Chapter 3

**The Muqāwama Thought: Intellectual Roots of Hezbollah's Resistance**

The historical development of the Twelver Shiite political thought demonstrates that it was greatly affected by having been created and adopted by a minority group in the Islamic world, giving rise to hostility and aggression among the Orthodox Sunni state institutions. The latter have often opined that the Shiʿa movement deviated from the true Islam; in certain cases, it was even deemed heretic.

A thorough examination of the Shiite political thought clearly reveals the psychology of an oppressed minority. In the most prevalent Twelver Shiism, this political thought is cloaked in messianism, which commands the believers to wait for the reappearance of the twelfth imam, al-Mahdi, from his occultation that has lasted for over a millennium, and who will lead the believers and realize the just state on earth. This resulted in Shiite political life to be characterized as negative and passive for hundreds of years.[[1]](#footnote-1) Supporters of this line of thought had determined that those who act differently in any other state, apart from in the state of the twelfth imam, severely violate the imam’s right and constitute a real heresy.

The change in Shiite thought started with the opening of the continued *ijtihād* gateways alongside suggesting solutions for the new problems that were still facing Muslims many centuries after the occultation of the twelfth imam.[[2]](#footnote-2) The *ijtihād* led to the development of *al-niyāba al-ʿamma*[[3]](#footnote-3) theory, which authorizes the *fuqahāʾ* (Islamic jurists) to judge among people and to collect the *zakat* (tax or obligatory alms), thus providing the *fuqahāʾ* with an operating space. However, clerics were not allowed to lead community, as this authority was exclusively attributed to the imams, who are both *maʿaṣūm* (sinless) and descendants of Ali.

In 1501, upon the establishment of the Safavid empire by Shah Ismail I and since the state’s adoption of the Shiite “ideology” and its transformation into a Twelver Shiʿa Islamic state, the shah sought to develop a new theory that would bypass the *intiẓar* (waiting) theory,[[4]](#footnote-4) having claimed to have met the vanished imam and Imam Ali, who commanded him to establish the Shiite state and serve as their delegate until the reappearance of the vanished imam. This theory was called *al- niyaba al-malakiyya*.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Although several clerics legitimized the ruling of the Safavid kings as representatives of the imam, the majority determined that these kings had arbitrarily taken over the rule and the imam’s rights. These developments caused a split between two movements within the Twelver Shiʿa Islam into “al-Akhbari” and “al-Uṣuli.” The former continued supporting passive position of awaiting the Imam’s return and opposing the *al-niyāba al-‘amma* theory, while the latter followed the path of the *mujtahidūn* (reasoners) and the reformists who re-opened the doors of *ijtihād* and interpretation.

Following the collapse of the Safavid state and later the Qajar state in Iran, Sheikh Ahmad Ben Muhammad Mahdi al-Naraqi (died in 1829), suggested the innovation of the theory of “*wilāyat al-faqīh*.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Through this theory, al-Naraqi granted the *faqīh* all the rights that the Shiites attributed to the Imam at the political level, as long as the vanished Imam did not reappear, and without demanding that the *faqīh* be “maʿaṣūm” (sinless) or a descendent of Ali. Al-Naraqi ordered the *fuqahā*ʾ to run governments in the vast Shiite state.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Reference to significant historical turning points in the context of Shiite clerics’ activism and their involvement in sociopolitical realms would help us comprehend the historical background of the emergence of the ideologists whom I will present in this chapter. These historical turning points took place in Iran, the largest Shiite state and the main articulator in the development of the Shiite thought in modern times.

**The Tobacco Crisis of 1890**

The status of the Shiite cleric in Qajar Iran was not like its parallel in Safavid Iran. The relationship between the Qajar regime, which did not accentuate its religiosity, and the clerics had weakened to some extent. Moreover, foreign influence, especially of Britain and Russia, on the Iranian state had gradually increased during that period. This had irritated the clerics both religiously, as they perceived it as excessive influence of heretics on the Islamic state, and economically, as the European empires opened Iran’s gates for the benefit of European merchants, thus affecting the Iranian merchants, the main allies of the clerics.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The secular opposition in Iran, for the first time, had cooperated with the clerics in the period preceding the Tobacco Crisis in 1890. Iran’s ruler, Shah Nasreddin, had granted a British tobacco company, the Imperial Tobacco Company*,* a monopoly over the Iranian tobacco market for fifty years, thus arousing objection and embitterment amongst the Iranian bazaar merchants,[[9]](#footnote-9) who were the strongest allies of the Shiite clerics. This alliance was due to the fact that the latter had originally belonged to this social segment, and since the bazaar’s people were the main source of economic support for the clerics. Because of this opposition, alongside the activism of the Islamic reformist, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani,[[10]](#footnote-10) which was coordinated with the Supreme *marjiʿ,* Mirza Shirazi, who lived in Iraq away from the shah’s regime, the latter issued a fatwa that banned consumption of tobacco all over Iran, resulting in a complete tobacco boycott by all the Iranian people. The shah eventually was obliged to annul his decision regarding the monopoly granted to the British company.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**The Constitutional Revolution of 1906**

In 1905, Iran was ready for a political revolution, considering the unsuccessful economic politics of the new Shah, Mozaffar ad-Din, alongside the fast growth of the middle class and its support of democracy, legality, nationalism, and secularism.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The revolution erupted in 1906 against the economic situation and the foreign strong presence in Iran, and against the absolute monarchy of Shah Mozaffar. Therefore, the constitutional revolution of 1906–1911 was a sort of a national democratic revolution.[[13]](#footnote-13) Moreover, the coalition established between the activist clerics and the anti-imperialist secular forces was further enhanced following the failure of Russia – which greatly affected Iran during those years – in its war with Japan. The Japanese victory was the first Asian triumph over a European nation in modern history, and the supporters of constitutions associated this victory with the fact that Japan was the only Asian state with a progressive constitution, while Russia was the only European state that lacked a parallel constitution.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Yet, this revolution had also witnessed an internal controversy between the clerics regarding their positions as progressives or conservatives. Conservative clerics, like Sheikh Fazlollah Noori, denied the right to create a new constitution that would replace the Divine constitution and the Qur’an, while other clerics, like Ayatollah Mirza Hossein Naini, supported the revolutionaries’ demands and praised the advantages of a constitution that would allow people to express their opinion and choose their ruler.

This controversy had a socioeconomic aspect, for the clerics economically leaned on the support of the shah, while the more independent clerics were freer to resist. The new constitution included an important clause, which was later revived following the 1979 revolution. It was clause 2, which allowed for the appointment of a council of clerics, who were granted the power of veto of parliamentary legislations, so that they did not contradict the Shariʿa.

In 1921, Iran’s rule moved (under a British auspice) into the hands of a senior officer in the Iranian army, Reza Khan, who in 1925 became the shah of Iran, with a clear pro-western orientation.[[15]](#footnote-15) The period of Reza Shah’s rule witnessed growing wealth, concentrated in the hands of a small elite group, and dire poverty among the vast majority of the Iranian people.[[16]](#footnote-16) In 1941, and as a result of the global war, the allies (the British, the Soviets, and the Americans) decided to dethrone Reza Shah, known for his sympathy for the Germans, in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, the last king in a kingdom that endured for 2,500 years.

**The Mosaddeq Government and the Nationalization of the Iranian Oil Industry, 1950–1953,**

In 1950, Mohammed Mosaddeq was elected the prime minister of Iran, against the background of the Iranian oil crisis and the British companies’ exploitation of this oil. Mosaddeq had led the National Front coalition, which was comprised of nationalist forces, Marxists, seculars and clerics who had allied together to “weaken the foreign interference of Western forces, especially Britain, in the Iranian affairs, mainly concerning oil and oil trading.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

After the British and American rejection of all compromises, Mossadeq nationalized the Iranian oil industry, causing Britain to lead a global boycott, later joined by the United States. This exacerbated Iranian hostility toward the Americans, particularly considering Iran’s high expectations of the United States in opposing the British.

Aided by the CIA, the British and the Americans overthrew the government of Mossadeq and returned Mohammad Reza Shah, who had previously fled Iran for Rome. This event was one of the most sensitive events that legitimized Mohammad Reza Shah’s regime.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**The 1963 uprising**

The 1963 uprising erupted as a response to the “White Revolution” of Mohammad Reza Shah, which included nationalization of forests, privatization of governmental companies and factories, and expansion of voting rights for women. Thousands of workers, students, clerics, and unemployed people went into the streets protesting against this “revolution”; meanwhile, a political figure had appeared on the Iranian scene – Ayatollah Khomeini.[[19]](#footnote-19)

In that same year, Khomeini had started defaming the monarchist regime, attacking mainly its reliance on the United States and Israel. Later that same year, the Iranian internal security service, SAVAK[[20]](#footnote-20) attacked the religious assembly in memory of the third imam, Imam Husayn. Khomeini was deported to Turkey, and afterwards he moved to Iraq.[[21]](#footnote-21)

**The 1979 revolution**

In his book *Iran between Two Revolutions*, Ervand Abrahamian notes that the common explanations for the Iranian revolution was the rapid modernization led by the shah, and on the opposite side- the extremely slow process of modernization led by the shah. Abrahamian maintains that neither explanation is correct or incorrect, for each contains half-truth. He argues that the revolution resulted from the extremely rapid modernization process led by the shah at the socioeconomic level, which created new social classes and an increasing class-based polarization. However, the shah simultaneously led an infinitesimal process of political modernization, which did not adapt itself to the socioeconomic changes occurring at that time.[[22]](#footnote-22) The Iranian revolution included the vast majority of the Iranians – middle class, bazaar’s merchants, workers, clerics, and students.

The incident that was thought to have instigated the Iranian revolution was the suppression of the conference of the Writers’ Association (November 19, 1977) attended by 10,000 students, when one student was killed and dozens were injured and arrested. This incident was followed by the publication of an article in *Ittilaʿāt* newspaper ( January 7, 1978), which criticized Khomeini, calling him a British spy and claiming that he was Indian and not Iranian. These two incidents sparked a series of demonstrations resulted in many causalities and deaths, leading to further demonstrations, especially on the fortieth day marking the fall of the victims, resulting in subsequent causalities.

These demonstrations and the use of the religious holidays and the Friday prayers ignited Iran completely. The shah’s reaction to the demonstrations was not decisive. On the one hand, he attempted to exhaust the demonstrators; on the other hand, he granted them and their leaders several “rewards,” eventually leading to his escape from Iran and Khomeini’s return to Tehran in February 1979, and to the triumph of the nationalist, communist, and Islamist revolutionary forces over the shah and his forces.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Undoubtedly, the oppression that the shah’s regime exerted against the organized secular opposition during those years was more potent than its treatment of the religious opposition. The regime found it easier to oppress the former rather than latter, which sought to recruit the masses through well-oiled religious and traditional slogans and propaganda. However, the religious opposition and its activists were loosely organized, making it harder for the regime to respond to their activism and completely oppress them.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The radical guerilla organizations, Fadaiyan-e-Khalq (a Marxist-Leninist movement) and Mojahedin-e Khalq (a radical leftist-Islamist organization that espoused the beliefs of Shariʿati and others) played a very significant role in undermining the security of the shah’s regime, and significantly in the last stages of the revolution, in thwarting their suppression by the shah’s liberal pro-western forces.[[25]](#footnote-25)

This historical process, which ultimately led to the establishment of the Islamic state in Iran, was buttressed by far-reaching ideas and developments in Shiite political thought, particularly in Iran, and in the whole region in general. Modern ideologists and clerics developed renewed perceptions of the role of clerics and Shiite doctrine in the present world. Through an interesting interaction with different ideologies and historical developments, these ideologists and intellectuals actively reinterpreted part of the basic concepts and the basis of the of the Shiite doctrine, in an attempt to restore the activist dimension of the Shiʿa and to transform it into a resistive and revolutionary tool, that could confront the complex reality in which the Shiʿa and the entire region’s population live in the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, they were crucial to the development of a new type of Shiite clerics, namely organic ideologists and intellectuals, who tied their fate with the people, with whom they had a direct and constant interaction.

In what follows, I review five outstanding thinkers in the Shiʿa revivalism.

1. **Muhamad Baqir al-Sadr**

Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr was born in 1933 (or in 1935) in al- Kazmiyya, near Baghdad. He was called *sayyid* as he was considered a descendant of the Shiite imams, with his kinship dating back to Imam Musa al-Kazem. His family is originally from Jabal Amel in Southern Lebanon, and his wife is the daughter of his cousin, Musa al-Sadr, the founder of Amal movement in Lebanon.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Al-Sadr started his theological studies in early life and became a *mujtahid* at a young age. He was the disciple of Ayatollah al-Khoeʾi and Sheikh Abbas al-Rumaithi. Since the very beginning of his journey, al-Sadr manifested a tendency toward political activism, unlike the general tendency prevalent among Shiite clerics during those years in *hawzāt* (religious schools), as well as in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbalāʾ, and the theological studies’ centers for the Shiʿa in Iraq and worldwide.

Al-Sadr was unofficially involved in the establishment of the Islamic Dʿawa Party in Iraq in the 1950s and hosted students and young disciples from all Shiite regions around the world, particularly from Lebanon, as shown in the previous chapter. These youth groups were influenced by the nontraditional activist approach of this young and senior cleric, who differed from the other Shiite clerics at that time.

Al-Sadr, who was close to the group of Najaf scholars, who called for a more active role among the clerics[[27]](#footnote-27) in the political and daily life, was aware of the appeal of radical leftist and secular ideologies, like Communism, Socialism, and Pan-Arabism among young Shiites in Iraq. Therefore, he strove to attract these young people back to religion. Al-Sadr realized that to achieve this goal, he needed to render religion more relevant to youth, thus motivating him to further enhance his activist orientation among the Shiʿa Islam.

Many of the Communist militants in the 1950s belonged to families of Shiite clerics from Najaf and other holy cities, whose economic situation worsened during this period; and the Marxist perception served as a tool for protest and for analyzing their dire economic situation for a long time.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Al-Sadr initiated a process of a more “academic” writing, different from the writing method adopted by traditional Shiite ulema. Two of his most prominent books are *Falsafatuna* (Our philosophy) and *Iqtisaduna* (Our economy). In the former, he deliberates the Western philosophies, mainly Marxism which served as a magnet for the young Shiite Iraqis and non-Iraqis. Through this book, he attempted to demonstrate the weaknesses of this philosophy and its incompatibility with the Eastern context.

The second book *Iqtisaduna* is more developed at the ideological level; there, al-Sadr attempted to provide in-depth Islamist answers to meet the challenge which the Marxist and Capitalist economies pose to the Islamic perception and religion in the modern world. The book is mostly dedicated to analyzing and deliberating the Marxist perception, considering its reinforcement by the Communist movement in Iraq and the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s among minorities in the Middle East, like the Shiites in Iraq, Lebanon, and other places, especially among the intellectual groups within these communities.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The historian Hanna Batatu maintained that al-Sadr’s ideas had little originality and that he had borrowed the ideas of other thinkers, and Islamized them so that they corresponded with the Islamic philosophy.[[30]](#footnote-30) However, there is no doubt that al-Sadr succeeded in addressing a wide audience and in shattering the “traditionalism” of the Shiite clerics, who were distant from the believers’ daily and political life. The success of al-Sadr was reflected in the massive number of supporters and imitators among young groups.

Islamist activists perceived al-Sadr as an intellectual figure who evokes pride. Iraqi Shiites deemed al-Sadr, with his serenity and depth of thought, as an adequate response of the Arab and Iraqi Shiʿa to the charismatic Iranian cleric, Ayatollah Khomeini.[[31]](#footnote-31) Khomeini and al-Sadr were friends, and many similarities can be drawn between these two exceptional clerics. However, an Iraqi Shiite once told the historian Batatu that “in their heart of hearts, Iraqi Shi’is like things to grow from their own soil.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

In the 1970s, following the death of *marjiʿ* Muhsin al-Hakim, three *marjiʿs* were left in Iraq – Abu al-Qasim al-Khoeʾi, Ruhollah Khomeini, and Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, the only Arab among them as the were Iranian. Therefore, al-Sadr gained great support from the Shiite community in Iraq and was most identified, among all clerics at that time, with the Islamic Dʿawa Party. However, Batatu emphasized that, contrary to the prevailing understanding, al-Sadr was not the founder of this party.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The nontraditional activist perception of al-Sadr had been remarkable since the very beginning of his journey and theological studies. What is particularly interesting is the book he wrote in 1955 entitled “Fadak in History,” in which he describes the incident that took place on the first days that followed the death of Prophet Muhammad, and the argument that erupted between the Prophet’s daughter, Fatima al-Zahraʾ, wife of the first Shiite imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib, and the first caliph, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, concerning the Prophet’s bequeathing of the village Fadak to his daughter Fatima, and its nationalization by Abu Bakr, claiming that prophets cannot bequeath, according to Prophet Muhammad’s hadith.

This book, which was the first publication by al-Sadr, accentuates his nontraditional thinking, as opposed to other clerics. It demonstrates the radical change led by al-Sadr in the believers’ perception of the figure of Fatima. Al-Sadr transformed her image from a marginalized woman, whose significance merely was in her being daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, wife of Ali, and mother of the second and third imams, Hasan and Husayn, into a central figure in her own right and in her revolutionary and resistant role to the first caliph, Abu Bakr.

This revolutionary role is not solely implicit but rather eminent in the explicit multiple use of the words “*thawra*” (revolution) and “*thāiʾra*” (female revolutionist) in al-Sadr’s book. He uses these two words eighteen times in the book’s first chapter, entitled *ʿAla masraḥ al-thawra* (On the revolution’s stage).[[34]](#footnote-34) Al-Sadr, unlike other Shiite and Sunni clerics, brought Fatima into a far-reaching process of alteration, transforming her from a constantly crying weak woman (called a moaner) into a strong[[35]](#footnote-35) and revolutionary woman, whose crying had resulted from successive harsh blows – the death of her father, and the denial of her husband’s right to be a caliph by his cousin, Prophet Muhammad, and to lead the Islamic nation after his death.

This potent portrayal of Fatima by al-Sadr grew stronger, as his writing was essentially different from the general traditional atmosphere that encompassed *al-ḥawza al-ʿilmīyya* in the 1950s in Karbalāʾ and Najaf. The dominant view that prevailed among Shiite clerics at that time favored the *intiẓār*, and the passivity and abstention from taking political positions, as long as the twelfth imam remains in the major occultation, that has lasted for more than a millennium.

Not only did this young cleric write about a woman in Islamic history, but he refrained from portraying Fatima stereotypically as a passive and weak woman and rather depicted her as powerful and rebellious. Al-Sadr portrayed her as taking active steps and confronting authority (namely Abu Bakr) – an attitude to which al-Sadr would adhere all his life’s activism – and steadfastly resist illegitimate or corrupt authority.

Fatima’s activism is strongly depicted in terms of independence and leadership, for she confronts the caliphate of the Islamic state and presents her argument in front of the new leadership, which was present in the mosque. She bursts into the mosque and does not fear confronting the new authority. Al-Sadr described her outburst as resulting from deep thinking and planning, rather than a one-time hasty and emotional break-down.

Al-Sadr was aware that Fatima’s resistance was not fruitful and that she could not regain her inheritance. Yet, al-Sadr emphasized that the revolution that Fatima had started succeeded, even if Fatima herself had failed.[[36]](#footnote-36) Opposition and dialectics of this sort will reappear in the activist perception of the triumph of Imam Husayn over Yazid, despite failure of the third imam’s “armyˮ in its battle with Yazid’s army in Karbalāʾ. This historical event has accumulated abundant myths and revolutionary operations, which the different forces in Shiite history have channeled for propelling activist and revolutionary energy within the Shiite faith throughout different periods of history. The same motif and parallelization of the blood’s triumph over the sword *(Intiṣār al-dam ʿalā al-sayf*) also exists in the Christian mythology, according to which Jesus is the victor despite his crucifixion, or probably because of it.

This early writing by al-Sadr clearly demonstrates the impact of the Marxist philosophy and al-Sadr’s complete awareness that although he wrote about a historical event that occurred more than a thousand years ago, he was mainly concerned with the youth’s alienation from religion and clerics in Iraq and with the great impact that Communism had on young Iraqis. In fact, even the writings of al-Sadr featured certain motifs of the socialist philosophy. For example, he described the Islamic Golden Age in which a rich man could not be respected merely for his wealth, and a poor could not be despised merely for his poverty. He differentiated between people based on their individual productivity,[[37]](#footnote-37) citing a verse from Sūrat al-Baqarah: “Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned”[[38]](#footnote-38). This corresponded to the Marxist slogan “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”

Al-Sadr, together with his sister Huda, was executed by hanging in 1980 by the Bʿath regime in Iraq led by Saddam Hussein, after being accused of treason and an attempt to initiate a coup d’état against the Iraqi regime.

Al-Sadr’s supporters, whom he recruited from within youth groups and masses in Iraq, deemed him the “Khomeini of Iraq.”[[39]](#footnote-39) He was reminiscent of the non-traditional Iranian cleric, who introduced reforms into the religious perceptions in Iran, Iraq, and the entire Shiite world.

The Iraqi authorities, however, did not tolerate the close relationship between al-Sadr and Khomeini, who had succeeded in overthrowing the shah’s regime in Iran with the same rhetoric and actions that al-Sadr used. The Iraqi regime despised the activism of the new clerics, who drew comparisons and borrowed from the ongoing history of oppression against the Shiʿa, the activist dimension or the “Husayni” dimension, as Khomeini used to define it, rather than the “Hasani” dimension.[[40]](#footnote-40)

1. **Ruhollah Khomeini**

Ruhollah Khomeini was born in Iran in 1902 in Khomeyn village, located about 120 km to the southwest of the holy city Qom. Like his future friend, Mohammad Baqir al-Ṣadr, he was also born to a family that genealogically dated back to the seventh Shiite imam, Musa al-Kazim. Early in 1918, he became disciple of Ayatollah al-Haeʾri and followed him to Qom in 1922. In the early 1930s, he became a *mujtahid* and a school teacher there.[[41]](#footnote-41)

In 1943, Khomeini wrote his book *Kashf al-asrar* (Unveiling of Secrets), in which he criticized the “secular” regime of the shah for being distant from the Divine laws. He also criticized Reza Shah’s support of Hitler and his admiration for the Third Reich and the Nazi Racial Science.[[42]](#footnote-42) In this book, the young Khomeini sided with the clerics’ position, previously expressed in the constitutional revolution, which called for allowing the council of religious sages to ratify the laws legislated by the Parliament.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Khomeini went through a process of radicalization during the regime of Reza Shah, following the shah’s “White Revolution,” which resulted in severe socioeconomic damage among the clerics and the merchant class in Iran. Moreover, the revolution did not ameliorate the status of the marginalized communities in Iran, as concluded by Khomeini and others.[[44]](#footnote-44)

On June 3, 1963, during the ʿAshurāʾ procession, Khomeini held one of the most foundational speeches in his political life, in which he compared the shah to Yazīd, the Umayyad Caliph whose army killed Imam Husayn. The day after, more than 100,000 demonstrators invaded the streets of Iran, and the following day, the shah’s regime detained Khomeini for nineteen days.[[45]](#footnote-45) Even after his release, the demonstrations did not dwindle. On September 4, 1964, Khomeini was deported to Turkey, and later to Iraq, where he lived for the next thirteen years as a teacher and a disciple. All these years, he never ceased providing statements on the Iranian political issue, but in a low dose, issuing about fourteen statements and manifestos.[[46]](#footnote-46)

While residing in Iraq, Khomeini developed a new political theory, intermingling between the theories of “*al-niyāba al-ʿamma*” and “*wilāyat al-faqīh*.” Khomeini altered the Shiite political thought entitling kings to rule on behalf of clerics and the vanished imam, to direct ruling by clerics on behalf of al-Mahdi. He explained the principles of his philosophy in the lectures he gave in Iraq, particularly in 1969 – published later as *al-Hukuma al-Islamiyya*[[47]](#footnote-47) (The Islamic Government) – which served as the infrastructure for the regime that he established in Iran ten years later, following the revolution.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Khomeini rejected the theory of *intiẓar* and the general philosophy that prevailed among traditional Shiite clerics, which bans the establishment of an Islamic government or state until the reappearance of the vanished imam, and only then, the new state would be established under the banner of al-Mahdi. In his book *al-Hukuma al-Islamiyya*, Khomeini described these statements as worse than a statement claiming that Islam is totally false.[[49]](#footnote-49) He supported his argument with several rhetorical questions: Are the rulings of the Shariʿa and Islam only relevant to the periods of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali, or are they constantly applicable in all times and in all places? He proceeded to argue that law enforcement, protections of Muslims, and collection of Islamic taxes could not be postponed until the reappearance of the imam, for chaos would prevail otherwise in this world.[[50]](#footnote-50) Khomeini virtually warned of the collapse of the state and the social order and of a setback to a pre-state period and to the “war of all against all” in the absence of state authority, although not it was not as perfect as the ruling of the vanished imam.

This was an encounter with Khomeini’s revolutionary statement, in which he opposed hundreds of years of tradition that called for waiting – the *intiẓār –* until the reappearance of the vanished imam. This criticism prepared the ground for Muslim Shiite activism in Iran and the Islamic world. It is evident that Khomeini’s goal at that time was to build a theoretical basis for the rebellion against the shah, under the banner of Shiʿa Islam.

Furthermore, in his book *al-Hukuma al-Islamiyya*, Khomeini emphasized that the imamate (*imāma*) should exist even during the occultation of the *maʿaṣūm* (sinless) imam. Hence, he argued that social leadership during the occultation of the vanished Imam should be handed down to the clerics, for Islam, according to Khomeini, requires that the *faqīh* be knowledgeable in the topics of Shariʿa law and be just (*ʿadl)*. These two unique qualities, inherent only in the figures of supreme Imams, qualify one to lead the society. This way, Khomeini bestowed upon the cleric all the political privileges that pertained to the twelfth imam and to the Prophet Muhammad, without demanding him to be maʿaṣūm or a descendent of Ali.[[51]](#footnote-51) As Khomeini wrote, “God has given the actual Islamic government that is supposed to be formed in the time of absence the same powers that he gave the prophet and the ruler (amir) of the faithful.ˮ[[52]](#footnote-52)

In addition to his criticism of the *intiẓār* theory and his support of the view that clerics are the only and right persons to take over leadership on behalf of the vanished imam, Khomeini added a complete dimension to the theory of *wilāyat al-faqīh*. In other words, he maintained that the leadership and governability of supreme clerics is absolute and equivalent to that of the imams and the Prophet. The sole difference between them and the clerics is that imams and prophets are superior to the rest of the people, including clerics, and enjoy sanctity that clerics would never obtain.

In one of Khomeini’s letters, written following the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and addressed to the president at the period, Khomeini maintains:

“The ruler (i.e. the Faqih) can destroy the mosques, for the good of the religion and the state, in the absence of other means capable of rectifying injustice.ˮ[[53]](#footnote-53)

The question raised here is who determines what is good for the religion and the states? Khomeini provided an explicit answer, maintaining it is the *faqīh’s* authority. He thus allows the cleric to be the absolute governor in a sort of absolute religious dictatorship. Khomeini argues that in Islam, there is neither monarchy nor dictatorship, for the cleric rules according to the Shariʿa.[[54]](#footnote-54)

**Is it Populism, Fascism, or Something Else?**

Unlike al-Sadr, Khomeini did not only add a theoretical dimension and prepare the theoretical ground for linking Shiʿa Islam to a political process. He also used this theory and promoted it so that he could implement it within the Islamic Republic of Iran established following the 1979 revolution. In addition to being a religious leader, a *marjiʿ taqlīd,* who controlled a network of religious organizations, and a theoretician, Khomeini was also a charismatic leader with rhetorical skills that could touch the hearts of the masses and motivate them to initiate a revolutionary act.

Different researches deemed Khomeinism an Iranian version of populism. In his book *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, Ervand Abrahamian argues that Khomeinism is a populism that meets the definition of populism the way it comprehends it:

“By it I mean a movement of the propertied middle class that mobilizes the lower classes, especially the urban poor, with radical rhetoric directed against imperialism , foreign capitalism, and the political establishment…populist movements use charismatic figures and symbols, imagery, and language that have potent value in the mass culture[[55]](#footnote-55). He proceeds to argue that “Populist movements, thus, inevitably emphasize the importance, not of economic-social revolution, but of cultural, national, and political reconstruction.ˮ[[56]](#footnote-56)

Mansoor Moaddel maintains that Khomeinism is a sort of a Fascist movement that suits the Third world and draws different comparisons, like the ideological dimension, which simultaneously glorifies heroic death, anti-liberalism, anti-materialism, and anti-communism, in addition to the state’s independence, shared by Fascism and Khomeinism, in the face of social classes, terrorism, and a secret police regime.[[57]](#footnote-57)

In fact, one can compare Khomeinism to other movements around the world. Khomeini used popular motifs and myths to mobilize the Iranian masses. George Sorel, one of the major philosophers of revolutionary syndicalism, devoted a part of his philosophy to explaining the significance and centrality of the use of myths to promote revolutions. Sorel maintained that for the myths and symbols to generate revolutions, they must translate thoughts into actions. He attributed great significance to myths as irrational tools for mass mobilization—especially of the proletariat, followed by the petite bourgeoisie—for political activism, instead of using rational ideas, as the instrument of myth encompasses the mythical thought, which is “an alternative to the theoretical and discursive ideas; a religious mentality that stands against a rational mentality. However, this system also has an immediate role: recruiting the masses and changing the world.”[[58]](#footnote-58)

“The myth is completely immune against any possibility of failure; the myth cannot be subject to reasonable and logical criticism; therefore, there are no limits to its power of mobilization and action”[[59]](#footnote-59).

Khomeini, like the other religious leaders and philosophers discussed in this chapter, was aware of the potency of symbols and myths and used them in the most effective and sensitive way with people, like the Shiite believers, who were imbued with the emotional impact of these symbols.

The innovation that Khomeini and his contemporaries introduced was the transformation of myths and events, which had served for more than a millennium as religious emblems or as symbolic means for expressing anger over the historical injustice inflicted upon the Shiites (like the ʿAshurāʾ; the martyrdom (*shahāda*), and so forth), into inspirational, motivating symbols that led to revolutionary action.

The Khomeinist perception and rhetoric divided the world into two main segments: the *mustakbirūn* (the tyrants) and the *mustaḍʿafūn* (the downtrodden), the latter representing the vast majority of Iranians and Muslims who have been subjected to deprivation and oppression by the tyrants, who are “Muslim” leaders in name only, and by the imperialists, particularly the United States, which Khomeini called the “Great Satan,” while Israel was called the “Little Satan.” Khomeini successfully used the Muslim resentment toward Israel to direct hostility also toward the shah, whom he portrayed as a marionette in the hands of the Israelis and the Americans.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Khomeini interpreted Shiʿism in a revolutionary manner, transforming it into a rebellious instrument and a mass mobilizer. The Shiite philosophy was capable of legitimizing explicit activism as well as absolute passivity and waiting for the vanished imam. However, Khomeini also praised resistive activism. In his book *al-Hukuma al-Islamiyya*, he addresses disciples and clerics, saying:

If you do not deal with the colonialist policy and if your study of the laws does not go beyond the theological framework, they will not bother you. Pray as you wish. They want your oil, so what do they care about your prayers? They want our minerals, and they want to open our markets for their goods and capital.[[61]](#footnote-61)

This statement is a purified and evident demonstration of Khomeini’s view regarding religion as a comprehensive ideology and way of life, which cannot be detached or separated from politics. Moreover, he positioned Islam as a revolutionary and resistive instrument that contributes to confronting foreign imperialism.

In addition, Khomeini used populist and semi-Marxist slogans, like “*mustaḍʿafūn*” and “*mustakbirūn*,” and talked of himself and of Iran as the avant-guard of all the oppressed Third World countries. He used a universal language, calling for the unity of the oppressed people of all races, faiths, and languages, but all under the wing and banner of Shiʿa Islam, namely the true revolutionary ideology and instrument, which faithfully represents the *mustaḍʿafūn* according to Khomeini.

Khomeini’s speeches accentuate the linkage between the shah and the detestable monarchist history. The shah himself asserted that by organizing a memorial event for 2,500 years of monarchy in Iran, in which he associated himself with the Iranian kings that had ruled in the Pre-Islamic period, appropriating the title of *shahinshah*,[[62]](#footnote-62) deemed by Prophet Muhammad as the most detestable among all titles. This statement of the Prophet Muhammad was constantly emphasized by Khomeini.

To further emphasize and deepen the difference between the *mustaḍʿafūn* and the *mustakbirūn*, Khomeini drew the most loaded comparisons from Shiite history. He always referred to the Umayyad caliph, Yazīd, as reminiscent of today’s shah, comparing Husayn’s family to the majority of the Iranian people. There is no doubt that Khomeini knew how to make use of the tremendous emotions concealed within this tragic event.

Further enhancing this analogy was the fact that Khomeini's supporters consciously called him “imam” without ever proving that he truly belonged to the holy imams of the Shiʿa Muslims. Positioning an imam on one side and a king or shah on the other was the shortest way for the masses to associate Khomeini with Imam Husayn, and Mohammad Reza Shah with the detested caliph, Yazid.

1. **Ali Shariʿati**

While Khomeini was the supreme leader of the Islamic revolution in Iran, Dr. Ali Shariʿati was its ideologist. He was born in 1933 in a small village called Mazinan, in Khorasan. His father was the cleric Agha Muhammad Shariʿati, founder of “Center for the Propagation of Islamic Truth,” which aimed to disseminate Islam through teachings of logic and science. Its goal was to reattract intellectual and modern youth back to Islam and faith,[[63]](#footnote-63) a goal destined to be one of the main objectives in young Shariʿati’s philosophy and activism.

Shariʿati was a philologist, sociologist, and a philosopher, and a graduate of Western academia. During his studies in Paris, he was exposed to the Western revolutionary movements, to Marxism, Socialism, and Existentialism, and he could foresee the flow of Iranian and Shiite youth in pursuit of these ideas. Shariʿati maintained that the Shiite faith should be renewed and transformed into a comprehensive revolutionary faith. He interpreted the Qur’an and Islam in modern and socialist terms and depicted prophets as leaders of the oppressed populations around the world. Some skeptic clerics and supporters of the shah even deemed him a Marxist hiding behind Islamic terminology.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Shariʿati joined the “National Resistance Front,” which included observant Muslims, secular nationalists, and Marxists who operated against the dominance of the West over Iran and its natural resources.[[65]](#footnote-65) Together with his father and other clerics, he established the movement of “The God-Worshipping Socialists,” whose name was taken from the title Shariʿati gave to a translated biography of one of Prophet Muhammad’s companions, Abu Dhar al-Ghifari. The biography portrays Abu Dhar as a prototype of the socialist hero, the revolutionist who opposed to poverty, capitalism, feudalism, racism, and dictatorship,[[66]](#footnote-66) who can inspire all revolutionists worldwide, especially in the Middle East.

Shariʿati’s main criticism was directed toward clerics who dedicated their vigor to unnecessary details and abandoned the core of true Islam, which is, according to Shariʿati, social justice and resistance to oppressive powers. Shariʿati differentiated between pure Shiʿa Islam, the revolutionary and authentic Islam of Ali, and the Safavid passive and inauthentic Shiʿa Islam.[[67]](#footnote-67)

Shariʿati maintained that Shiʿa Islam had sided with oppressed people for many centuries, and sought to liberate them from the different tyrants:

We can see that for over eight centuries (until the Safavid era), Alavite Shi'ism was more than just a revolutionary movement in history which opposed all the autocratic and class-conscious regimes… Like a revolutionary party, Shi'ism had a well-organized, informed, deep-rooted and well-defined ideology, with clear-cut and definite slogans and a disciplined and well-groomed organization. It led the deprived and oppressed masses in their movements for freedom and for seeking justice.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Shariʿati was less concerned with the confrontation between secularism and Islam. He instead preached about the clash between one religion and another; between the red Alawid Islam, as he named it, and the black Safavid Islam.[[69]](#footnote-69)  While red Islam praised martyrdom and revolutionary activism, the Safavids castrated it and transformed the heroic activism of Imam Husayn into an act of contrition, constant self-pity, passivity, and infinite waiting, which prevents the believers from acting in a way that changes the status quo.[[70]](#footnote-70) Shariʿati aspired for a Shiʿism without clerics, or at least, without traditional clerics mainly concerned with unimportant issues. He sought to render religion as an ideology that mobilizes the masses toward a revolutionary act that would establish the empire of justice in this world at the present time, instead of waiting infinitely until the end of history.

‌ Shariʿati was considerably influenced by his sojourn in France. During his studies there, he was in contact with the Algerian resistance movement, the National Liberation Front. He was also influenced by Franz Fanon, the prominent theoretician of revolutionism in the Third World, and by the French philosopher and activist Jean Paul Sartre.[[71]](#footnote-71) In fact, Shariʿati attempted to bring the revolutionary ideology he acquired in France into a process of Islamization, by rendering it more relevant and clear to the masses, who do not necessarily know or comprehend the Western worldviews, ideologies, or philosophies but who are strongly attached to Islam and Islamic tradition that are integral to their lives.

Therefore, Shariʿati did not adopt a pungent, critical position only toward traditional clerics, or others who glorified passivity and *intẓār* but also toward the Westernized intellectuals who attempted to eliminate the clerics, Islam, and the Islamic traditions, both the progressive and reactionary ones. Therefore, Shariʿati denigrated them in terms of their ability to struggle against imperialism.[[72]](#footnote-72) In his lecture, “Where Shall We Start,” Shariʿati emphasized this point, saying:

“Our own history and experience have demonstrated that whenever an enlightened person turns his back on religion, which is the dominant spirit of the society, the society turns its back on him.ˮ[[73]](#footnote-73)

Shariʿati virtually attempted to delineate the way for intellectuals to become organic intellectuals in Iranian society and in Muslim societies in general, whose activism is driven by society’s popular-national faith and not in isolation from it.

As previously stated, Shariʿati was deeply influenced by European Marxism and existentialism and tried to Islamize this philosophy in a way that would be accepted by Muslims and based on the Islamic tradition and faith in Iran, or as he maintains:

Adherence to real faith and “Tashayu’a” (Shiism) in our society unites us with the masses, and enables us to speak in their language, hence our ability to disseminate conscious and instill a sense of responsibility (among the masses) … this is achieved through interpreting and analyzing the events and the figures in the history of Islam. This adherence rescues us from being alienated from people (Al-Nās), and builds between us- namely the intellectuals, and the masses a stable bridge. Therefore, the conscious regarding the “Tashayu’a” becomes a general conception in the society we live in, since it helps us understand genuine and deep truths in our land.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Yet, Shariʿati had a twofold purpose. In addition to mobilizing the masses toward revolutionary activism, he still adhered to his father’s original objective voiced years ago – to bring the westernized Iranian intelligentsia back to Islam. To achieve this, he needed to use one of the central worldviews that prevailed in Europe at that time, that of Sartre’s existentialism,[[75]](#footnote-75) which constituted a common ground and language that was shared with the Iranian intellectuals who were influenced by it during those years.

Elisheva Machlis emphasized in her article on Shariʿati and the tawhidtheory that he succeeded in formulating an authentic theory that linked Islam to existentialism, achieving this mainly through transforming the concept of tawhidfrom an Islamic theological perception into an ideology and worldview of revolutionary activism that seeks to change reality;[[76]](#footnote-76) that is, to position human beings and their future at the center of concern, instead of the divine essence and nature. In his unique perception of the tawhid concept, Shariʿati merged between God, nature, and man, rendering them one essence.

In his lecture on tawhid, Shariʿati determines that:

“There are many people who believe in *tauhid*, but only as a religious-philosophical theory, meaning nothing but ‘God is one, not more than one̓ but I take *tauhid* in the sense of a world-view, and I am convinced that Islam also intends it in this senseˮ.[[77]](#footnote-77)

A paragraph before this text he wrote:

“But *tauhid* as a world-view in the sense I intend in my theory means regarding the whole universe as a unity, instead of dividing it into this world and the Hereinafter, the natural and the supernatural, substance and meaning, spirit and body. It means regarding the whole of existence as a single form, a single living and conscious organism, possessing will, intelligence, feeling and purposeˮ[[78]](#footnote-78).

Shariʿati’s theory of tawhid was designated for bridging between the Divine authority and human activism and freedom of choice, which ultimately lead to man’s freedom of political activity in this world, here and now. This is made possible by virtue of the inherent unity, as suggested by this theory, between God, man, and nature, and in light of Shariʿati’s renewed interpretation of man’s perception as “God’s Caliphate”; that is, God’s successor on earth. Shariʿati thus concludes that God and man are part of one entity; therefore, man constantly progresses in an infinite path (for God is infinite) toward the comprehension of the universe and of God, which will enable man to choose and act freely in this world, and to be responsible for his choices and deeds.[[79]](#footnote-79)

It is evident that the desired result of Shariʿati’s tawhidphilosophy is not an ideological or intellectual game for its own sake. His activism was intended to achieve justice with “authentic” Islamic instruments, even at the expense of Orientalizing western ideologies and westernizing Islam.

Shariʿati was not merely interested in the afterlife; rather, he was imbued with the motivation to change the present world in which people currently live and suffer as human beings, as he argues:

…this is the “Tashayuʿa”, it is not about praying in a hope of gaining “Ḥur a-ʿEīn” (the heaven’s beautiful virgins). The real “Tashayuʿa” is not about accumulating “requitals” (Thawab) in preparation for the hereafter life; it is about gaining requital and all the good in this word. It seeks to achieve salvation, “divine interceding” and all the goals that exist on earth… it even builds heaven in this world.[[80]](#footnote-80)

Shariʿati further proceeds by accentuating the goal of achieving social justice and maintains that the Qur’anic references to “Allah” in the social issues can be replaced with *al-nās* (the people), adding that:

In the affairs of society, therefore, in all that concerns the social system, but not in creedal matters such as the order of the cosmos, the words *al-nas* and *Allah* belong together. Thus when it is said, "Rule belongs to God" the meaning is that rule belongs to the people, not to those who present themselves as the representatives or the sons of God…When it is said, "property belongs to God,' the meaning is that capital belongs to the people as whole, not to Croesus. When it is said "religion belongs to God" the meaning is that the entire structure and content of religion belongs to the people; it is not a monopoly held by a certain institution or certain people…[[81]](#footnote-81)

These quotes demonstrate that Shariʿati’s perception was radical and humanistic. And although Shariʿati’s perception was not an Orthodox Marxist, it was influenced by it.

In his lecture on the dialectics of sociology, Shariʿati reduced the social structures and regimes in history to two, Abel and Cain’s. In the first one, he incorporates all the just and egalitarian social structures, primitive communism in early history, and the future socialist society. In the second, he incorporates all the social structures based on oppression and exploitation, like slavery, feudalism, capitalism and so forth.[[82]](#footnote-82) Sharitʿai divided the regimes that existed throughout history into two opposing forces – exploiters and exploited. In the former, Shariʿati includes kings, wealthy people, aristocrats, and traditional clerics and in the latter he includes the people – *al-nās* – and God. Shriʿati emphasizes that in a class-based society “Allah sides with al-Nas in all the social issues mentioned in the Quran. Allah and al-Nas are actually synonyms, and very often they can replace each other without changing the meaning.”[[83]](#footnote-83)

In this way Shariʿati surpassed other contemporary clerics or philosophers. He tried to match Shiite Alawid Islam, as he calls it, to revolutionism and to transform it into an ideology and a revolutionary instrument that can change the world and confront Western imperialism, without alienating the masses.

Shariʿati did not enjoy the fruits of this linkage as they were manifested in the triumph of the Iranian revolution about two years after his death in London in 1977, apparently perpetrated by the shah’s secret police, SAVAK.

1. **Musa al-Sadr**

Unlike the preceding three thinkers, Musa al-Sadr did not excel in philosophy nor was he a distinguished cleric among his contemporaries, although he descended from a family of *asyad* and outstanding clerics, whose roots were in southern Lebanon and its environs and who flourished in Iraq and Iran. Al-Sadr’s uniqueness lies in his being a cleric of a new type that developed at that time, especially in the new arena he entered – Lebanon.

The new politics and history of the Shiʿa in contemporary Lebanon would be incomprehensible without learning about the project developed by the Iranian-Lebanese cleric Musa al-Sadr; this is why he was deemed one of the founding fathers (although not directly) of Hezbollah in Lebanon and of the *muqāwama* philosophy, strongly associated with Shiʿism in Lebanon.

Imam Musa al-Din al-Sadr was born in 1928 in the Iranian holy city of Qom.[[84]](#footnote-84) His father, Ayatollah Sadr al-Din al-Sadr was a distinguished cleric, whose family was originally from a small village in Lebanon. One of his forefathers, Sayyid Saleh Sharaf al-Din, had escaped the tyranny of the Ottoman governor, Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar, who terrorized the Shiite community in the region of Jabal ʿAmil (currently Southern Lebanon and Upper Galilee). Sharaf al-Din arrived in Isfahan in Iran, where he fathered five sons, who all became ʿulamaʾ.[[85]](#footnote-85)

Musa al-Sadr completed primary and secondary education in Qom and pursued higher education in the University of Tehran, where he studied Law and Political Economy. Although he did not aspire to become a cleric, he returned to Qom, following pressures exerted by his father, where he studied theology in the madrasa. During his theological studies, he was editor of the periodical *Makateb Islami* (The Islamic Schools). In 1953, he moved to Najaf and pursued his theological studies, under the supervision of the cleric Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim.

The first time al-Sadr visited Lebanon, the land of his forefathers, he left a very positive impression on his hosts. Therefore, he was invited to succeed the cleric of Tyre, Sayyid Abdul Husayn Sharafeddine, after his death, and become the Mufti of Tyre. He accepted the invitation, encouraged by his teacher in Najaf, and moved to Tyre in 1959.[[86]](#footnote-86)

Imam al-Sadr, as he was called later by his supporters, arrived in Lebanon at a momentous time. His arrival coincided with the return of the Shiite nouveau rich, together with their wealth mainly accumulated in West Africa as well as in other countries. The nouveau rich looked for new channels of influencing their community and their homeland, which was ruled under a Maronite-Sunni hegemony, which left them behind and caused them from the outset to leave Lebanon and seek success in distant countries.[[87]](#footnote-87)

After their return to Lebanon, these nouveau rich found themselves between the hammer and the anvil. They could not relate to the radical leftist parties, which were well-established among young and oppressed Shiites. These parties sought to radically transform Lebanon with a class-based revolution that would fundamentally alter the position of merchants and bankers, in addition to giving the rule to the oppressed and poor people and abolish the sectarian division that excluded the Shiites from centers of power and having any influence on the state’s organizations. Moreover, these radical parties were not partners in the comprehensive Arab dream, that would lead to the “fusion” of all Arabs in the Arab nation, regardless of their religion, race, or faith, and unite all the Arab countries, including Lebanon.

The nouveau rich also disliked the traditional clerics and their absolute reliance on the generosity of the traditional *zuʿamāʾ*,[[88]](#footnote-88) who deemed the nouveau rich potential competitors. Therefore, amity did not prevail between these two social groups.

Amid all this, Imam Musa al-Sadr, a cleric of a new type, arrived on the scene. On one hand, he played the role of a traditional cleric, in his mantle and in his being mainly a cleric and the Mufti of Tyre, and later as head of the supreme council of the Shiite community in Lebanon. On the other hand, he was an organic intellectual who related to the masses and established a broad network of relationships, both with the masses and the Shiite nouveau rich, who both looked for a leader that would help them claim their share in the centers of power in the Lebanese state.

Al-Sadr faced the challenge of transforming the Shiites into one united group. As already stated in the previous chapter, Shiites were divided into resident of Southern Lebanon and residents of the Lebanese Beqaʿ, and the relationships between them were loose. To render the Lebanese Shiites a homogenous community, al-Sadr started a process of bridging gaps between the Beqaʿ’s residents, members of the strong tribes, and the observant residents of Southern Lebanon, who were more religious, educated, and more submissive to their *zuʿamāʾ*. Al-Sadr intensively sought to unite these two communities and initiated a process for building a “homogenous imagined community” including these two communities. In the speeches and protest rallies that he organized in the early 1970s, he focused on the connection between the people of the Beqaʿ and the people of the South.

Al-Sadr transformed the religious rituals, especially ʿAshuraʾ, into an instrument for solidarity between the different members of the Shiite community.[[89]](#footnote-89) Therefore, al-Sadr sought to disseminate the activist interpretation of Karbalā’s story and the murder of Imam Husayn:

“Hussein had three kinds of enemies: those who killed him –and they were tyrants; those who tried to obliterate his memory, like the men who plowed the earth and covered the spot where he was buried or like the Ottomans who prevented any remembrance of him. The third kind of enemies are those who wanted to ossify the example of Hussein, to restrict the meaning of his life and martyrdom to tears and lamentations. The third kind of enemies are the most dangerous for they threaten to destroy the living roots of Hussein's memory.ˮ[[90]](#footnote-90)

Al-Sadr meant by the third kind the Shiʿa itself, the serene and silent tradition of the Shiʿa, the tradition of the traditional clerics. He attempted to bridge a gap of centuries since the murder of Husayn and draw a comparison that is relevant to the present reality of the Shiite community in Lebanon.[[91]](#footnote-91) Al-Sadr did not consider Shiʿa Islam as a religion that was solely concerned with the end of time. Like the other thinkers surveyed in this chapter, he perceived it as an instrument that could not be detached from daily life.[[92]](#footnote-92)

Al-Sadr was deeply inspired by the book by the Egyptian intellectual and author ʿAbbas Mahmud al-ʿAqqad, entitled *Al-Husayn abu al-shuhadaʾ* (Husayn, Father of the Martyrs), which was published in 1944 and depicted the battle between the third Shiite imam and the Caliph Yazid as a conflict between completely different “moral conceptions.” Husayn represented the nobility in the family of Prophet Muhammad, while Yazid inherited all the negative attributes of the Umayyads who were opposed to Prophet Muhammad in early Islam and joined his ranks only after their defeat. According to al-ʿAqqad, Yazid represented corruption, while Husayn represented traditional Islam, which emphasized justice and equality. The *shahāda* path that Husayn chose was the only means for maintaining the spirit of Islam, and despite Husayn’s military defeat, al-ʿAqqad deemed him triumphant in the judgement of history.[[93]](#footnote-93)

Al-Sadr, like other contemporary Shiite modernists, adopted this interpretation of Imam Husayn’s heroic story. In the numerous speeches that he gave, he used to remind the Shiite believers that the lesson learned from ʿAshuraʾ is not lamentation but rather the choice of activism and the *shahāda* path that Imam Husayn chose for protecting the oppressed and realizing justice and equality. Al-Sadr succeeded in rendering Karbalāʾ and ʿAshuraʾ a centerpiece in the self-understanding of the Lebanese community and in the collective resemblance between all Shiites in Lebanon.

Al-Sadr highlighted the changed self-perception of Lebanese Shiites, manifested in the rejecting of the pejorative attributed to them, *matawla* – whose connation was always negative throughout history – that of a humiliated community whom everyone despises. Al-Sadr named the members of his community *rafīdūn*  (refusals), which is also a historical appellation of the Shiites, accentuating their being an opposition throughout most of their history. In one of his famous speeches, al-Sadr states

Our name is not Matawlah our name is men of refusal (*rafiḍun),* men of vengeance, men who revolt against all tyranny…even though this may cost our blood and our lives.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Al-Ṣadr, who wanted his community to become unified and proud of its identity, chose the word *rafīdūn* to accentuate that the Shiʿa is a resistive group within the Islamic world. It was also chosen to remind the Lebanese Shiites that they are not a minority group on the margins of a small state called Lebanon but rather an integral part of a much larger Shiite world, which included communities in influential states such as Iran, Iraq, the Gulf states, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Syria, China, parts of the former Soviet Union, and elsewhere.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Al-Sadr based his project on three main components. The first is the activist interpretation of Shiʿa Islam and the transformation of the Shiite perception into one of pride and identification. The second is the unity between wealthy and intellectual Shiites who sought a new leader that would lead them toward occupying desirable positions in the Lebanese state, and these Shiites were mainly from southern Lebanon. The third component is the establishment of a militia and a military force that could protect the Shiites and the new project developed by al-Sadr. This component was particularly based on the Shiites from the Beqaʿ governorate, who were known for their military capacities and force.[[96]](#footnote-96)

However, despite al-Sadr’s ability to introduce an activist dimension among the Lebanese Shiites and to provide them with an authentic religious context that does not contradict Shiʿa Islam – an objective not made possible by leftist parties – his activism was not directed toward creating a radical and revolutionary change within the Lebanese state. In this regard, scholar Augustus Norton indicated that al-Sadr had a reformist way of thinking, which sought to help Shiite community regain the position they were deprived of within the Lebanese state.[[97]](#footnote-97) Al-Sadr called for allowing his community, more precisely the new elite within this community, to have a piece of the Lebanese cake; however, he did not seek to turn the game upside down. It was for this reason that he maintained amicable relationships with the elites of the different Lebanese communities, especially the Maronite community.

The events that took place late in al-Sadr’s life did not enhance his efforts, and the Lebanese civil war posed an obstacle to his project. The Lebanese equation resolved before al-Sadr could completely develop his project to its fullest; and although he unprecedently succeeded in uniting a large part of the Shiites under the wing of his “movement of the oppressed,” which included leftists, conservatives, radical Islamists, liberals, and others, the movement’s unity did not last for long, particularly following al-Sadr’s disappearance during a visit to Libya in 1978. Imam al-Sadr’s activist call for “reforming” the Shiite tradition, especially the ʿAshuraʾ rituals, gave way to a more radical and revolutionary call in Lebanon, and one of its prominent advocates was Ayatollah Mohammad Husayn Fadlallah.

1. **Mohammad Husayn Fadlallah**

The person who had indeed prepared the ground of the emergence of Hezbollah’s Shiite *muqāwama* was another cleric, Mohammad Husayn Fadlallah. He was born in Najaf, Iraq, in 1935 to Abdel Raouf Fadlallah, a Lebanese cleric. Fadlallah the son acquired his primary theological knowledge from his father and pursued his studies among distinguished Shiite *mujtahidūn,* especially Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei.

Fadlallah arrived in Lebanon, his father’s native land, at the invitation of the Shiite association Jamʿiyyat usrat al-taʾakhi in Beirut.[[98]](#footnote-98) He became part of al-Hala al-Islamiyya fi Lubnan, the Islamic atmosphere that developed in Lebanon following the rise of the number of Shiite clerics within the state, chiefly in the late 1960s and the early 1970s after the Baʿath regime in Iraq had deported many young Lebanese men who came to Najaf to study Shariʿa. Among them were the future Hezbollah leaders like Raghib Harb, one of first leaders of the organization, ʿAbbas al-Musawi (the second secretary-general), Hassan Nasrallah (the third secretary-general), and others.[[99]](#footnote-99)

Fadlallah continued attracting the young believers who were disappointed with traditional Shiite clerics[[100]](#footnote-100) and became the main ideologist of the resistive and revolutionary Islam, for which these youths aspired, especially considering the aggravation of war in the mid-seventies. In the shadow of the Shiites’ expulsion from the Eastern part of Beirut by the rightist Christian militias, Fadlallah wrote *Al-Islam wa-mantiq al-quwa*[[101]](#footnote-101) (Islam and the logic of force), a book that served as a local ideological and Sharʿi basis for the resistive philosophy in Lebanon. In his book, Fadlallah suggested solid religious foundations for the young Shiites who sought a militant and resistive Shiʿism, rather than a conciliatory religion based on the taqiya.[[102]](#footnote-102) He denunciated lamentation and self-flagellation that prevailed in the ʿAshuraʾ rituals and praised power, force, and control. Fadlallah further proceeded with the resistive and revolutionary interpretive line of ʿAshuraʾ. Like Khomeini, Shariati, and others, he maintained that the revolution did not end with the death of Imam Husayn, and that Shiites would misinterpret the legacy of Husayn and of the imams, if they continued to adhere to their conciliatory and peaceful attitude.[[103]](#footnote-103)

The second phase in Fadlallah’s philosophy were consolidated in the lectures he gave in a mosque in Southwest Beirut, during the civil war and the Israeli invasion. In these lectures, collected and published under the title of *Al-muqawama al-Islamiyya* (The Islamic Resistance), Fadlallah granted the Shiites in Lebanon, particularly the young militants who went through the radicalization process of their community, his approval of their *muqāwama* actions against the Israeli conquerors. Fadlallah analyzed at length the resistance activism and the martyrdom of the resistors as a rational act rather than an outcome of “brainwashing,” since they aimed to push their nation and homeland a step forward toward the major goal of defeating the occupation.[[104]](#footnote-104)

Fadlallah’s greatest contribution lies in his defining of the *muqāwama* as a comprehensive project, that was not limited to resisting the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. He presented the *muqāwama* as an inclusive universal and Islamic project, under which all the *mustadʿafūn*, both the Muslims and the non-Muslims, could operate.[[105]](#footnote-105) Elsewhere, he says:

We do not want to be only an Islamic Muqawama that operates only in the South. We strive to be an Islamic Muqawama in the Islamic world and among the wretched peoples of the Third World.[[106]](#footnote-106)

Fadlallah reemphasized that the *muqāwama* sought to liberate both the Muslim and non-Muslim people. This perception corresponded with the previously presented philosophy of Khomeini and Shariʿati, who also maintained that Islam was the comprehensive and genuine worldview that would liberate all marginalized people. It was the same perception that later enabled Hezbollah to consolidate a national project directed at the different parties within the Lebanese sectarian mosaic, although it developed under the influence of the revolutionary movement of Shiʿa Islam.

Despite Fadlallah’s continuous attempts to differentiate himself from Hezbollah and to repetitively emphasize that he was not the spiritual leader of the organization, it is evident that his influence on Hezbollah was remarkably much deeper and would explain some of the changes that the organization went through given Fadlallah’s openness toward the other. Despite his enthusiasm and support of the Islamic Iranian revolution, Fadlallah consistently maintained the position that Lebanon would never be Iran due to its complexity and diversification in terms of its demographic and social structure. He did not believe in the possibility of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon in the foreseeable future. Therefore, he replaced this notion by that of “the human state” (*dawlat al-insān*) as a step toward establishing the ideal and anticipated Islamic state, from the perspective of Fadlallah and his supporters. This state (the human state) would abolish sectarianism and equally respect human beings, whoever and wherever they are, and their different religious perceptions.[[107]](#footnote-107)

Fadlallah suggested the idea of the “human state” in the eighties, after having realized that Lebanon was not Iran and that the process of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon would take remarkably longer and necessitated a long-term conceptual and popular ground preparation. He maintained that realizing this long-term goal required the recruitment and mobilization of the Christian and secular parties in Lebanon toward achieving a common goal, which would ultimately lead to abolishing the sectarian system in Lebanon.[[108]](#footnote-108) Fadlallah’s idea was an explicit reference to the Gramscian perception of the war of position strategy, instead of a “Blitzkrieg.” In other words, it was an attempt to slowly and discreetly assimilate Islamic ideas and perceptions in the different institutions in the Lebanese state and its society, rather than instigate a violent revolution in which Islamists would assume control, as was desired by many young Lebanese radicals who took part in the civil war and longed for successive takeover of all positions within the complex and heterogenous Lebanese society.

Fadlallah’s views applied both the moderateness and apoliticism of his teacher Ayatollah al-Khoeʾi, and the revolutionary and activist radicalism of his political source of inspiration, Ayatollah Khomeini. The combination of these two different and opposing teachers, alongside the dynamics of the development of the civil war in the Lebanese context in which Fadlallah operated, explain well the contradictions in his views.

Fadlallah’s enthusiastic support of the Iranian revolution did not derive mainly from its contribution to applying the Shariʿa laws but rather from the revolution’s ability to free humankind and human will, particularly in the Third World countries, from the burden of accepting the draconian and heretic powers. Fadlallah and other thinkers who can be defined as “humanist Islamists,” were on an internal quest within Islam and Islamic philosophy, seeking a revolutionary tool that would liberate all the Islamic states and the wretched nations from the historical burden of imperialism and continuous oppression. Fadlallah considered Iran’s Islamic revolution as one way, among many others, for releasing the internal power of the oppressed people (especially in the Islamic world) and to transform it into a constructive rather than destructive force, which would contribute to development and not only to liberation.

**Intermediate Conclusion: Islamic Revolutionism**

The ideologists reviewed in this chapter were representative of the group within the Shiite community in the different countries, mainly among radical youth who sought change but were uncertain about how to create far-reaching social change that would improve their status and that of their families and community members.

In the agitated world of the national liberation and decolonization movements of the Third World the 1950s–1970s, during which an increasing number of youth followed radical and socialist ideologies and views, the religious institution in general, and the Muslim Shiʿa in particular, seemingly had become obsolete institutions that were disconnected from the continuously developing lives of the youth. At that time, as well as in other historical periods, the Shiite clerics were a sort of prototype of the traditional intellectuals to whom Gramsci referred in his “Prison Notebooks,” in the sense that they were a type of a remnant of the past, who adhered the past and to the very limited knowledge that served as sedatives for the masses. These clerics supported passivity and abstention among the believers from pursuing any activist initiative to change the reality in which the Shiite believers lived, or to challenge the injustices they had been confronting for centuries.

In this context, a new and different type of clerics and thinkers came on the scene and gained support by looking to the early history of Shiʿa Islam, which was much more active, and to the contemplations of the first and third imams, Ali and Husayn respectively. These revolutionary clerics could not come onto the scene without the previously presented historical development, during which radical, socialist and patriotic perceptions were deeply instilled in Middle Eastern society, particularly in the countries that had a large Shiites and religious minorities, like Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and others.

These clerics were “organic intellectuals,” not only in the sense that they were the product of the growth of a specific socioeconomic class but also because they established organic relationships with the populations that supported them and they responded to the challenges that other radical movements put in their path. But no less important was the challenges posed by the Shiite community itself, which searched for a rebellious instrument that would change the Shiites’ life.

More precisely, these clerics can be depicted as religious intellectuals that were “organic through tradition.” Their traditionalism, not in the Gramscian sense, derived from their connection to their ancient religion and tradition. They dug into this tradition and extracted the “revolutionary-resistive” parts, which characterizes especially the early Shiʿa history. These clerics reconnected the Shiite emblems and tradition to the daily life of the believers and transformed them into a powerful political stimulus that enabled the Shiites to gain both worlds. Passivity and abstention from political activism was not needed anymore in the present world; on the contrary, one needed to be active and lead the oppressed people worldwide by using the most authentic and rebellious means. Concurrently, they must believe that social activism in the present world will accelerate the reappearance of the twelfth imam, the Mahdi, who will bring justice to this world and will lead the believers towards absolute justice in the afterlife.

The ideologists reviewed here applied three central points that they believed would activate the revolutionary-resistive potential within the Shiite perception and also benefit it. The first was a renewed and active reinterpretation of the “shahāda” of Husayn in Karbalāʾ; namely a transition from an interpretation that put aside centuries of lamentation and self-suppression by the Shiites, out of remorse for not standing by their imam in his battle with the army of Yazid, to the Christian-like message of the “blood triumphs over the sword” (*intiṣār al-dam ʿalā al-sayf*). In other words, they interpreted the martyrdom of Imam Husayn as a historical event that should apply to all times and places, or as stated by Shariʿati: “every day is ʿAshuraʾ and every land is Karbalāʾ.”

The second point was the reinterpretation of “*al-ghayba*” (the occultation of the twelfth imam), from a passive interpretation that demands that the believers remain idle and refrain from political activism until the imam’s reappearance, to a more active one, in which, according to authentic and true Shiʿa, the believers should take initiative in the present world to accelerate the return of the Mahdi. The Messianic dimension in the Shiite doctrine and the integration of the activist aspect are reminiscent of the dilemma which the Marxists faced in the late nineteenth and and early twentieth centuries. Orthodox and economist Marxists believed that the revolution was inevitable, according to their beliefs in historical determinism that Marx had sublimely interpreted, and that conscious political activism was not needed to accelerate the process, because, at the end, once the materialist conditions ripen, the revolution would surely erupt. However, this perception was considered by modernizers and radicals like Lenin and others as neutering. They opined that political activism in history should be initiated by the “Avant-garde,” who will lead the proletariat toward playing its active role and to bring about a revolution, in the here and now.

The socialist and Marxist philosophy undoubtedly influenced the philosophy of the revolutionists and ideologists reviewed here. This is particularly manifest in the philosophy of Shariʿati and al-Sadr. These ideologists believed that Shiʿism was the rebellious instrument of the “Avant-garde,” which could lead the wretched of the earth toward justice, freedom, and independence.

The third point is that of the taqiya (the attempt to hide the real faiths of the Shiite believers). The ideologists deemed it a sign of weakness, and the activism that they tried to arouse in the lives of the believers and their supporters attempted to link the taqiya to a specific historical period during which the Shiites were a defeated and persecuted minority. Nowadays, it is well-known (as was always highlighted in Musa al-Sadr’s speeches) that the Shiites are estimated to number tens of millions worldwide. This further emphasized for the Shiites themselves that they are a *force majeure* by means of the most “revolutionary” instrument or ideology that can provide an answer not only to all Muslims but also to all the oppressed people around the world. Therefore, they should cease hiding and stand out prominently in this world, in the here and now.

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