolutionary visionaries equipped with a range of counter-hegemonic utopias (Marxist, Communist, Maoist, Islamist, etc.), the political culture of Iran experienced a radical change during the 1960s. While the domestic aspect of this cultural shift that led to the revolution in 1979 is well documented, the consequences for Iran's grand strategic foreign policy preferences have not been studied rigorously.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the protests against the Pahlavi state did not reflect dissatisfaction only with domestic issues. The historical claim accentuated by the Iranian movement, which was inherent in the revolutionary internationalist ethos, transcended the nation-state, creating the dynamism that propelled the movement to spiral out of the Iranian context.

<sup>26</sup> For an examination of this political culture, see Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> I have employed the terminology of Karl Mannheim here; see his *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 174, n. 1. Here, utopianism is *not* synonymous with ideology as E. H. Carr claimed; rather, utopianism refers to rationalization of political change (termed realism by Carr). See Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1961). For an examination of the differing uses of terms common to Carr and Mannheim, see Charles Jones, *E. H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty to Lie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> For a perceptive analysis of Iran's domestic political culture, see especially Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals*, n. 26; and Samih K. Farsoun & Mehrdad Mashayekhi, *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic* (London: Routledge, 1992).

Oppositional Iranian activists and intellectuals not only protested against the institution of monarchy but also demanded the redefinition of the country's identity and the redirection of relations with the whole world. As Morteza Mottahari argues:

If it is decided that [the] basis in determining the limits of the Iranian nation is the Aryan factor, the ultimate end of that is proclivity toward the Western world. But this proclivity in our national and political mission involves submissions and consequences, the most serious being a severance with neighbouring Islamic nations that are not Aryan and an attachment to Europe and the West. . . . [I]f we [would choose as] the foundation of our nation our intellectual, behavioural and social heritage over the past fourteen centuries, [however,] we would have a different mission and other costs. . . . Therein, Arab, Turk, Indian, Indonesian and [Chinese] would become our friends, even kinsmen.<sup>29</sup>

In order to legitimate the monarchy, the Pahlavi state emphasized the ancient, pre-Islamic Persian heritage of Iran's identity. Moreover, both Mohammad Reza Shah (r. 1941–79) and his father, Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925–41) nurtured the idea of 'Iranianism,' embedding the Iranian self in the romantic discourse about a superior 'Aryan' nation (*mellat-e aryan*), married to Indo-European heritage because of common linguistic roots and hence different from the 'Arab-Semitic other.'<sup>30</sup> Demonstrating affinity with orientalist views about the supremacy of the Indo-European peoples and the mediocrity of the 'Semitic race' characteristic of the writings of Ernest Renan and others,<sup>31</sup> late nineteenth-century figures of Iranian nationalism such as Mirza Fath Ali Akhonzadeh or Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani were the forerunners of the 'metaphysical mendacity' of racially coded Iranian supremacy adopted by the Pahlavi state and secular intellectuals.<sup>32</sup> Iranian nationalist discourse idealized the status of pre-Islamic Persian empires, while negating the 'Islamicization' of Iran by Muslim forces. The Shah's celebration of 2500 years of Iranian empire in Persepolis in 1971 and his decision to abandon the Islamic solar *hegra* calendar in favor of an imperial one exemplify his adherence to the 'Iranianist' topia. Nurtured by the dream of reviving ancient Persian grandeur and establishing the ultimate 'great civilization' (*tamadon-e bozorg*), externalizing the Muslim identity of Iran from the Persian-Aryan self was meant to rationalize the Pahlavi claim to 'natural' affinity with the 'Western' world.<sup>33</sup> In her examination of the image of Arabs in modern Persian literature, Joya Blondel Saad reaches a similar conclusion:

<sup>29</sup> Morteza Mottahari, *Islam and Iran* (Beirut: Dar al-Ta'aruf, n.d.), p. 22, quoted in Wajih Kawtharani, 'Mutual awareness between Arabs and Iranians,' in: Khair el-Din Haseeb (Ed.) *Arab-Iranian Relations* (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1998), p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, one of the many titles of Mohammad Reza Shah included *Aryamehr*, which means 'light of Aryans' in Persian. His father, Reza Khan, who established the Pahlavi dynasty, promoted the name 'Iran' (Land of Aryans) instead of Persia and supported the elimination of Arabic terms from the Persian language.

<sup>31</sup> For a critical deconstruction of Ernest Renan's study of 'semitic' and 'orientalist' discourse, see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995), esp. pp. 140–150.

<sup>32</sup> See Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, 'Cultures of Iranianness: the evolving polemic of Iranian nationalism,' in: Nikki R. Keddie & Rudi Matthee (Eds) *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), pp. 162–181.

<sup>33</sup> For a comparison of the representation of 'Self' and 'Other' in textbooks before and after the revolution see Golnar Mehran, 'The presentation of the "Self" and the "Other" in postrevolutionary Iranian school textbooks,' in *ibid.*, pp. 232–253.

For some Iranian nationalists, the Other has been not so much the West, but the Arabs and Islam. Identifying Iran with the West, as fellow 'Aryan' nations, allowed for the acceptance of Western modernisation and the importation of Western culture. ... The myth of the common origin of Iranians, 'proved' by categories of race ('Aryan') and language (Indo-European), and the myth of the pre-Islamic Golden Age, allowed Iran to fit the Western national model.<sup>34</sup>

If the Pahlavi state attempted to externalize the Arab-Semitic other from the Iranian-Aryan self in order to position Iran more firmly in the 'Western' camp, oppositional intellectuals constructed the narrative of *gharbzadegi* to protest Iran's state-sanctioned 'Westernization.' Jalal Al-e Ahmad's publication of *Gharbzadegi* in the fall of 1962 put forward one of the most influential anti-dependency theories in Iran, disseminated beyond the pre-revolutionary intellectual context in the country. Al-e Ahmad equated penetration by and dependency on the 'West' with a state of cultural and economic mediocrity he termed *gharbzadegi* (westtoxification, occidentosis or westitis), defined as

a complex of circumstances which comes about in the life, culture, civilization, and way of thinking of a people in one spot on the globe without any kind of supporting cultural context or historical continuity, or any evolving method of integration, coming about only as a result of the charity of machines.<sup>35</sup>

Employing a medical analogy, Al-e Ahmad deprecated the decadent, mediocre and inauthentic status of Pahlavi Iran. If left untreated, he argued, the spread of the disease-like status would lead to the demise of the country's cultural, political and economic independence, because society was made susceptible to 'Western' penetration. Moving beyond the Iranian context, Al-e Ahmad saw the struggle against *Gharbzadegi* in terms of a conflict between the 'Occidental West' and the 'Oriental East.' Employing the metaphor of 'the machine,' he argued that while the 'West' had learned to master the 'technology of modernity,' the mediocre 'East' was kept in a state of political and economic dependency. The definition of this milieu of subjugation and power was dramatized as a means to alert the 'Eastern mind' about the creeping intrusion of 'west-toxification' and its corrupting symptoms on societies programmed to be subservient to their imperialist masters:

Our sense of competition has been lost and a sense of powerlessness has taken its place, a sense of subservience. ... One would think that all of our own standards are extinct. It has reached such a state that we are even proud to be their vermiform appendix. Today the fate of those two old rivals is, as you see, this: one has become a lowly groundskeeper and the other the owner of the ballpark. And what a ball game it is! Nine innings of genitals and thighs, charges of stupidity, mutual flattery, and bluster.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Joya Blondel Saad, *The Image of Arabs in Modern Persian Literature* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996), p. 134.

<sup>35</sup> Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Plagued by the West (Gharbzadegi)* (New York: Caravan, 1982), p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The second dominant narrative that had a determining impact on Iran's shifting self-perception and its relationship to the 'Western other' emerged from the writings of Ali Shariati. Echoing the views of Al-e Ahmad, Shariati developed a comparably critical position toward imperialism and cultural, political and socio-economic dependency on the 'West.' During his education at the Sorbonne in Paris, Shariati was in contact with figures of the French left whose political outlook and intellectual paradigms were influential in his later writings. Those included Catholic Islamologist Louis Massignon to whom he was a research assistant between 1960 and 1962, the Jewish-Russian émigré George Gurvitch who was his professor in sociology, Islamologist Jacques Berque whose class on the 'Sociology of Islam' Shariati audited in 1963–64, Frantz Fanon whose seminal *The Wretched of the Earth* he translated (in collaboration with others) into Persian, and Jean-Paul Sartre whose attempt to reconcile existentialism with Marxism and humanism had an important influence on Shariati's own attempt to synthesize social scientific concepts with Shia-Islamic political thought.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, he employed aspects of these ('foreign') ideas in one of his main publications entitled *Bazgasht beh-khish* (Return to oneself), which appeared as serialized articles in the Iranian daily *Kayhan* between 22 April and 22 June 1976. Shariati argued that discovering the 'true identity' of Iran as a nation requires rejecting 'Western' cultural influences and foreign ideologies and reverting instead to the 'authentic' Iranian-Islamic self. Pointing toward the corrupting influences of 'Western' culture, he demurred the subordination of indigenous ideas, values, and morals of the people in favor of an uncritical imitation of alien worldviews.<sup>38</sup> Comparable to the views of Al-e Ahmad, then, Shariati developed his ideas in close relation to the 'imperialist' other which made the invention of the necessary journey back to the 'Iranian-Islamic self' possible in the first place.

The romantic dimension of Shariati's worldview can be attributed to his interest in Sufism (Islamic mysticism) and the role he attributed to it in the political arena. While the trajectory of his intellectual thought makes it difficult to discern a genuine Sufi tendency, nonetheless one might argue that he presented elements of Sufism as a revolutionary and libertarian program, suitable to challenge the status quo in Pahlavi Iran. As Ali Rahnama argues in his perceptive political biography of Shariati:

In a way Shari'ati argued that an individual's gnostic experience was an educational process which paved the way for the meaningful dedication of one's life to the cause of the people. By the time the Sufi wayfarer is free of all worldly chains including his love for life and ready to be accepted by Him, he has acquired all the attributes of a true warrior for the cause of God. . . . Thus Shari'ati replaces the Sufi concept of self-annihilation and subsequent assimilation or living in God with self-annihilation and subsequent assimilation of living in 'the people.' This is certainly a novel interpretation. According to it, Che Guevara becomes an armed and socially responsible reincarnation of Hallaj and 'Ayn al-Quzat Hamadani [two Persian Sufis executed on charges of heresy]. They are both selfless martyrs of love.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 119–128.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345. In an interesting insight into the identity politics of Pahlavi Iran, Rahnama notes that Shariati's articles were printed next to another serialized article entitled 'Reza Shah the Great, saviour and reconstructor of Iran.'

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

The romantic imageries intrinsic to the narratives of *Bazgasht beh-khish* and *Gharbzadegi* constituted the apotheosis of the socialist, third-worldist and revolutionary Islamic *Zeitgeist* dominating Iranian society during the 1970s. The agents of that political culture engineered situationally transcendent ideas that promised to succeed de facto in the realization of their projected contents. ‘Only those orientations transcending reality,’ Karl Mannheim argues ‘will be referred to . . . as utopian which, when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time.’<sup>40</sup> According to Mannheim, such ‘chiliastic’ utopias are expressions of the ideal that is realizable in the here and now. ‘For the real Chiliast,’ he elaborates, ‘the present becomes the breach through which what was previously inward bursts out suddenly, takes hold of the outer world and transforms it.’<sup>41</sup> Paul Ricoeur argues in a similar vein, elaborating that Chiliasm ‘has the idea of a millennial kingdom coming from heaven . . . [it] assumes a transcendent point of departure for a social revolution based on religious motives.’<sup>42</sup> The concept of chiliastic utopianism appears to be immediately relevant to the events in Iran. Once the religiously framed, anti-imperialist discourse was codified as a revolutionary narrative it developed a dynamism of its own, ‘shattering the order of things’ not only in Iran but also beyond. As lay religious intellectuals whose ideas appealed to the disillusioned middle-class urban youth in 1970s Iran, Shariati and Al-e Ahmad introduced Islamic-revolutionary ideas to a wide audience outside the religious seminaries, giving impetus to the emergence of a systematic, Islamic culture of revolt. Translated by the organized political movements into revolutionary action, the force of this systemic movement transcended the powers of both its makers and its agents—it engendered its own dynamism, its own ‘utopian reality’ rendered transcendent by its intoxicating claim. Introjected with such a powerful, authoritative discourse, Iranians were driven by the belief that the revolution was a revolt against the *mostakbaran* (oppressors), that the shah was the incarnation of Yazid, that Iran was the battlefield where the party of God (*hezb’allah*) was struggling against the Greater and Lesser Satan, that Imam Khomeini was the messianic chaperone guiding the slave revolt in its mission to smash the idols (*bot*) of the imperial masters. This revolutionary reality penetrated Iranian thinking to its core (even Foucault could not escape its force). After the success of the revolution, the Islamic Republic institutionalized the revolutionary utopias as central ideological precepts of the Iranian state—a process that established Iran as a revisionist power in international affairs.

#### *Institutional-introjective Structure of Iran’s Foreign Policy Culture*

What gave Iran’s revolutionary narrative its force was its religious passion. The revolutionary reality transmuted the paradigms of *gharbzadegi* and *bazgasht beh-khish* into a radical counter-culture that succeeded in destroying one of the most powerful states in the Persian Gulf. Glorifying the symbols of Iranian and Shia romanticism—the aesthetics of *shahadat* (martyrdom), the sufferings of Imam Hussein, the just age of the Imam Mahdi—they

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<sup>40</sup> Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 173, n. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, George H. Taylor (Ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 276.

extracted, channeled, and dispersed the emotional energy onto the receptive revolutionary masses.<sup>43</sup> Once internalized, this emergent culture appeared as an objectified reality to its agents. This aestheticized political reality had its own structure, meaning, symbols and imagery. Hence, the *Shuhada* (martyrs) were not merely freedom fighters giving their lives for the revolutionary cause. The revolutionary reality represented them as the ‘candles of society [who] burn themselves out and illuminate society.’<sup>44</sup> Martyrdom was not a loss, it was a choice ‘whereby the warrior sacrifices himself on the threshold of the temple of freedom and the altar of love and is victorious.’<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Imam Hussein—the exalted, almost eponymous hero of the revolutionary play—was not merely a religious-political personality among others. ‘He was that individual who negated himself with absolute sincerity, with the utmost magnificence within human power.’<sup>46</sup> This ‘ideal man,’ Shariati contended

holds the sword of Caesar in his hand and he has the heart of Jesus in his breast. He thinks with the brain of Socrates and loves God with the heart of Hallaj. . . . Like the Buddha, he is delivered from the dungeon of pleasure-seeking and egoism; Like Lao Tse, he reflects on the profundity of his primordial nature; . . . [L]ike Spartacus, he is a rebel against slave owners . . . and like Moses, he is the messenger of jihad and deliverance.<sup>47</sup>

After the triumph of the revolution, the newly created Islamic Republic under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini fused the revolutionary energies and channeled them into politics, transforming the self-attribution of Iran from a systematically legitimated status quo power to an internationalist Islamic movement, equipped with the transnational mandate for the export of the revolution (*sudur-e enghelab*). How was this abstract self-identification institutionalized and how did it shape Iran’s grand strategic preferences?

Due to the dominance of the persona of Ayatollah Khomeini, the philosophical-theoretical context of the self-bestowed universal mandate, which emerged as the foundation of the foreign policy culture of the Islamic Republic, was shaped by Shi’i political theory and its interpretation by the charismatic leader.<sup>48</sup> Speaking authoritatively both because of his institutionalized position as the leader of the revolution (*rahbar-e enghelab*) and supreme jurisprudent (*vali-e faqih*) and his broad support among the elites and the populace,<sup>49</sup> Khomeini frequently employed the imagery of the millenarian struggle between the ‘oppressed’ and the ‘oppressors’ in order to rally the Iranian

<sup>43</sup> One of the main tenets of Iran’s *Ja’afari* or Twelver Shia school is that the Twelfth Imam went into hiding (*gheiba*) and will return to establish the just rule of God on earth.

<sup>44</sup> Mortada [Morteza] Mutahhari, ‘Shahid,’ in: M. Abedi & G. Leggenhausen (Eds) *Jihad and Shahadat: Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam* (Houston: Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986), p. 126.

<sup>45</sup> Ali Shari’ati (n.d.), ‘Arise and bear witness,’ available at < <http://www.shariati.com> > (accessed 24 March 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Idem, ‘A discussion of Shahid,’ in: Abedi and Leggenhausen (Eds), *Jihad*, p. 233, n. 44.

<sup>47</sup> Ali Shari’ati, *On the Sociology of Islam*, p. 122.

<sup>48</sup> See Roy P. Mottahedeh, ‘Shi’ite political thought and the destiny of the Iranian Revolution,’ in: Jamal S. al-Suwaidi (Ed.) *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability* (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996), pp. 70–80; and esp. Juan R. I. Cole & Nikki R. Keddie (Eds), *Shi’ism and Social Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> The doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* was put forward by Ayatollah Khomeini in *Hokumat-e Islami* in the early 1970s. For an English translations of Khomeini’s main arguments, see Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, Hamid Algar (Trans.) (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981).



population behind the revolutionary cause. That Manichean *mostazafan-mostakbaran* dichotomy was central to the *Weltanschauung* of Khomeini, representing a modification of the traditional Islamic differentiation of world affairs in *dar al-Islam* (the abode of Islam or the place of peace) and *dar al-harb* (the abode of war, or the place of non-believers).<sup>50</sup> Borrowing from anti-imperialistic terminology of the Iranian left and touching upon the country's Third World populist and socialist *Zeitgeist* during the 1970s, Khomeini referred to a wider struggle not only between Muslims and non-Muslims but also between justice and injustice.<sup>51</sup> According to that ideological dualism, the ongoing clash between the 'oppressed,' who have been deprived of their political, cultural, natural and economic resources, and the 'oppressors,' who have subjugated the 'disinherited,' is zero-sum in nature. Elevating the position of Islamic Iran to the highest 'moral high-ground,' the aspiration to effect a total change of that 'unjust' system was rendered explicit. Confirming that goal, the preamble of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic declared that the revolution aims to bring about the triumph of the *mostazafan* against the *mostakbaran*. Moreover, it is stated that the Constitution 'provides the necessary basis for ensuring the continuation of the Revolution at home and abroad.' Illustrated in accordance with the Quranic verse 'This, your nation, is a single nation, and I am your Lord, so worship Me (21:92),' it is further declared that the Constitution 'will strive, in concert with other Islamic and popular movements, to prepare the way for the formation of a single world community.'<sup>52</sup>

#### *Iran's Foreign Policy Culture and the Challenge to International Society*

Despite contradictory sections in the Constitution where abstention from 'aggressive intervention in the internal affairs of other nations' is accentuated (see, for example, Article 154) and the overall anti-militaristic tenor during the early days of the Islamic Republic, the Iranian revolutionaries did as much as any revolutionary movement to propagate their message abroad.<sup>53</sup> Khomeini explicitly endorsed the export of the revolutionary idea, but he also cautioned: 'This does not mean that we intend to export it by the bayonet. We want to call [*dawat*] everyone to Islam [and to] send our calling everywhere.'<sup>54</sup> Although covert support to 'liberation movements' in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine was sometimes justified openly, exporting the *idea* of the Islamic Republic without military aggrandizement was rather more central.<sup>55</sup> Reliance on *dawat* (calling) and *tabligh* (propagation, advertisement, dissemination) hence substituted for the militaristic coercion periodically characteristic of the shah's reign. In accordance with that disposition, the Islamic Republic cancelled the shah's multi-billion dollars defense contracts with the United States and Western Europe and abandoned Iranian military installations in Oman. Conscious of the appeal of the Islamic republican model to the Muslim world and caught in a momentum of revolutionary intoxication, Iran relied on its ideological power transmitted by the charisma of Ayatollah Khomeini and transplanted by

<sup>50</sup> For Khomeini's perception of international affairs, see Rajaei, *Islamic Values and World View*, n. 4.

<sup>51</sup> See Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Hamid Algar (Trans.), *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1980), p. 19.

<sup>53</sup> For a comparative analysis, see Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>54</sup> Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini, *Sahifey-e nur*, vol. 18 (Tehran: Vezarat-e Ershad, 1364/1985), p. 129.

<sup>55</sup> See, among others, Rajaei, *Islamic Values and World View*, pp. 83–84, n. 4; and R. K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle-East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 26ff.

sympathizing movements in the region and beyond.<sup>56</sup> It was this self-confidence about the justness of the revolutionary cause and the spiritual superiority of religious values that motivated Khomeini to write a letter to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in January 1989, attempting to persuade him to consider religion in general and Islam in particular as an alternative to the materialism of capitalist societies. He argued in a similar vein in his response to a letter from Pope John-Paul II (in the midst of the hostage crisis) in May 1980:

I ask His Honor to warn the U.S. government of the consequences of its oppressions, cruelties and plunders, and advise Mr. Carter, who is doomed to defeat, to treat nations desiring absolute independence of global powers on the basis of humanitarian principles. He should be advised to observe the guidelines of Jesus Christ and not to expose himself and the U.S. Administration to defamation.<sup>57</sup>

The occupation of the US embassy by the *daneshjuaan-e musalmanan-e piramun-e khatt-e imam* (Muslim Students following the line of the Imam) in November 1979 was perhaps the most explicit rejection of the pillars of international society and here specifically the institutions of international law. Denying diplomatic immunity to more than 50 US American embassy personnel was intended to symbolize the revolution's protest against imperialism, and specifically what was perceived to be an unjust and oppressively hierarchical world order. The 'hitherto prevailing conventions of diplomatic immunity and representation' were considered 'worthy of attack,' because of the legitimating force of revolution.<sup>58</sup> In other words, here and elsewhere, the long-term image and ideological symbolism of the revolution superseded crude, short-term cost-benefit calculations. Rejection of central tenets of international political culture was deemed conducive to appeal to other revolutionary movements, representing '[t]he Islamic Revolution of Iran [as] a new achievement in the ongoing struggle between the peoples and the oppressive superpowers.'<sup>59</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini condoned the occupation, because it reiterated Iran's revolutionary aspirations and symbolized the combatant-Islamic state identity he favored. Moreover, the hostage crisis was taken as an opportunity by the *khatt-e imam* (the Imam's line) revolutionary wing of the Iranian factions to encourage a process of internal radicalization and subdue their liberal-left competitors organized around Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan.<sup>60</sup> The preferred state identity espoused by that faction was to be offensive, revolutionary, and idealistic, rather than conservative, accommodating, and status quo oriented. As the closest manifestation of the omnipotence of the United States, whose government was deemed to be the prime agent of anti-Iranian conspiracies,<sup>61</sup> occupying the 'den of spies' (*laneh-e jasusan*), as the US embassy was called, was meant to reiterate the revolutionary, anti-imperialistic character of the Iranian movement, symbolizing the 'total' victory of the Islamic revolution, kindling 'flames

<sup>56</sup> For further analysis see Farhang Rajaei, 'Iranian ideology and worldview: the cultural export of revolution,' in: John L. Esposito (Ed.) *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact* (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990), pp. 63–80.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to Pope John-Paul II,' in: Massoumeh Ebtekar, *Takeover in Tehran: The Inside Story of the 1979 U.S. Embassy Capture* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2000), p. 246.

<sup>58</sup> Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics*, p. 96, n. 53.

<sup>59</sup> First Communiqué of the Muslim Students Following the Line of Imam,' in Ebtekar, *Takeover in Tehran*, p. 70, n. 57.

<sup>60</sup> See Fred Halliday, 'Iranian foreign policy since 1979: internationalism and nationalism in the Islamic Revolution,' in: Cole & Keddie (Eds) *Shi'ism*, p. 96, n. 48.

<sup>61</sup> The occupation occurred about two weeks after the shah was allowed to come to the United States for medical treatment.

of hope in the hearts of the enchained nations' and creating 'a legend of self-reliance and ideological steadfastness for a nation contending with imperialism.'<sup>62</sup>

A comparable rationale propelled Ayatollah Khomeini to pursue a second controversial challenge to the central tenets of international political culture. By issuing a religious verdict (*fatwa*) against Salman Rushdie and the publishers of *The Satanic Verses*, Khomeini negated the very basis of the international nation-state system, whereby the citizens of a sovereign state are subject only to the jurisdiction of territorial state law and, where applicable, to secular international law. From Ayatollah Khomeini's perspective, the extension of *sharia* law to someone who used to be part of the *umma* had become an apostate member of the Islamic community, and who had insulted the Quran and the Prophet Mohammad was not only legitimate but also an obligation.<sup>63</sup> Mandated by his religious status as *marjay-e taqlid* (source of emulation, highest Shi'i religious rank) and legitimated by a popular revolution in the name of Islam and on behalf of the 'wretched of the earth' (to employ Frantz Fanon's famous phrase), Khomeini positioned divine law above secular international law during periods when safeguarding the *maslahat* (interest) of the Islamic state and—by extension—the Muslim *umma* demanded political expediency. In both cases—hostage taking and the *fatwa* against Rushdie—Ayatollah Khomeini found it conducive to assert the Iranian state identity as the anti-imperialist, revolutionary-Islamic power house, because in both cases asserting that identity was helpful to fend off domestic dissent and claim the leadership of the Muslim *umma* externally. Seeking acknowledgement and support for the primacy of the revolution's spiritual and political power, calculations were made on the basis of the *absolute* ideological appeal of the revolutionary idea rather than the *relative* costs of confrontation. Ironically, the more international society turned against Iran, the more this reaction confirmed the self-perception of the Iranian state as the leader of an 'oppressed' nation, facing the overwhelming force of the 'arrogant powers'—a deeply internalized perception that was reiterated by the Iraqi invasion and the international silence about Saddam Hussein's repeated employment of chemical weapons. The revolutionary state closely related this imagery to the sufferings of Shi'is at the hands of unjust rulers and the martyrdom (*shahadat*) of the Shi'i Imam Hussein during the Battle of Karbala against the Umayyad monarch Yazid in 680 CE:

Imam Husayn was not to be killed again. Thus, he defeated Yazid [i.e., the shah] in Iran last year. Imam Husayn, who now is leading a battle against a greater Yazid [i.e., imperialism], also will triumph, God willing. The revolutionary Imam Husayn in Iran, who is fighting imperialism, is not alone now. In addition to some 35,000,000 Iranians who bravely and devotedly rally around him, there are billions of Muslims and non-Muslims everywhere in Syria, Libya, Algeria, Lebanon, Palestine, Pakistan, Africa, the Omani liberation front, Eritrea, the Chilean resistance, the Chadian liberation movement, the Canary Islands' liberation movement, the Futami liberation movement, Spain, Korea and many other places as well as the entire Islamic world, and the oppressed all over the world, who all support Iran, the revolution and Imam Husayn, represented in leader Imam Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> See n. 59.

<sup>63</sup> See David George, 'Pax Islamica: an alternative new world order,' in: Abdel Salam Sidahmed & Anoushiravan Ehteshami (Eds) *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Boulder: Westview, 1996), pp. 80ff.

<sup>64</sup> *BBC Survey of World Broadcasts*, Part IV (A), The Middle East, 24 November 1979, ME/6280/A/8.

The anti-imperialist norm advocated by Al-e Ahmad and Shariati and adopted by the revolutionary state, central as it was to the language and symbols of the Islamic Republic during the first decade of its existence, became a dominant institution in revolutionary Iran.<sup>65</sup> Inextricably linked to the identity of the Islamic state, the rhetoric about the struggle of the ‘oppressed’ against the ‘arrogant powers’ soon broke the boundaries between political idiom and political action, explaining the Iranian belligerence toward the prevalent rules and institutions of international society. Consistent with Islamic leftist concepts and the prominent intellectual discourse about *Gharbzadegi*, encroachment on the Islamic world by ‘corrupting’ ‘Western’ concepts was deemed poisonous for the evolution of a just society and the emergence of the ultimate *Homo Islamicus*. In theory, regaining authenticity—in Shariati’s terminology returning to the self (*bazgasht beh-khish*)—and retaining independence required detachment from the bipolar international system that was perceived as ‘dangerous for humanity.’<sup>66</sup> Alluding to the intellectual production of that mindset, Mehrzad Boroujerdi has suggested a causal link between the anti-imperialist disposition of Iranian intellectuals and the challenges of revolutionary Iran to the international system:

[Iranian thinkers] believe in the telos of living a moral, sensible, passionate and authentic life. Authenticity is tantamount to taking hold of one’s existence and traditions in a manner that is genuine, trustworthy, and sincere. To be ‘authentic’ is to embrace one’s time and culture critically, and, yet to keep an eye on the overriding sense of loyalty and belonging. For the prototypical Iranian intellectual this has translated into a rejection of the apish imitation of the West on the grounds that mimicry and submission are fraudulent and counterfeit states of being. This explains why anti-Westernisation and anti-imperialism have become two of the fixed hallmarks of the modern Iranian intelligentsia’s identity discourse. The formidable ideological permeation of the West and its (neo)colonial exploits lead many Iranian intellectuals as well as the common people of Iran, in search of indigenisation, authenticity, and freedom, to turn toward nativism and Islamicism. In their desire not to be a prolegomenon to Western philosophical texts or a nodal point in the Western imperialist maps, some of these intellectuals and social movements, alas, succumb to cultural xenophobia toward the West and adopt essentialist world-views. As a result, precarious policies (i.e., hostage taking, export of revolution, the death sentence against Salman Rushdie) should not come as a surprise.<sup>67</sup>

Boroujerdi suggests that anti-imperialism, cultural authenticity, and independence constituted the central parameters of Iran’s identity discourse after the revolution because the revolutionary elites had deeply internalized the three norms and were hence an immediate factor of Iran’s delineation between itself and the ‘Other.’ In turn, this would suggest that it was due to this ideational mindset that the foreign policy norm of *na sharghi*

<sup>65</sup> See Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, n. 49.

<sup>66</sup> Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini, Sermon delivered on 5 November, in *Kayhan* (Tehran), 6 November 1982, and quoted in Rajaei, *Islamic Values and World View*, p. 75, n. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Mehrzad Boroujerdi, ‘Iranian Islam and the Faustian bargain of Western modernity,’ *Journal of Peace Research*, 34(1) (1997), p. 4.

*na gharbi, jomhuri-ye islami* (neither Eastern nor Western, only the Islamic Republic) entered the revolutionary program, pitting the Islamic Republic against the established (bipolar) order of the international nation-state system. R.K. Ramazani agrees:

The policies of the state of the faqih, aiming as they do at the eventual creation of . . . an Islamic world order, will inevitably entail confrontation between that state and the superpowers. Such a conflict is inevitable because the superpowers have arrogated all power (*qudrat*) to themselves. . . . It is in the context of these basic ideas that the Iranian slogan ‘neither East, nor West, only the Islamic republic’ . . . should be understood, not the irrelevant notions of equidistance or non-alignment. . . . These ideas in effect accept the Western notion of power politics, whereas Khomeini’s religious, millenarian, and idealistic view rejects the global role of both superpowers; they are both considered to be illegitimate players in the international system they dominate.<sup>68</sup>

Hence, given that anti-imperialism emerged as a central institution of Iran’s foreign policy culture, it should not come as a surprise that the Iranian state acted upon that disposition by ending the country’s membership of Cold War institutions such as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), challenging established norms of appropriate behavior in the conduct of international affairs, turning into a passionate advocate of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM), supporting the Palestinian quest for self-determination, and transforming its alliance with the United States into a relationship of enduring antagonism. The costs of these policies were accepted, even if that meant that the country would be isolated, and labeled as a ‘rogue’ or ‘outlaw’ state by international society.

#### *Islamic Utopian Romanticism and Iran’s Contemporary Political Order*

It has been argued that Iran’s contemporary foreign policy culture is rooted in the revolutionary paradigms formulated in the 1970s and that this cultural system informed the country’s grand strategic preferences. Institutionalized as central narratives of the state, the Islamic Republic followed the revolutionary utopias not only at the level of behavior but also of interest. In other words, the radical wing that took over the post-revolutionary Iranian state did not see a contradiction between the revolutionary ideals and ‘the’ national interest of the state. On the contrary, from their perspective, realizing those ideals *was* in the national interest of the Islamic Republic and—by implication—the Muslim *umma*. Iranian foreign policy elites were aware that the appeal of the revolution in the Muslim world (and in some parts of the Third World) would be enhanced greatly if the counter-hegemonic rhetoric were to be backed up by action. If the United States was the ‘Great Satan,’ conquering the moral high ground in international affairs required confrontation. If the Islamic Republic wanted to propagate its revolutionary claim, it needed to confront real and perceived imperialism both at home and abroad. If the revolution was to act as a model for other Third World countries, it had to assert its legitimacy, if necessary, through violent action. In the Iranian case, then, as elsewhere, utopia offered both ‘a vantage point from which to perceive the given, the already constituted’ and, more importantly, ‘new possibilities above and beyond the given.’<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> R. K. Ramazani, ‘Shi’ism in the Persian Gulf,’ in: Cole & Keddie (Eds) *Shi’ism*, p. 33, n. 48.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Editor’s Introduction,’ in: Ricoeur, *Lectures*, pp. xxviii–xxix, n. 42.

The composition of Iran's contemporary foreign policy culture shows both residual elements of the revolutionary utopias and signs of an emergent counter-culture that signals loyalty to the country's commitment to a rather more equitable world order, yet less 'raucous' methods to achieve that goal.<sup>70</sup> In the Iranian context, as elsewhere, culture does not appear as a monolithic system resistant to changes from below. 'The reality of any hegemony,' Raymond Williams argues 'is that, while by definition it is always dominant, it is never either total or exclusive. At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in the society.'<sup>71</sup> One needs only to consider the speeches of women activists such as Noble Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi and intellectual paradigms developed by oppositional figures such as Mohsen Kadivar, Akbar Ganji or Abdolkarim Soroush (or even watch the movies of directors Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf and his daughter Samira or Majid Majidi) to conclude that Iran's post-revolutionary cultural order (yesterday's utopia turned today's topos) is undergoing rapid transformations.<sup>72</sup> Undeniably, this emergent counter-culture—which has manifested itself in a multi-dimensional movement for democracy—has already had an impact on the country's foreign policies (e.g., cooperation with regional states, détente with the European Union, and at some stages even with the United States under Mohammad Khatami's 'dialogue among civilizations' policy). It would be reductionist, however, to attribute these policies to power struggles between pragmatic 'reformers' organized around Khatami and pan-Islamic 'conservatives' supported by Leader Ali Khamenehi. This dichotomous notion, too often presented in mono-causal terms (i.e., reformism equals pragmatism and pro-Western policies while conservatism equals pan-Islamicism and anti-Western agitation), is inadequate to address why Iranian foreign policy elites have remained committed to certain core strategic principles of the state. Does the Islamic Republic not continue to represent itself as a 'moral superpower,' as a force for change in international affairs? Does it not challenge US foreign policies repeatedly, in the Persian Gulf, in Iraq, in Central Asia? Does it not continue to support the Palestinian cause, with conferences, ideological propaganda, organized diplomatic initiatives? Does the episode with the eight British servicemen in June 2004 and the continued standoff with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) over the country's nuclear program not indicate Iran's obstinate adherence to the independence norm?<sup>73</sup> Does the country not continue to advocate the case for the Islamic republican alternative both at home and abroad? Like other states, it appears, the Iranian republic adheres to certain grand strategic preferences that transcend the faultlines of day-to-day politics.

Moreover, from the perspective of contemporary Iranian decision makers there appears to be no contradiction between the utopian-romantic *Leitmotif* of the revolution and multilateral engagement and détente—two institutions that are central to

<sup>70</sup> For a conceptualization of 'residual,' 'dominant,' and 'emergent' culture see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), esp. pp. 121–127.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>72</sup> See further Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, 'The contemporary political landscape of Iran: the eclectics of post-revolutionary politics,' Part I, 8 November 2004, *The Tharwa Project*, available at < [http://www.tharwaproject.com/English/Main-Sec/Features/Feat\\_11\\_29\\_04/index.php?option=com\\_keywords&task=view&id=817&Itemid=0](http://www.tharwaproject.com/English/Main-Sec/Features/Feat_11_29_04/index.php?option=com_keywords&task=view&id=817&Itemid=0); and *idem*, Part II, 29 November 2004, available at < [http://www.tharwaproject.com/English/Main-Sec/Features/Feat\\_11\\_29\\_04/index.php?option=com\\_keywords&task=view&id=814&Itemid=0](http://www.tharwaproject.com/English/Main-Sec/Features/Feat_11_29_04/index.php?option=com_keywords&task=view&id=814&Itemid=0) > .

<sup>73</sup> See further *BBC News*, 'Iran releases British servicemen,' 24 June 2004, available at < <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2hi/middle-east/3835313.stm> > (accessed 24 August 2004); and International Crisis Group, 'Iran: where next on the nuclear standoff?,' 24 November 2004, available at < <http://crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3118&1=1> > (accessed 13 May 2005).



the 'dialogue among civilizations' initiative put forward by the Khatami administration. Although the Islamic Republic has distanced itself from some of the confrontational policies characteristic of the first decade of the revolution, *tabligh* and *dawat* continue to provide the strategic means to realize the grand foreign policy preferences of the state:

Fulfilling the utopian vision of the revolution's devotees inside and outside of Iran is a pressing necessity to ensure our survival. To assert our identity it is necessary to be present in all world forums and to defend Islam and Iran effectively in all international tribunals and conventions. But we cannot ultimately flourish and make our weight felt in the international scene—whose rules are set by our opponents—unless we maintain our unique idealism.<sup>74</sup>

To open a parenthesis here, I am not claiming that there is a consensus among the different factions of Iranian politics on every foreign policy decision. That would oversimplify the differences between the spectrum of political parties and institutions in Iran. After all, there are at least six institutions involved in Iran's foreign policy process: the office of the Leader, the Foreign Ministry, the office of the President, the Head of the Expediency Council, the Supreme National Security Council, and the Parliament (primarily through its National Security and Foreign Policy commissions). There is no doubt that these institutions follow different agendas. But there appears to be a culturally constituted consensus about the country's role in international affairs that is strong enough to transcend the factions of—and fractions in—Iranian politics. This foreign policy culture refers to a higher level of abstraction than the day-to-day affairs of the state. It functions as the guardian of identity, represents a web of shared ideals, images, norms, institutions, and provides for the foreign policy elites a coherent, if systematically abstract, overall orientation in the conduct of international affairs. Pro-Palestinian sentiments, anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism, Islamic communitarianism, 'third-worldism' (recently reinvigorated by Iran's close relationship with Cuba and Venezuela), and cultural and political independence have functioned as the ideational points of fixation reconstituting the Iranian self during the revolutionary process of the 1960s and 1970s and are not easy to discard. They have acquired the status of cognitively objectified and formally codified social institutions reabsorbed by Iran's contemporary elite, one that is introjected with the penetrating ideational force of this cultural reality. Despite the current power struggles in Iran, the shared interests of reformers and conservatives meet where their competition ends: at the junction of Iran's foreign policy culture and—by implication—the grand strategic preferences of the state.<sup>75</sup>

It is not at all obvious, then, that Iran's current strategic preferences represent a break from the ideals of the revolution. Nor is it clear that they result from 'socialization' in international structures, although the war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq played its part in confronting Iran with the brute realities of international life. A utopia is always in the process of being realized because it is as much legitimization of what is, as it is an aspiration of what could be

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<sup>74</sup> Mohammad Khatami, *Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society* (Canberra: Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, 2000), p. 62; see also Javad Zarif, 'Indispensable power: hegemonic tendencies in a globalized world,' *Harvard International Review*, 24(4) (2003), available at < <http://www.ceip.org/files/Publications/2003-04-01-brumberg-HIR.asp?from=pubdate> > (accessed 13 November 2003). Zarif is Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations.

<sup>75</sup> Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, 'But what about Iran's grand strategic preferences?,' *The Daily Star*, 26 August 2004.

(this is the essential difference to ideology, which does not hold the prospect for change, but legitimates the status quo). Iranian-Islamic utopianism is alive and well because it is still in the process of realizing its dual aim: democratization at home and positioning Iran as a central international player abroad. The current reform movement pursues an eclectic reinterpretation of these goals and does not represent a revolt against the system.<sup>76</sup> Its vehicle is a reconstituted counter-utopia, a 'liberal-humanitarian' utopia that is directed against the 'chiliastic' moment of Iran's revolution. The crucial difference between the chiliastic and liberal-humanitarian utopia, Karl Mannheim argues, manifests itself in the sense of time.<sup>77</sup> While the latter avow the instantaneity of their promise—the transcendent moment is here and now, the immediateness of the transcendent overcomes the distance between the utopia and reality—liberal-humanitarian utopias emphasize evolutionary change. 'There is a sense of unilinear progress,' Ricoeur elaborates, 'and this philosophy of progress is directed exactly against the time sense of the chiliastic utopia. . . . The idea is *post tenebras lux* (after darkness, light); in the end, light wins.'<sup>78</sup> It could be said, then, that the Iranian utopia of *imminent change* has transmuted into the utopia of *generic growth*. This appears to be the philosophical faultline of Iran's contemporary political culture: it manifests itself in the fight between an intellectual and scientific (enlightened?) worldview and a theocratic or clerical (orthodox?) worldview. The influential ideas of the contemporary Iranian philosopher Abdolkarim Soroush are emblematic of the former:

If science develops, it would modernize and develop our politics, it would give meaning to justice and freedom . . . and [it] would determine the rights of people. We should not forget that in the New World politics is scientific politics and management is scientific management. The new science modernizes even philosophy. Islamic philosophy is dear, but . . . [w]e should not think that the answer to all questions could be found in this philosophy. Even on the scene of philosophy we should seek progress and renewal.<sup>79</sup>

The paradigmatic turn advocated by Soroush and others has engendered the critical deconstruction of Iran's pre-revolutionary identity discourse. According to the 'Kian school of Iranian philosophy,' neither the 'return to the self' nor the idea of 'west-toxification' have sufficiently addressed Iran's conflict with itself. Instead of essentializing Iran's Islamic heritage and castigating the 'West,' Soroush argues, Iranian thinkers need to evaluate critically the country's national (Persian), religious-Islamic (Shia) and Western heritage.<sup>80</sup> 'The difficulty arises,' Soroush asserts,

when some people unreflectively assume a fixed and eternal cultural identity and distinguish friend and foe accordingly. Such people never realize that the self must be created, that it does not come prefabricated and maintenance-free. . . . The bid to 'return to oneself' will remain an empty slogan at best (and a slayer of culture and

<sup>76</sup> For a perceptive, anthropological analysis of Iranian modernity, see Fariba Adelhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, Jonathan Derrick (Trans.) (London: Hurst, 1999).

<sup>77</sup> See Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, esp. chap. IV, n. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Ricoeur, *Lectures*, p. 278, n. 42.

<sup>79</sup> Abdolkarim Soroush, 'Scientific development, political development,' *Kian Monthly Review*, 10(54) (2000), available at < [http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/By\\_dr.soroush/E-CMB-19990500-Seminar\\_on\\_Tradition\\_and\\_Moder-nism\\_held\\_in\\_Beheshti\\_University.html](http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/By_dr.soroush/E-CMB-19990500-Seminar_on_Tradition_and_Moder-nism_held_in_Beheshti_University.html) > (accessed 12 June 2004).

<sup>80</sup> Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of 'Abdolkarim Soroush*, Mahmoud Sadri & Ahmad Sadri (Trans. and Eds) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 156.

a source of stagnation at worst) if the boundaries of the self remain unspecified, if flexibility is denied. We cannot countenance a 'return to the self' that is counterposed to the reconstruction of the self.<sup>81</sup>

The contemporary foreign policy preferences of the Iranian state oscillate between the emerging, liberal-humanitarian utopia articulated by an increasingly vocal civil society and the chiliastic meta-structure woven into the institutional and intellectual fabric of the country during the revolutionary process. A critical, discursive, reconfiguring continuation rather than a break with the ideals of the revolution, this emergent culture has guided the Khatami administration toward advocating reform at home and abroad, while prioritizing an essentially conservative purpose: the preservation of the revolutionary-Islamic character of the Iranian system and the projection of Iranian power both regionally and globally. Managing the intrinsic dichotomies of this 'utopian-romantic realism' will depend on the ability of the Iranian state to accommodate the calls for internal reform and its diplomatic resources to engage an international society struggling to accommodate the desires of a demanding Leviathan shaken by the events on 11 September 2001.<sup>82</sup>

### **Mnemonics of Iran's Foreign Policy Culture**

We began our journey with the assertion that utopian-romantic ideals constituted the preference setting and goal orientation of the post-revolutionary Iranian state. What had emerged as a counter-hegemonic political culture during the 1960s and 1970s, it was argued, was codified as a revolutionary narrative and appeared as a transcendent, *de facto* reality, reacting on its agents. The introjection of the utopia of the just state, mantled in the romantic imagery of the millenarian Shi'i struggle for emancipation, constituted the pool of shared knowledge that determined the foreign policy culture of the Iranian state after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Once this aestheticized political reality was internalized cognitively and legitimated institutionally, the self-identification of the Iranian state as the vanguard of an international movement for emancipation guided the country toward challenging the international status quo that was perceived as inherently unjust and overbearingly hierarchical. Thus, for the sake of abstraction, we may assume that the morphology of Iran's foreign policy culture may be attributed to a four-dimensional, dialectical process: (1) the elite-driven invention of utopian-romantic Islamic theories in the 1960s and 1970s engendered a total redefinition of Iran's relationship with the world based on a new, Muslim-revolutionary identity for the Iranian state; (2) through the process of mass internalization of the revolutionary ideals and institutionalization in the post-revolutionary period, the utopias generated a powerful dynamism of their own (they attained systemic qualities); (3) socialized in this omnipresent, ideological system, Iranian foreign policy elites were habituated to accept Iran's new role as legitimate and a reflection of the revolutionary ideals as formulated by Ayatollah Khomeini and others; (4) that process of institutionalization and habituation constituted Iran's contemporary role identity *par excellence*—it introjected foreign policy

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165. *Kian* is the journal founded by Soroush in 1992.

<sup>82</sup> The emerging 'post-Islamicist' moment in Iran's foreign relations led in January 2004 to the renaming of a Tehran street after Khaled Islambouli, the assassin of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat (1981), thus opening up the current rapprochement with Egypt. Irish Republicans in January 2001 launched an Internet campaign urging the Iranian government not to rename a street in Tehran that was named after the IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands after his death in 1981.

elites with the idea that Iran's self-attributed moral high ground legitimates the country's special place in international affairs, which, by necessity, motivated (and motivates) them to challenge the prevalent status quo.

Let me conclude with a necessary autocritic. First, the way I framed my dialectical argument may suggest that the change from one dialectic to another occurs in a temporal sequence: elites externalize culture, culture is objectified, internalized, etc. I may have left room for the critique that I am suggesting a causal transmission belt from one cultural dialectic to another. Such a conclusion would be erroneous. It is important to remember that this paper has sketched a *continuous* dialectical process composed of four moments. Because they occur simultaneously, analysis of foreign policy culture needs to explore the full cycle of the four-dimensional dialectic. In other words, there is no real beginning or end to the dialectical process. Our search for analytical signposts and significance is essentially a modest (perhaps even 'primitive') one. It is limited to finding constitutive events that informed the grand strategic preferences of the country in question and to establishing how they were formed, transformed and maintained to fit the central preferences of the state. Every political entity experienced such constitutive periods. How, for instance, can we divorce the idea of *la grande nation* from France's role in international affairs, the concept of *Handelsstaat* from Germany's international conduct or Wilsonian idealism from the international role of the United States? Few analysts would contend that these self-perceptions did not condition how successive governments in those countries perceived their mission in international affairs. Fewer still would doubt that formative periods such as the American Revolution, the French Revolution and the 'Third Reich' influenced the way future generations of decision makers in those countries interacted with other nations. To give meaning to the outside world, the bearer of culture needs to revert to the pool of knowledge accumulated from previous experiences. Inventions of the past *have* an impact on the present. The practice of foreign policy depends on the existence (and introjection?) of intersubjective 'precedents and shared symbolic materials—in order to impose interpretations upon events, silence alternative interpretations, structure practices, and orchestrate the collective making of history.'<sup>83</sup> Appeals to the past explain why the US state is typically represented as an idealistic force committed to international justice, the German state as an anti-militaristic economic powerhouse, and the French state as a European superpower.<sup>84</sup> None of these abstract typologies would make sense without reference to culture and none of them would be effective if the states in question would not act out, reproduce and legitimate their self-depicted identities. I think it is a central purpose of dialectical analysis to identify and to unravel critically those cultural reification processes.

Second, it may be charged that my argument does not address sufficiently the degree of cultural pressures on foreign policy interests. How deterministic is culture in setting grand strategic preferences? The method pursued in this paper suggests that it is difficult to discern a priori if and when foreign policy culture has an impact on interests and preferences, and the impact needs to be investigated in conjunction with the empirical analysis. In other words, to explore the causal and constitutive effects of culture is a matter

<sup>83</sup> Richard K. Ashley, 'Foreign policy as political performances,' *International Studies Notes* (1998), p. 53.

<sup>84</sup> For the German case, see Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); and John S. Duffield, 'Political culture and state behavior: why Germany confounds neorealism,' *International Organization*, 53(4) (1999), pp. 765–803. For the impact of norms and ideas on French military doctrine, see Elizabeth Kier, 'Culture and military doctrine: France between the wars,' *International Security*, 19(4) (1995), pp. 65–93.

of the dialectical analysis, and is by no means predetermined in advance by theoretical signposts. It is important to remember that cultural inventions, however monolithic and deterministic they may appear, are essentially human fabrications. Their objective status does not divorce them from human action. The relationship between the individual, the producer, and the cultural world, the product, is and remains a dialectical one. Both are in constant interaction with each other. These aspects receive their proper recognition once cultural systems are understood in terms of an ongoing dialectical process composed of the four moments of externalization, objectification, internalization, and introjection. I regret that the unsolved puzzles within these dialectic moments could not have been explored more fully; had we moved further down our path, we might have come to understand the inner dynamics and structure of our ideal types.

Finally, by entering the well-maintained garden of 'Middle Eastern' studies with the heavy boots of critical cultural theory, some empirically spirited readers may ask: why bother with theory? My initial response to such valid criticism would be that theories are at the heart of what individuals and governments think and say about the determinants of international politics; they also become the method that governments use to define their identity and their differences to others. The main issues in international relations are about war and peace, of course. But when it comes to who had the right to attack the other country, who had the right to dominate and exploit it, who was a legitimate resistance movement and who a terrorist, and who was 'our' enemy in the first place—these issues are debated, contested and sometimes decided within theory. Indeed, the seminal study of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger on the invention of tradition and Hobsbawm's ideas on the construction of nationalist ideologies provide enough incentive to think of nation-states themselves as theoretical constructs.<sup>85</sup> The power of theory, or to block alternative theories from emerging, is very important to the legitimation of culture and national and international policies. Indeed, our case might have demonstrated that the 'libidinous' energies of theory mobilized millions of people in Iran to rise up and oust the omnipresent shah; a comparable force motivated the Russians, Chinese, Cubans and other movements with the principal aim to subvert established hierarchies of master and servant, top and bottom, have and have-nots. Is opposition to theory hence not too often 'really directed against the transformative activity associated with critical thinking'?'<sup>86</sup> Does critical thought not emancipate and open up room for intellectual exchange that partakes neither of orthodoxy nor of the partisan affirmation about the supremacy of one worldview?<sup>87</sup> These questions refer to issues left embarrassingly incomplete in this study. An important task for future research would be to synthesize the vast critical theory literature with the international politics of the 'Third World,' to ask how one can study the political cultures of non-Western societies from a critical, or a non-deterministic and non-manipulative, perspective. Projects like these may engender rather

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<sup>85</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (Eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>86</sup> Max Horkheimer, 'Traditional and critical theory,' in: *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), p. 232.

<sup>87</sup> In international relations, the return to critical theory has constituted a serious challenge to mainstream portrayals of international relations. For overviews see, among others, Andrew Linklater (Ed.) *International Relations: Critical Concepts in Political Science* (London: Routledge, 2000), esp. vols. IV and V; and Richard Wyn Jones (Ed.), *Critical Theory and World Politics* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2001).

more multicultural discourse among the growing international studies community, strengthening the case of those among us who advocate the benefits of inter-cultural dialogue.

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