Alternative Paradigms or Ideological Alignment?

The Duality of Islamic Social Science

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Abstract

This article delves into the paradoxical evolution of Islamic social science, where criticism of "Western" paradigms intersects with alignment with state authority, leading to the suppression of alternative perspectives within academia through the political intervention of the state to stabilize specific knowledge. The notion of the "Islamic University" in Iran reflects a broader suspicion of "Western" social sciences as cultural and political infiltration, aligning with the state's project of establishing a "modern Islamic civilization" (*Tamadon-e Novin-e Eslami*). This demand for Islamic social science underscores the intertwined nature of academia, politics, and cultural identity in post-revolutionary Iran. The novelty of this article lies in its illustration of how this perspective on social sciences, entwined with political power, articulates specific notions about the 'West' and 'Western' social sciences. My focus is on the three significant projects championed by the state and its key representatives, aiming to critique "Western" social sciences and explore alternative paradigms. Firstly, the Heideggerian approach, spearheaded by Reza Davari Ardakani, the emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Tehran and former member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, critiques Western social sciences. Secondly, influenced by critics of modernity like Foucault and Eric Voegelin, the approach was represented by Hossein Kachu'iyan, a Sociology professor at the University of Tehran and a former member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, who seeks alternative perspectives instead of sociology. Lastly, drawing from traditional Islamic sources and thinkers, the third approach represented by Hamid Parsania aims to establish Islamic social science.

Keywords

Mirroring the Other

After the 1979 revolution in Iran, the political and identity confrontation with the West as a historical political entity led to the formation of a "native" identity or self. This process has temporarily masked the gaps and tensions within this identity and the "revolutionary and authentic self," as well as the differences among its conceptual narrators. The revolution itself and its characteristics, including the importance of clerics and religious traditions, along with the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88) and political tensions with the West, played a significant role in shaping this identity, which defined itself in opposition to a unified entity called the West. Using Jalal al-Azm's articulation of Orientalism reversed, I argue that in post-revolutionary Iran, with institutional support and funding from the state, this notion, known as Islamizing sciences, goes beyond intellectual thought and its institutionalized aspects, affects academic freedoms in universities. My focus is on one crucial institution, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, and three main university professors whose names, right or wrong, intertwined with the native social sciences in Iran since all three are the West criticized over the last 40 years.

In the late 20th century, a growing body of literature in anthropology started problematizing the term culture (Clifford 1988, Keesing 1994, and Abu-Lughod 1991). One of the important anthropologists writing on this is Abu-Lughod arguing that culture has become a concept used to discuss social life as a coherent, timeless phenomenon that facilitates and freezes the process of othering in anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1991). The process of othering was the essential core of colonialism and anthropology. Many anthropologists as mentioned, started to reflect on this controversial aspect of the discipline, intertwines of othering and generalized concepts like culture, but reflections were not limited to anthropology and some research has been done before this.

As Boroujerdi (1996) shows, Michel Foucault elaborates on how the modern Western notion of self was developed when studied the genealogy of human sciences from the eighteenth century onwards, arguing that these sciences created a new, positive concept of the self, which was completely different from Christianity's idea of the self (Foucault 2002). Foucault believes that this new self-identity emerged through the understanding of the "other."

He traces the process of othering within society; these internal others include the madman, the deviant, the prisoner, etc. (Foucault 2016).

Influenced by Foucault, Edward Said, by applying genealogy to a broader context, tries to clarify the external process of othering on the large scale of the Orient and Occident to show how the Occident has shaped its new identity by defining the Orient as its other (Said 1979). The Orient has been constructed through centuries by systems of representation to show that the Orient is considered the other of the Occident, which is ontologically and essentially different. Therefore, the Orient had been investigated, analyzed, and defined by Orientalism and came under control, while the Orient itself did not have the right to speak up.

Said's articulation of Orientalism is controversial. Regardless of all the debates around it, one of the valuable questions that should be asked is: what are the consequences of Siad's Orientalism for the so-called Orient itself? Here, Sadik Jalal al-Azm's idea of Orientalism reversed becomes important. He argues that intellectuals in "Oriental" societies try to recapture the true self of "Oriental" people to neutralize the Orientalism discourse (Al-'Azm 2022). The paradoxical part is that these intellectuals internalize Orientalism and then use the exact rhetoric to talk about the "true essence" of the Orient. He traces the idea of orientalism in reverse in two instances: Arab nationalism and Islamic revivalism. Secular nationalism and Islamic revivalism discourse, both cultivate the idea that to talk about Muslim societies we need entirely different terminology, and "Western" concepts would not say anything about our problems.

Following the 1979 revolution in Iran, revisionist political thought in Arab countries developed significantly, as observed by Jalal al-Azm. Various intellectuals contributed to this development, centered on the idea that since the Napoleonic occupation of Egypt – which Edward Said identifies as the starting point of Orientalism – Arabs have been seeking redemption through secular nationalism, Marxism, liberalism, and other ideologies, none of which proved fruitful. Consequently, they turned to what is now called popular political Islam as a possible solution (Jalal al-Azm 1981: 234). Jalal al-Azm highlights the literature produced by Islamists, or those influenced by them, which attempts to defend their central idea and reproduce the classical doctrine of Orientalism. This literature emphasizes the ontological and epistemological distinction between the Orient and the Occident, thereby reinforcing the traditional perspectives of Orientalism.

I would like to add this in Jalal al-Azm's argument that by emphasizing the ontological differences between the Orient and the Occident, these intellectuals reframe the notion of the "Oriental" self by articulating a totalized, coherent

representation of the Occident. Additionally, they use the terminology created by the Orientalist discourse itself to criticize the representation of the Orient developed by Orientalists, thereby engaging with and challenging the very framework imposed upon them.

What is interesting here is that instead of changing the game plan, "Oriental" intellectuals accept the essence of the Orient and attempt to redefine that essence positively. The idea of the problem-space, developed by David Scott (2004), helps us understand this situation. According to Scott, after the failure of social and political hopes, our postcolonial present turns into an anticolonial image. There is a connection between this dead-end present, an old utopian future shaped long ago, and imagined futures that might open new, unexpected horizons of possibilities for our stagnant present. In the early nineteenth century, progressive ideologies such as nationalism, Marxism, and Fanonism articulated a vision of where their society came from and what that specific past entailed. By interpreting that past, they sought answers for the present to understand their future trajectory. This framework allowed them to envision a path forward based on their historical and cultural contexts (Scott 2004). Scott describes our postcolonial situation with bitter but true words: "The acute paralysis of will, lack of imagination, widespread corruption, and authoritarianism are symptoms of a deeper problem tied to an anxiety of exhaustion. The New Nations project has depleted its creative energy, leaving only a power structure devoid of vision. As a result, anti-colonial dreams have turned into postcolonial nightmares" (Scott 2004: 2).

This situation has two aspects. One is which past is reconstructed and represented for our contemporary inquiry. What sort of contemporary is our present supposed to be that the past expected it? The second question involves which problem-space makes such an inquiry possible now. David Scott uses the concept of problem-space to show that it is the postcolonial questions that are important to think about, not just the answers we provide. In addition to considering the questions, it is also essential to think about the logic that shapes our questions and, accordingly, the logic of our answers. A problem-space refers to a discursive context defined by a set of questions and answers around which conceptual and ideological-political stakes are identified. It is more than just an arrangement of ideas, concepts, images, and meanings; it is a context of argument and intervention. A problem-space is characterized by the specific problems recognized as such, the questions deemed worth asking, and the answers considered valuable within that context (Scott 2004: 4). Different historical situations shape different conceptual-ideological problem-spaces. Therefore, it is important to read the past and its relation to the present, not to search for the answers produced by intellectuals and theorists, but to identify

the questions that reveal the epistemological conditions for those answers (Scott 2004: 7).

With the rise of the modern imperial world, as Talal Asad elaborates (1992), culture could no longer be invented in isolation, as every invention is a response to the categories shaped by European modernity (Scott 2004: 43). Consequently, as David Scott mentions, European modernity is not a choice but one of the fundamental conditions of choosing, making us all conscripts of modernity, not volunteers (Scott 2004: 19). Therefore, a complete division from modernity is impossible. However, this notion was challenged by the idea that emerged among Iranian scholars after the 1979 revolution. They believed in a significant break from Western modernity (Scott 2004: 43). Michel Foucault himself described the Iranian revolution as signaling the end of Western-style modernization in Islamic countries.[1] This perspective sought to establish a distinct path, separate from the influence of European modernity, even as it remained deeply intertwined with the very framework it aimed to reject.

In *Orientalism* (1979), Edward Said discusses Orientalism as a negative, totalizing structure of violence and objectification. The initial attempts of postcolonial theories aimed to overcome this oppressive framework. Consequently, postcolonial theories and other Western essentialist critics, including theorists of the idea of the Islamic social sciences in post-revolutionary Iran, have sought to respond with a positive and regenerative power. The problem here is that, in challenging the Orientalist narratives about the Orient, scholars in Islamic social sciences have uncritically adopted Said's articulation of the Orient and Occident. Paradoxically, although these theorists have developed Islamic/local answers (employing a poststructuralist approach and using Islamic tradition), they have continued to assume an Orientalist stance by essentializing the Occident and attempting to portray the Orient "in a good way." This essentializing approach mirrors the very Orientalist framework they seek to counter, thereby perpetuating the binary opposition between the Orient and the Occident.

Does the political significance of Islamic social sciences rely on framing the West as a specific type of conceptual and ideological object? Does the moral dimension of Islamic social sciences depend on depicting the West as a particular obstacle to overcome? And does the demand for a postcolonial future in Islamic social sciences necessitate constructing certain types of historical

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1   It should be mentioned that this is one way of reading Foucault's idea about the Iranian revolution which is controversial. To see more about this interpretation of Foucault see Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi (2016) *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment.* 1st edition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

narratives? These are the main concerns of this article. Definitely answering these questions is beyond the scope of this article but these are the questions and assumptions that shape the main argument of this article. Islamic social sciences in current Iran are the future that was wished to be in the past. In other words, early Ardakani and Kachu'iyan were theorizing possibilities of such a future. To shape the future, which is our postcolonial present, we can see the role of the present-past which is part of the past that has been reworked and preserved and remembered in the present, the past that assembled into a totality in a certain way (Scott: 43). To do so, the analysis relies on documentary research and thematic analysis. By systematically examining primary sources such as writings, interviews, and public talks conducted by leading scholars, alongside secondary materials, I uncover patterns, themes, and contradictions within the discourse surrounding Islamic social science in post-revolutionary Iran.

Threads of Tradition

The Islamizing of social sciences is an attempt to explore alternative social sciences theoretically and methodologically, based on Islam. This attempt can be traced in many countries; however, my focus is on Iran since the unique experience of the "Islamic"[2] revolution in 1979 and the Cultural Revolution in 1980 facilitated this attempt and turned it into a state-based project. However, the idea of Islamic social sciences had been discussed among religious scholars, academicians, and intellectuals before the revolution in Iran as well as in other Muslim countries. Therefore, to illustrate the current situation of Islamic social sciences, it is worth briefly having a historical overview.

Islamic social sciences are connected to the larger changes in the 1960s and 1970s in philosophy and social sciences around the world. After the Second World War, neo-Marxism, French existentialism, post-colonialism, and Third-Worldism challenged the main assumptions of capitalist modernity. Localizing "Western" knowledge in general, and the idea of Islamic sciences, particularly in social sciences, spread in different countries. For instance, one can mention Syed Muhammad al Naquib Al-Attas (1978), Osman Bakar (1998), Isma'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī (1987), Muzaffar Iqbal (2010 and 2019), etc. (Saburian and Parsania 2018: 2)

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2 I use quotation marks for the "Islamic" revolution because calling the 1979 revolution is controversial and solely Islamic excludes other participants, like leftists.

The echo of these ideas in Iran can be traced to the general idea of "Return to Self" which was articulated by various scholars and intellectuals like Ali Shariati, Ehsan Naraghi (one of the founders of social sciences in Iran), and Jalal Al-Ahmad (1962). In their view, the "Self" in Iran should be based on national religious identity, which is usually described as the opposite of national archaism promoted by the Pahlavi monarchy before the revolution, which romanticized ancient pre-Islamic Iran. The important aspect of this approach was articulating Islamic social sciences as a tool against imperialism with freedom at its core.

It is important to know that in this period the idea of Islamizing sciences including social sciences was ambiguous. It was fluctuating between the more general idea about religious science and scientific religion. However, the seeds of Islamic social sciences can be seen in this period. Ali Shariati is an academician intellectual trying to articulate Marxist ideas within the Islamic terminology rhetorically. He was a passionate advocate of social Islam and "Return to Self" influenced by Marxism (1972),[3] especially through reading the Frankfurt School and Sartrean existentialism, he advocated for committed intellectualism aware of tradition and history (1970).[4] Shariati's concept of the return to self can be understood as an extension of Jalal Al-e Ahmad's discourse of "Westernization" (1963) and the notion of self-alienation. He called for a return to Islamic selfhood, stating that "it is the only self that is closer to us than all others, the only culture and civilization that is alive now, and the only spirit of life and faith that exists in the fabric of society where intellectuals must work" (Shariati n.d.: 40 in Saburian and Parsania 2018: 3).

Another form of thinking about Islamic sciences is the justification of Quranic verses by referring to modern sciences, which is close to the idea of scientific religion. For instance, Mohammad Taghi Shariati, Ali Shariati's father, in his book *Tafsir Novin* (1967), which is Quranic exegesis, interpreted Quranic verses by referring to their "scientific" aspects. In other words, he considered the Quran as a book full of data about nature as well as moral advice, and by developments in science, now those miracles have been revealed scientifically. Another key figure is Mahmoud Taleghani, who tried to explain Islamic traditions using scientific language in his book *Partovi az Quran* (1979), as well as Mahdi Bāzargān, who in his book *Bād va Bārān dar Quran*[5] (1974), interpreted

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3   The transcription of this speech can be found in Shariati, A. 2013. *Collection of works 3: Abu Dhar*. Tehran: Dr. Ali Shariati Mezinani Cultural Foundation Institute.

4   The transcription of this speech can be found in Shariati, A. 2013. *Collection of works 20: Che Bayad Kard?* Tehran: Dr. Ali Shariati Mezinani Cultural Foundation Institute.

5   Wind and Rain in the Quran.

the verses related to wind and rain in a scientific and argumentative way to adapt them to new sciences.

The institutional aspects of Islamic social sciences are crucial, alongside key figures. As Saburian points out, the concept of an Islamic university was initially proposed in a document by the Pahlavi Foundation. During the first Pahlavi era, Reza Shah acquired numerous lands, which were transferred to the government in 1941 under the second Pahlavi (Saburian and Parsania 2018: 4). In 1949, a law allowed these properties to return to Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, intended for charitable purposes.[6] Part of these assets was allocated to establish the "Islamic University" in 1961 (Saburian and Parsania 2018: 4). This initiative reflected the second Pahlavi's policy of controlling religious institutions, a continuation of his father's approach. Khomeini, the first Supreme Leader, opposed this idea, viewing it as a means of state control over religious bodies (Abrahamian 1983). Thus, the Islamization of sciences was an idea pursued even before the Iranian Revolution.

Cultural Guardians

In 1934, for the first time, a sociology course was offered by a German scholar[7] in the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences (Golchin 2005). Finally, in 1958, the Institute of Social Studies and Research was co-created by UNESCO and the University of Tehran. This institute was the main[8]academic institution for 15 years for social sciences research and teaching, particularly in sociology, anthropology, and demography (Bayatrizi 2013: 465–469). The University of Tehran initially planned to establish an institute within the Faculty of Law, offering master's courses in public administration (Golchin 2005). However, Ehsan Naraghi, who had studied sociology in France, proposed an alternative. He suggested creating an institute for social research and teaching within the Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences, where a sociology course was already being taught (Bayatrizi 2013: 465–469). He believed that the existing focus on Iran's culture and history in this faculty would provide an environment for advancing the native social sciences.

The institution gained popularity for two main reasons. First, it offered new opportunities in social sciences with nearly guaranteed employment after

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6   https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/94055.

7   Name of this scholar varies in different documents but all agree that he came from Germany.

8   ISSR was not the only place to pursue social scientific research, in fact, outside of academia individual intellectuals also developed a body of social scientific work (Enayat 1974: 1–6)

graduation. Second, it attracted students seeking to pursue political activities in an academic setting. This was particularly significant in the repressive political climate following the 1953 coup.[9] Naraghi, the institution's founder, faced criticism from the Shah, who accused him of promoting socialism, while leftists and Islamists suspected Naraghi of being a SAVAK[10] agent trying to control revolutionary figures like Ali Shariati. This duality highlighted the institution's role as both a promoter of Shah's policies and a venue for student opposition (Bayatrizi 2013: 469–470). In 1972, it became the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tehran.

Following the 1979 revolution, when Islamists took power, social sciences were accused of promoting "Western culture and perspectives." Universities remained closed for two years, from June 12th, 1980, until December 18th, 1982, a period known as the Cultural Revolution (Fazeli 2006: 135). Khomeini, the first leader of the Islamic Republic, was particularly concerned about the political-ideological environment in universities, especially regarding leftist students and professors. This concern marked a key moment in his efforts to define an "Islamic" society, to be realized through "Islamic" universities. Rather than providing a clear, positive definition, Khomeini focused on what an Islamic university should not be, contrasting it with "Western" universities and science. Essentially, he defined the "Islamic" university by opposing it to its "Western" counterpart, framing the West as the other against which Islamic identity and education were to be shaped. In one of his sermons in April 1980, he said:

> Our colleges should undergo fundamental change. They should be rebuilt. They should train our youth in an Islamic fashion. As sciences are taught to them, they should also be fed with Islamic coaching. We do not want one group to push them towards the West and another group towards the East … Today we are in confrontation with America. We are facing a big power. So we need our youth to stand against them with us.

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9   A coup in 1953 overthrew the democratically elected government of Muhammad Mossadeq, allowing Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to rule autocratically. The 1951–53 oil crisis between Iran and Britain was the result of Mossadeq's decision to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian oil company. After Iran seized oil installations, international debates erupted, economic sanctions were imposed, and an invasion threat loomed. A military intervention was staged in August 1953 by the CIA and MI6 after the crisis persisted despite US attempts to broker peace. These twenty-eight months saw dramatic changes in Iran's relations with Britain and the United States (Abrahamian 2013).

10 SAVAK (Organization of National Security and Information), the Iranian secret police and intelligence service, protected the regime of the shah by arresting, torturing, and executing many dissidents.

But they stand against themselves .... We do not fear economic block-
ade. We do not fear military intervention. The thing that is dreadful to us
is the dependency of culture. We fear imperialist colleges. The colleges
that train our youth for the service of the West make us fearful. Likewise,
we fear the colleges that produce servants of Communism. We want our
colleges to not be like those who traduce us. They do not conceive the
meaning of independence and the Islamization of the colleges.[11]

Therefore, he ordered the establishment of the Headquarters of the Cultural
Revolution. Some of the tasks of this group were reviewing university syllabi
and rewriting them based on Islamic values, adding courses related to the
ideological viewpoint of Islamists, and expelling students and professors who
were not in line with the new revolutionary regime (Fazeli 2003: 135–143).
This included leftists, liberals, and those connected with the Pahlavi regime.
After the massive purge, in November 1984, Khomeini's order turned the
headquarters into an organization, known today as the Supreme Council of the
Cultural Revolution (SCCR). That was not the end of the story. In October 1986,
the approvals of the SCCR became equivalent to law.[12] The SCCR is essential
for investigating the development of the Islamization of social sciences in
Iran since the main professors who try to Islamize social sciences are also key
figures in the SCCR, which I will discuss. Before that, it is worth mentioning
that although the SCCR is an important institution for the promotion of Islamic
social sciences and the control of universities, there are other institutions
as well that do not have controlling power but have funding to promote
Islamic social sciences, such as the Islamic Development Organization, the
Islamic Promotion of Qom Seminary, The Organization for Researching and
Composing University Textbooks in the Humanities and Islamic Sciences,
the Research Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought, the Imam Khomeini
Education and Research Institute, the Research Institute of Hawzeh and
University, the Research Institute of Islamic Culture and Education, and the
Islamic-Iranian Model of Progress.

Navigating Intellectual Crossroads

Reza Davari Ardakani is considered one of the most controversial thinkers
of the Islamic Republic in Iran. He studied philosophy at the University

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11   http://emam.com/-/siHwSk.
12   More details about SCCR based on its own website can be found at: https://sccr.ir
      /pages/10257/2.

of Tehran. He then started his academic career as a lecturer and eventually became a professor there. He was a student of Ahmad Fardid and was highly influenced by Fardid's Heideggerian approach to the West which means that he considered the West as a metaphysical totality that has taken over All areas of social life in contemporary societies. After the revolution, Davari became one of the key thinkers of the Islamic Republic and became a member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (SCCR) from 1984 to 2021.

Davari articulated the "Islamic" revolution as a significant break from the history of "modernity": "Our Islamic Revolution is a sign of the end of Western history and the beginning of another 'era' in the shadow of the grace and refuge of the Divine. If this shadow is not upon humanity, it will lead to ruin and corruption" (Davari 1979: 169). He sees the relation between the revolution and the West in this way: "We have not made a revolution to solve Western crises, but in our revolution, Western issues and their existence are eliminated" (Davari 1979: 232). Therefore, in his view, there is no need for modern social sciences anymore. Since social sciences have been shaped to fulfil the necessities of modern societies, and post-revolutionary Iran is not part of the modern world anymore, it represents something new.

The "Islamic" Revolution led Davari to believe that a new path had been opened other than "Westernization." As he stated, "We did not carry out the revolution based on Western history to realize Western values. As Imam [Khomeini] said, we did it for God, and a revolution for God would not fail" (Davari 2008 [1983]: 158). He further elaborated, "This revolution is a reaction to Westernization, but it does not limit itself to this reaction. This revolution will create a great tremor in the West. Since it is a religious Islamic revolution based on the message from God and oriented toward human nature and truth, it cannot be evaluated by Western values" (Davari 2008: 159). In his view, this revolution is not comparable to other revolutions: "This revolution is not like other [anti-imperialist] revolutions; it is essentially different and does not limit itself to anti-imperialism resistance. It would be a path to understand the true nature of imperialism and the beginning of a serious confrontation" (Davari 2008: 206). Over time, the philosophical aspect of his thought faded, and ideological anti-Westernism replaced it: "The West is an arrogant devil, and refuge must be sought from it in God." He considers "Western" intellect as demonic and argues that no attention should be paid to any Western ideologies, asserting that even their negation and rejection should not be considered (Davari 2008: 314). This ideological thinking and politicization caused Davari to overlook that, based on his intellectual foundations, all nations and peoples in our time are Westernized. Consequently, the decline and end of Western history, which he predicts apply to non-Western nations. In the early stages

of this thought he thought that the Islamic revolution might turn Iran into an exception for this historical process but eventually one sees that in his view Iran would not have a different future too.

When he wrote these lines in the early aftermath of the revolution in 1983, he did not have a clear idea about what the future might hold. The future has now become our present. This idea, that the "Islamic" revolution is a break from modernity and represents "a whole different world" that would "challenge the whole existence of the West" (Davari 2008: 206), was foundational to his thinking. He mentioned that one cannot predict what it might look like in the future, but it should be something entirely new. In Davari's view, the Islamic revolution will gradually overcome Western manifestations such as university, social sciences, development, cinema, etc. This rhetoric of articulating something completely different from what the West has shaped can be seen later in Ali Khamenei's speech about a "New Islamic Civilization" as well as the propaganda against the West as the "Great Devil".

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a significant intellectual conflict in Iran centered around the Popper-Heidegger dichotomy and their Iranian representatives, Abdul Karim Soroush and Reza Davari Ardakani. This conflict was primarily about their differing approaches to the West. Soroush, influenced by the science philosopher Karl Popper, emerged as a leading figure in a liberal tendency within the Islamic revolution. He advocated for selectively integrating aspects of Western civilization, such as rationality, social sciences, democracy, and development while maintaining Islamic religious principles. Soroush argued for the possibility and necessity of cultural exchange, mutual recognition, and cooperation. He believed that Iranians could benefit from Western intellectual contributions and that modernity provided tools for critical reflection and self-improvement (Soroush 1994).

In stark contrast, Davari, influenced by Hegelian philosophy and Heidegger's ideas, viewed the West as a unified and totalizing entity characterized by humanism and modernity. He saw these elements as leading to the decline of metaphysical philosophy and the rise of materialism and rationalism. Davari argued that Iranian intellectuals should engage in a critical reflection on Western history to undermine its celebrated legacies of humanism and modernity. He advocated for the complete rejection of Western modernity, which he believed had supplanted the medieval natural order with secular science and history. For Davari, the West represented a corrupting influence that needed to be entirely eradicated to preserve Islamic identity and establish an intellectual framework distinct from Western thought, grounded in religious principles and revelation. Thus, while Soroush promoted a nuanced and inclusive approach to integrating Western and Islamic intellectual traditions,

Davari called for a total repudiation of Western modernity in favor of a return to a religiously grounded society. This dichotomy between selective integration and complete rejection defined the most important intellectual conflict in Iran during that period. (cf. Soroush 1994; Davari, 2000 and 2007; Abazari and Roozkhosh, 2017).

Davari's writings can be divided into two types of analysis. Some of his works, such as the book *Vaz-e Konuni-e Fekr dar Iran* (The Current State of Thought in Iran) (1979) and *Fārābi; Philosoph-e Farhang* (Farabi; Philosophy of Culture) (2007), contain philosophical reflections and deeply thoughtful elucidations. The second type of his writings is political-ideological. Davari's main concern in both types of writings is encountering the West, in the first type, by historicizing the West, he tries to describe it not as a geographical reality, nor as a united entity, nor even as an assembly of particular details. In his view, the West is an event that began with modern philosophy and is now in its most expanded form (Davari 2000: 9). In this sense, the West represents the relationship between humankind and other creatures, a relationship in which humans consider themselves capable of intervening and controlling other entities. One of these entities is the Orient (Davari 2000: 9). In his view, the West has developed over the past two and a half millennia. With its expansion, the veil of the Orient becomes thicker, and its light becomes blurred. Although initially, it was the light of the Orient that made this expansion possible for the West, like the relationship between the sun and the moon (Davari 2000: 26). In the second type of his writing, one can observe a more political-ideological articulation of the West that can be particularly seen in his debate with Soroush. While his later writings attempt to clarify his opinions, for the purpose of this article, his intentions are less significant than how his political ideas were comprehended. It is crucial to understand these writings in their specific context.

In post-revolutionary Iran, the project of Islamizing social sciences and Humanities has been pursued with various ups and downs. Davari's stance is interesting in this context because, although he never explicitly endorsed this project or affirmed the possibility of Islamic humanities, his opposition to the West and Western social sciences, along with his collaboration with governmental cultural institutions, led some to believe that he sympathized with this project. His critique of the West as a whole, which included all aspects of the West such as Western humanities, placed him rhetorically alongside those who defended a project called "Islamic Humanities." However, Davari's understanding of the West was not the same as that of other conservative critics within the Iranian government. Unlike the ruling conservatives, Davari, as a Heideggerian philosopher, did not believe in Islamic humanities. Yet,

his position as a well-known critic of the West and modernity created the perception that he held a similar stance to the conservatives who supported the project of Islamic humanities. One can talk about a kind of metaphorical space of criticism of the West or opposition to the West that had political rhetoric and brought together different individuals and tendencies against the West and domestic Westernizers.

It should be mentioned that Davari's intellectual journey has been full of ups and downs and changes. Recently, when he was invited to give a speech on the topic of religious science and Islamic humanities, he wrote a letter[13] declining to attend the session. In this letter, he mentioned that for thirty years, efforts have been made to develop Islamic social sciences, but these efforts seem to have made no progress and likely will not. Although this stance of his did not conflict with his previous ideas, its lack of clear articulation surprised many supporters of the concept of Islamic humanities. He emphasized the requirements of the modern world and modern sciences, explaining that Islamic science is not something to be constructed but something to be found that aligns with society. He argued that if we are looking for Islamic science, society must become Islamic first. Moreover, in the *I have Failed, and I Accept this Failure*[14] interview, it seems that after forty years of the Islamic Revolution, Davari's judgment has shifted. He no longer sees the Islamic Revolution as a break from the modern world, but rather as a part of it that inevitability adapts to the requirements of modernity.

Hossein Kachu'iyan and Hamid Parsania are two university professors in the faculty of social sciences at the University of Tehran. Since they are in the same faculty and same program, in this part I examine their points of view together. Hossein Kachu'iyan is a Sociology professor at the University of Tehran and a former member of the SCCR, who seeks an alternative social science for Modern social sciences. His approach is influenced by critics of modernity like Foucault and Eric Voegelin. In his idea, the "Islamic" revolution in 1979 was a cleavage in the history of the world. Therefore, the super narratives about the history of modernity are not efficient anymore, be it development theories, modernization, or globalization, since the "Islamic" revolution negated their reality (Kachu'iyan 2012).

In his view, the "Islamic" revolution is an event outside the scope of modern history, challenging "Western" meta-narratives. Therefore, one could not analyze it by using theoretical frameworks about the modern revolution, as they are rooted in the main assumptions about the human and social

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13   https://ensafnews.com/?p=101919.
14   https://3danet.ir/failure-ardakani/.

world in the Enlightenment and the 1979 revolution is something beyond modernity. From his perspective, social sciences theories "involve projecting specific philosophical historical foundation of sociological theories onto non-Western communities. These approaches have inherent essential bounds with the necessities of development of modernity (Kachu'iyan 2004: 101–102). Therefore, modern social sciences, due to their deep connection to modernity, not only fail to elucidate anything about Iran's changes but also lead to misleading interpretations. Consequently, the mission of university scholars in Iran should be articulated to achieve a philosophical understanding of Iranian history, identity, and culture, ideally leading to the development of alternative social sciences.

In his view, the main core of Iranian society that shapes its identity is Islam, which forms identity in opposition to the "West" (Kachu'iyan 2007). To clarify this, he emphasizes specific historical moments in Iran's history when Islam played a role, such as the Tobacco Protest,[15] the "Islamic" revolution, the Iran–Iraq War,[16] and Ahmadinejad's victory in the sixth presidential election. He believes that in Iran, the only foundation of social order is Islam, not "modern" identity or nationalism. The point is that although he heavily criticized the "West" and "modernity", he never offered any alternative approaches regarding how and to what extent Islam can be a blueprint for society. In addition to his academic efforts, when he was the director of the sociology program at the University of Tehran, he approved an enactment to prioritize the recruitment of professors who, in addition to university education in the field of social sciences, also have seminary education. The intention was to build an intellectual base to promote Islamic social sciences within the university.

Drawing from traditional Islamic sources and thinkers, Hamid Parsania aims to establish Islamic social science. He is a sociology graduate from the University of Tehran and a scholar at the Qom Seminary. He is one of the students of Abdullah Jawadi Amoli, one of the key religious conservative influential clergy. He believes that Western social sciences suffer from paradoxical

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15 In 1891, Major G. F. Talbot secured an exclusive 50-year right to produce, sell, and export tobacco in Persia, involving a rent of £15,000, a quarter of the profits, and a five percent dividend to the Shah. Only those with Talbot's permits could trade tobacco. This monopoly led to a successful movement of collaboration between the ulama, reformers, and the masses. Mirza Hasan Shirazi, a prominent Shi'i ulama, played a key role. In December 1891, his fatwa, declaring the use of tobacco as a religious offense against the Imam of the Age, turned the boycott into a religious act, spreading protests throughout the country (Keddie 1966).

16 Known as "Holy Defense" in Iran.

conceptualization which does not align with our religious-based traditional society (Parsania 2013). Parsania, in challenging modern epistemological approaches, constantly pursues the reconstruction and revival of the epistemological heritage of the Islamic world in his work. He is searching for an alternative form of social sciences instead of "Western" social sciences through Islamic tradition. Consequently, from his perspective, Quranic revelation, demonstrative reason, and infallible mystical intuition are complementary rather than mutually exclusive, and adhering to one does not negate the need for the others (Parsania 2016). Therefore, in his intellectual system, while utilizing reason, transmission, and intuition, the Quran is the foundation of all sciences. In his system, various intellectual methods based on reason, transmission, and intuition are accepted. He constantly cites religious resources such as the Hadith tradition, and theoretical and practical mysticism (Parsania 2006). These are the exact normative forms of knowledge that Boroujerdi mentions about how in Orientalism Reversed scholars use normative disciplines. According to Boroujerdi, Orientalists construct their arguments based on disciplines like biology and anthropology, while these intellectuals use literature, theology, and other normative fields which is problematic as we see (Boroujerdi 1996: 13).

Parsania is not an influential figure in mainstream academic debates in social sciences in Iran, but the thing is that he is important not because of theoretical novelty, which is not much, but because of the alignment of his project to the political discourse of shaping the "new Islamic civilization." Therefore, he has the institutional power to make his discourse dominant. One example is the social sciences books for high school students, which are published under the consideration of the Ministry of Education. He is the author of these books and provides narration about social sciences based on this "Islamizing" approach (Heydari 2021). Another example is establishing a different department in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tehran named "Islamic Social Sciences" in 2013. On their website, the mission of the department is clarified as: "The Department of Islamic Social Sciences aims to improve the intellectual and ethical aspects of social sciences and pay attention to indigenous and civilizational issues. Relying on more than three decades of preparations and diligent designs, finally, in 2013, by accepting students in the two fields of "Muslim Social Science" and "Philosophy of Social Sciences", it began its work. From that time until now, the field of "Social Science of Muslims" has been accepting students at two master's and doctorate levels, and the field of "Philosophy of Social Sciences" has been accepting students at the master's level in the Faculty of Social Sciences of Tehran University. The main repeated topics for the dissertation among the

students of these programs are comparative studies between Islamic thinkers such as Al-Farabi, Mulla Sadra, and Ibn Khaldun and Western thinkers, and more generally between Islamic and Western thought. In this project, some scholars have also revisited thinkers like Machiavelli, Weber, and Marx to assess the experience of establishing humanities in the West. However, their overall orientation is that the intellectual advantages of Western thinkers are mostly already present in our traditional and religious thought, and they even believe that the first group (Islamic thinkers) surpasses the second group (Western thinkers).

Kachu'iyan and Parsania each have different theoretical orientations; the first one cites postmodern thinkers, and the second one uses Islamic tradition. Since both criticize the West, this assumption has been shaped that they are following one project. Therefore, one can see here that the concern of encountering the entity known as the West and modernity, as well as the integration or blending of theoretical and political discourses, significantly shapes the academic atmosphere. In fact, they sometimes even mix the critique of modernity and the West as a historical entity with the critique of the West as the political enemy of the current political system.

Therefore, it appears that the critique of the West as an inherent totality, perceived as the 'other' of the Islamic Republic, is the point that unifies the different academic approaches to the West. This theoretical unity does not emerge within the academic realm but rather manifests itself in the political sphere. Hence, despite their differences and the aims they pursue, all these projects have had political implications for the political and academic landscape of social sciences in Iran. The policymaking aspect of this issue can be observed in the budget allocated to organizations involved in the Islamization of the humanities. Excluding religious seminaries, one of the significant organizations active in this field, with numerous subsidiaries, is the Islamic Development Organization, which has been allocated a budget of around 5 thousand billion tomans in 2024. To illustrate the magnitude of this amount, it is worth noting that the budget for the University of Tehran, one of the country's main universities, is 4.5 thousand billion tomans.

One of the controversial examples of the merging of political disputes and academic discussions can be seen in the trials following the 2009 protests. This critique of Western paradigms, in contrast to the emancipatory element claimed by postcolonial theorists, advances by eliminating and suppressing dissenters. This was evident to the extent that, in the aftermath of Iran's controversial 2009 election, a number of Iranian researchers were labeled as threats to national security in court proceedings, and Western theorists such

as Weber, Parsons, and Habermas were accused and were considered as a cultural-political threat for Iranian society.[17]

Conclusion

This article has shown that before the revolution, there was a significant search for alternative approaches to social sciences, characterized by various forms of Islamization within intellectual circles and among religious scholars. Following the revolution, the concept of native social sciences became institutionalized and restricted itself to Islamic perspectives. By using the concept of problem-space shows us how specific questions have been asked and how these questions have changed during the time before and after the revolution by forming the post-colonial state.

Using the Cultural Revolution as a background and examining the contributions of three university professors who were members of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, I have demonstrated how a significant part of Iran's academic landscape has engaged in the Islamization of social sciences, both theoretically and institutionally. Ultimately, this process internalized the very Orientalism it aimed to critique, shaping its identity by opposing and otherizing the West. The contradiction here is the fact that its logic of criticism is the one that formed Orientalism itself. Similarly to what Jalal al-Azm termed "reversed Orientalism," this phenomenon subverted alternative indigenous approaches to social sciences, turning them into tools that undermined the freedom they had initially sought to achieve.

What is known today in Iran as Islamic social sciences is a continuation from the early days of the revolution. This initiative aimed to establish a completely new order beyond modernity and challenge the West in its entirety. However, what we are experiencing now is based on post-structuralist approaches, internalizing Orientalism and searching for an essence of the Orient that is fundamentally reliant on its counterpart, the West. This approach, to escape the hegemonic suppression of the West, called for a return to self. In practice, however, it led to the suppression of so-called non-Islamic readings, which had both political and policy implications. A prime example of the former was the trial of Weber during the 2009 Green Movement, and the latter can be seen in the burgeoning organizations dedicated to the Islamization of sciences and their increasing budgets.

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17   For more information see: https://www.chronicle.com/article/reading-weber-in-tehran/.

In post-revolutionary political rhetoric, the West was defined as the other of the Islamic Republic. The political identity of the Islamic Republic was also based on this discourse and othering. The intertwining of this political discourse with academic debates about the West in post-revolutionary Iran led to conceptual confusion and strange alliances formed solely due to their anti-Western dimensions. The theoretical confrontation between Heideggerian and Popperian thought reproduced itself in the future political landscape of Iran, manifesting in the dichotomy between conservative and reformist political factions. Three key figures associated with localization projects, despite significant differences, are often perceived as pursuing the unified project of Islamizing social sciences. Furthermore, the fact that these three individuals are members of one of the most important cultural institutions in the country, which has political implications for the academic sphere, highlights the interweaving of political and theoretical discussions.

Thus, what we are witnessing today as Islamic social sciences in Iran is the outcome of a historical trajectory that began with revolutionary aspirations for a new order and has evolved into a complex interplay of post-structuralist thought and institutionalized Orientalism. Each of these three approaches has its own specific origin drawing from different resources and has different interpretations from Iranian Islamic tradition. Their direct connection with politics articulates the picture that all of them are part of the same united project. While they have some similarities, without this intertwining of politics and academia it would be barely possible to see them as the same project although in the institutional dimension, one can see a unity among them. The effort to carve out an indigenous academic identity distinct from Western hegemony has paradoxically entrenched itself in the very paradigms it sought to transcend. Last but not least, it should be mentioned that there are other ways of searching for liberated native social sciences in Iran that are independent and do not limit themselves to the ideological political project of the state.

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