# Rethinking Political Secularism in the Works of Post-Revolutionary Iranian Intellectuals: Akbar Ganji, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Mohsen Kadivar

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# Abstract

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This thesis argues that the discourses of post-revolutionary Iranian reformist, religious intellectuals transformed from a vague notion of "religious democracy" to more concrete concept of "political secularism" in the second part of the 2000s. More specifically, this thesis focuses on the works of Akbar Ganji, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Mohsen Kadivar. Examining their works and discourses it is clear that an alternative and democratic conception of secularism - namely "political secularism," which rejects both secular and religious fundamentalisms that Iran experienced in the last century - emerged as a political principle that to maintain the unity of society on the basis of sociopolitical equality and freedom.

66.000 words

# Özet

"Devrim Sonrası İranlı Entelektüellerin Çalışmalarında Siyasal Sekülerizmi Yeniden Düşünmek: Akbar Ganji, Abdolkarim Soroush ve Mohsen Kadivar"

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Prof. Dr. Duygu Köksal, Tez Danışmanı

Bu tezde, devrim sonrası İran'lı reformcu dini entelektüellerin temel söylemlerinin soyut "dini demokrasi" kavramından, daha elle tutulur ve gerçekçi "siyasal sekülerizm kavramına geçişleri iddia edilmektedir. Daha spesifik olarak, bu tezde Akbar Ganji, Abdolkarim Soroush ve Mohsen Kadivar'ın çalışmalarına odaklanılmıştır. Söz konusu İranlı entelektüellerin çalışmalarının incelenmesiyle sekülerizmin kapsayıcı, alternatif ve demokratik yorumlanışı olan siyasal sekülerizmin ortaya konduğu görülecektir. Söz konusu İran'lı entelektüeller siyasal sekülerizmi, İran'ın geçtiğimiz yüzyılda deneyimlediği hem seküler hem dini radikalizme alternatif olarak, toplumu eşitlik ve özgürlükler temelinde bir arada tutabilecek yeni bir siyasal prensip olarak çalışmalarında ortaya koymuşlardır.

66.000 kelime

*To my dear mom, Şükran Telek, who always loved me*
*and changed my life by providing me books since I was child,*
*And to my dear dad, Yener Telek, the man who taught me curiosity*
*– and not to give up…*

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# 1

## Introduction

In this thesis, I examine the writings of post-revolutionary Iranian reformist, religious intellectuals - which emerged as a reaction to the Islamic regime's socio-political actions in the 1980s and 1990s - and argue that they are increasingly becoming "politically" secularist, especially in the second part of the 2000s. They are called religious intellectuals (*rowshanfekrane dini*), and because they also support the reformist movement in Iran, they are known as reformist, religious intellectuals.[1]

Post-revolutionary intellectual discourses in Iran are varied and ample. As Mehran Kamrava puts it, there are three main intellectual inclinations that emerged in post-revolutionary Iran. These are a conservative discourse, a reformist, religious discourse and a secularist discourse.[2] Among these, I pick up the reformist, religious discourse because it holds a very important place in post-revolutionary Iranian intellectual life among supporters of a democratic Iran. More specifically, I take Akbar Ganji, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Mohsen Kadivar under consideration, three prominent reformist, religious intellectuals.

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1 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 84

2 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 1.

Through the 1990s, reformist, religious intellectualism was shaped by the ideals of religious democracy and/or Islamic democracy. On the other hand, it changed in the second part of the 2000s, and rather Iranian reformist, religious intellectualism has been shaped by a reappraisal of secularism rather than of religious democracy. In this thesis, I argue that reformist, religious intellectuals showed an inclination towards "political" secularism - rather than a militant and aggressive reading of secularism - to provide a way for social harmony and socio-political freedom, which were lost in post-revolutionary Iran. I argue that although the basis of discourse was religious democracy for these intellectuals in the 1990s, in the second part of the 2000s, the main principle became political secularism. Many factors contribute to this change. The end of the reformist government in 2005, the rise of the conservative Ahmadinejad, and the domination of governmental institutions and public space by conservatives (again) increased the tone of political secularism in the writings of reformist, religious intellectuals. The Green Movement of 2009 became a turning point for religious reformism in Iran; the masses that poured into the streets supported not a religious, Islamic government, but a democratic one. In that sense, the Green Movement represents a climax for the growing demand for secularism and democracy among members of Iranian society.

In this thesis, my main research question is whether reformist, religious intellectuals are becoming increasingly secularist in the 2000s. Around this question, sub-questions emerged like whether reformist, religious intellectuals abandoned religious discourses and religious argumentation. Does Iran have the potential to give birth to democratic secularism, which I interpret as political secularism? If yes, what are the intellectual discourses for political secularism in Iran? How do religious reformist intellectuals form their discourses, and how do they spread their ideas among Iranian society without incurring the resentment of believers? Is a democratic political structure possible in Iran? Where do reformist, religious intellectuals stand on that question? From the beginning of this study, I argue that Iranian reformist, religious intellectuals provide an important case since their discourses formed the political language of post-revolutionary social and political opposition in Iran, including women's and student's movements. As will be

shown in this thesis, their intellectual struggle provides the intellectual and political vocabulary for a democratic Iran.

In this thesis, I also explain what political secularism is and how Iranian reformist, religious intellectuals deal with this concept in their writings. In the first chapter, I discuss the concept of secularism, and its differences with the concepts of secular and secularization. Correspondingly, I explained two secularization approaches that debate the role of religion in modern times. With reference to the French and American forms, I discuss the similarities and divergences of mainstream secularisms. These two models nurture mainstream perceptions of the secularism, but there is another model that academicians neglect; it is Indian secularism. Political secularism, which does not exclude religion from the public sphere but only the state, is nurtured by the Indian model of secularism. I also discuss Indian secularists and anti-secularists. Such anti-secularists, including Ashis Nandy and T.N. Madan, argue that secularism is a conflict-generating ideology. According to them, secularism damaged the social harmony among different religious and ethnic groups formed during the centuries long pre-modern times. Furthermore, they argue that in modern times secularism has transformed religion from a faith into a political ideology. Moreover, Indian anti-secularists see secularism as an alien to Indian history; a Western, Christian concept that cannot work for Indian culture. Instead, they put forward tolerance and autonomy. They argue these values are rooted in Indian culture.

I argue that these explanations are not exclusive to Indian anti-secularists. The same arguments can be seen in pre-revolutionary discourses among Iranian intellectuals or in today's Islamic conservatives and radicals of Iran. Before the 1979 revolution, Ali Shariati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad, who were the public intellectuals and whose discourses formed revolutionary language in Iran, disparaged the shah's attempts at modernization and secularization and accused intellectuals who demanded democracy and secularism of the alien to Iranian culture and "Westoxicated" (*Gharbzedegi*). Such culturalist and essentialist arguments were pervasive among pre-revolutionary intellectuals in Iran.

However, it will be revealed in this thesis that post-revolutionary intellectualism, specifically reformist, religious intellectuals, abandoned this anti-Westernism and argued for democracy and related concepts. The main point

that links Indian anti-secularists and Iranian intellectuals before the revolution was anti-colonial and anti-Western discourse.

Ali Shariati, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Ruhollah Khomeini, and Indian anti-secularists derided western concepts because historically, Western countries damaged democratic efforts in their countries. For example, one of the most important events that fomented anti-Westernism and suspicion against the West in Iran was the coup d'état against elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953.[3] After World War II, there was a democratic period lasting from 1941 to 1953.[4] There was a relatively free atmosphere for making politics. The Iranian people chose Mossadegh as their prime minister. Prime Minister Mossadegh nationalized Iranian oil; however the English government reacted aggressively because the monopoly over oil extraction belonged to English companies.[5] After Mossadegh's nationalization of Iranian oil, the British government convinced government of the United States to plot against Mossadegh and overthrow his government. In 1953, a coup d'état was realized and Mossadegh fell from power. In his place, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was brought in to head the Iranian state. After that, the new shah suppressed all opposition in Iran until the 1979 revolution, creating a clientelist system from which only his dynasty and his close-relations benefited. Iranian intellectuals before the revolution saw Western intervention and the shah's despotism as two faces of the same coin. This situation was combined with shah' policies of secularization and modernization, which were oppressively implemented from above. Thus, Iranian intellectuals and opposition leaders adopted culturalist and essentialist explanations against the Western world. They argued for a return to Islamic roots with a revolutionary enthusiasm that would overthrow both the despotic shah and colonialist Western governments. That was the post-colonial atmosphere. So, there was much in common between anti-secularists of India and Iranian intellectuals before the revolution.

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3 Ali Mirsepassi, *Democracy in Modern Iran Islam, Culture, and Political Change,* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), p. 15.

4 Ibid.

5 Stephen Kinzer, *Şah'ın Bütün Adamları Bir Amerikan Darbesi ve Ortadoğu'da Terörün Kökenleri,* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), p. 16.

However, in this thesis, I also discuss of political secularism with reference to Jean Bauberot's reappraisal of *laïcité* and Indian secularist Rajeev Bhargava's political secularism notion. In relation to that, I used John Rawls' "political" definition to argue an alternative conception of secularism that explains the discourses of Iranian reformist, religious intellectuals in the post-revolutionary period.

Jean Bauberot redefines laïcité as a process that of constant criticism of authority, expansion of rights, and realization of freedoms. Bauberot argues that if these features stop, then laïcité itself becomes an authority trapped by ideological content as opposed to a process of egalitarian and liberalistic aspirations. Second, Bauberot claims that laïcité is not a French exception; in any society shaped by different political, religious, ethnic identities, laïcité can emerge. He sees a universal feature in it and asserts that laïcité does not belong to one nation or culture. His explanations exclude culturalist and essentialist arguments and reinterpret laïcité and/or secularism as a principle that can provide the basis for a democratic state and society. It will be seen that this reinterpretation of secularism found its place in the writings of reformist, religious intellectuals.

Furthermore, Rajeev Bhargava - one of the most important contributors to the literature of secularism - argues that there are two secularisms. One is ethical and the other is political. He defines ethical secularism as aggressive and notes that it excludes all religion from the public sphere and makes the secular reason as the dominant principle of society. On the other hand, Bhargava claims "there is a strong exclusion in political secularism as opposed to varieties of weak exclusion." Political secularism requires the exclusion of ultimate ideals for the protection of ordinary life.[6] In the same sense, Bhargava explains that political secularism excludes ultimate ideals from the state for a peaceful polity.[7] He believes the only condition for the implementation of political secularism is the exclusion of any ultimate ideal and value

6 Rajeev Bhargava, "What is Secularism for?" http://law.uvic.ca/demcon/victoria_colloquium/documents/WhatisSecularismforPreSeminarReading.pdf, (23 March 2016), p. 10

7 Ibid, p. 5.

from the coercive public sphere, namely, the state.[8] Moreover, instead of the mutual exclusion of state and religion, Bhargava argues that state can intervene in religion on the grounds that the aim of the intervention is to promote equality, peace, and tolerance, which he names as the constitutive values of secularism. For Bhargava, religions can also intervene in politics, but only if its intervention promotes these constitutive values. This is the basic difference of political secularism. Moreover, political secularism is also known as the institutional differentiation model. It is basically the separation of state and religion.

I argue that Iranian reformist, religious intellectuals reappraised political secularism in the second part of the 2000s. Bhargava's notion of political secularism can be an explanatory tool for understanding the motivations of reformist, religious intellectuals when they refer to political secularism. For reformist, religious intellectuals, the exclusionary mechanism of the Islamic regime necessitated political secularism as a unifying principle to provide "social harmony" and the perception of a "shared home" on the basis of democracy in Iran. That is why they increasingly supported and reassess the concept of political secularism in their writings. They not only argued for separation of state and religion, but also exclusion of any kind of comprehensive doctrine at the state level. Bhargava's inclusionary political secularism approach corresponds to Iranian intellectual discourses of religious reformism in the second part of the 2000s.

Lastly, I discuss of John Rawls' "political" conception to better explain the reformist, religious intellectuals' inclination towards an inclusionary secularism. First of all, Rawls argue that modern society consists of pluralities as a normal result of its historical development.[9] For Rawls, society consists of both reasonable and comprehensive doctrines. However, only a "political" conception can unify differences in a non-exclusionary way. To him, comprehensive doctrines are only for those who conform to it, however; political

8 Rajeev Bhargava, "What is Secularism for?" http://law.uvic.ca/demcon/victoria_colloquium/documents/WhatisSecularismforPreSeminarReading.pdf, (23 March 2016), p. 10.

9 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. XXXVIII.

conceptions are for everybody.[10] Moreover, he says that political conceptions do not follow any comprehensive doctrine.[11] Thus the main question for Rawlsian philosophy is "how is it possible that deeply opposed though reasonable comprehensive doctrines may live together and all affirm the political conception of a constitutional regime? What is the structure and content of a political conception that can gain the support of such an overlapping consensus?"[12]

In this sense, Rawls points to the need for a "political" conception. He sees public reason as one of the main pillars of political liberalism. Rawls claims, "Public reason is best guided by a political conception of principles and values of which all citizens can endorse."[13] He equates public reason with civic friendship and the principle of reciprocity.[14] Thus a democratic constitutional regime - namely a political liberalism in Rawlsian thought - is possible only if exclusionary, comprehensive doctrines have no political power. This resembles Bhargava's political secularism. Rawlsian political philosophy requirea removing comprehensive doctrines from political power and demands the creation of an atmosphere in which all citizens of different ethnic, religious, and ideological backgrounds can co-exist as equal members in a just and free society.

The Rawlsian "political" conception strongly influenced Iranian reformist, religious intellectuals in the second part of the 2000s. As mentioned, this thesis focuses on the writings of three prominent figures of reformist, religious intellectualism. Among them, Akbar Ganji is most influenced by Rawlsian thought and constantly referred to Rawlsian political liberalism after he went into exile in 2005. In this thesis, I also claim that through Akbar Ganji's intellectual influence, Soroush and Kadivar follow his path and begin supporting the political conception of secularism in the second part of the 2000s. In Ganji's discourse, it is apparent that any kind of religious or comprehensive doctrine should be separate from state and political power.

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10 Ibid, p. XIX.

11 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 13.

12 Ibid, p. XVII.

13 Ibid, p. 10.

14 Ibid, p. XLIX.

Before going into the individual discussion of the reformist, religious intellectuals discussed in this thesis, I argue that Iranian reformist, religious intellectuals, by increasingly holding a political conception of secularism and trying to disseminate it in society, have made Iran an important contributor to the democratic and/or political conception of secularism in the literature.

## § 1.1 Akbar Ganji

Akbar Ganji is one of the three religious reformist intellectuals that this thesis focuses on. Although Akbar Ganji, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Mohsen Kadivar have much of their discourse in common - such as rejection of post-revolutionary Iranian political structure, demand for human rights, support for a modern rights-based legal system instead of duty-based traditional jurisprudential structures, they also have their differences. For example, Akbar Ganji more explicitly argues for secular democracy in the 2000s than Soroush and Kadivar. As opposed to these intellectuals, Ganji urges that it is insufficient to argue for separation of state and religion; politics and religion should be separated on the basis of secular reasoning. His experiences with the regime between 2000 and 2006 were important to the changes in his discourse from religious reformism to secular democracy, since he was sent to Evin prison on the charge of insulting Islam and the Islamic regime. After he was released from prison in 2006, he went into exile and met Western philosophical actors and encountered their discussions including that of John Rawls. Rawlsian political philosophy defines "political" as a principle that can hold the unity in the society, which Akbar Ganji perceived and defended in the second part of the 2000s. Since then, Akbar Ganji constantly refers to John Rawls and urges his solution in the Iranian context. He defines secular democracy with the Rawlsian "political" conception and argues that no comprehensive doctrine should be incorporated into the political structure. His demand for secular democracy corresponds to the Rawlsian political conception. Abolition of the *Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih* (Absolute Guardianship of the Jurist), separation of state and religion, and the arrangement of democratic, constitutional political institutions without insertion of comprehensive doctrine are among his demands. Ganji has thus become one, sig-

nificant intellectual in Iran that reappraises secularism as a political principle to provide for social harmony and unity among differences, as well as socio-political freedom.

Among these three intellectuals, Akbar Ganji represents the most secularist approach. However, especially during the Green Movement, his ideas were influential because Rawlsian thought became popular; Soroush and Kadivar were both influenced by him. During the upheaval in 2009, Ganji together with Soroush and Kadivar prepared a manifesto in which they referred to no religious symbols or discourses. It was a declaration of secular, democratic demands for free and fair elections, the abolishment of vetting processes of the Guardians Council, release of political prisoners, free means of mass communication, the right to protest, the independence of universities, prosecutions for those who participated in torture, the independence of the judiciary, and election of all officials in the state etc.[15] These secular demands were expressed in a secular language, which might surprise who know these demands were voiced by reformist, religious intellectuals. Changes in religious reformism cannot be understood in Iran without understanding the changing positions towards secular democracy.

## § 1.2 Abdolkarim Soroush

Abdolkarim Soroush is a leading figure of religious reformism in Iran. He is even described as the founding father of religious reformism. Soroush also represents a break from the intellectual discourses and trends of the 1970s. His anti-ideological, anti anti-Western stance; his rejection of essentialism; his defense of democracy, civil society, and human rights, dialogue with the Western world signify a departure from pre-revolutionary Iranian intellectualism. Intellectuals before the Iranian revolution adopted a strong anti-Western tone in their discourse. If somebody before the revolution used concepts like democracy and secularism, they were labeled as "Westoxicated"

15 "Abdolkarim Soroush: The Goals of Iran's Green Movement," 7 January 2010, http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Global-Viewpoint/2010/0106/Abdolkarim-Soroush-The-goals-of-Iran-s-Green-Movement, (accessed 9 December 2015).

and alien to Iranian culture. Jalal Al-e Ahmad's coinage Westoxication indicates as much.

However, Soroush started to use democracy, modernism, and critical reason as the main mottos of his studies. Among the three intellectuals, what differentiates Soroush is his insistence on critical reason. His strong emphasis on critical reason makes him a follower of Western Enlightenment tradition and scientific thought. However, Soroush's discourse has the most contradictions. For example, although he argues for critical reason, he often refers to Islamic mysticism. It is apparent that mysticism and critical reason exclude one another, but for Soroush it is not an important matter. I believe these intellectuals, are generally in line with critical reason, and the Enlightenment line; however, they reject the dominant form of secular reason that obliterates the place of religion. Instead, they argue for a synthesis in light of critical reason.

The reformist period (1997-2005) allowed Soroush to increase his popularity in the discourse of religious democracy. However, I argue that although Soroush asserted a religious democracy in the 1990s, he was implicitly arguing for secularism through the secularization of religion. As will be shown in the chapter on Abdolkarim Soroush, his arguments for religious democracy depended on critical and secular reason. Yet religious democracy was his cover. This is a contradiction and many reasons can be given for his contradictory statements. I believe the suppressive atmosphere of the 1990s explain his attitude. I call him a "cautious secularist," was afraid of expressing his secularist demands more explicitly in the Iranian context. Soroush is therefore the most contradictory intellectual source among these three intellectuals. Akbar Ganji explicitly argued for secularism even when he was in Evin prison in Iran; On the other hand, Kadivar always argued for Islamic democracy.

In the second part of the 2000s, Soroush increasingly, explicitly started to talk about political secularism. The concept of political secularism frequently emerged in his articles, interviews, and conference talks. He used political secularism to argue that the separation of state and religion is a pre-requisite for a democratic state and society in Iran. To that end, he followed up with some political and intellectual methods. Soroush has always worked to delegitimize the Islamic regime in Iran by referring to Islamic and philosophical

texts. He shaped religious reformism as a political tool to shake the Islamic foundations of the regime. First of all, he struggled for an alternative reading of Islam opposed to the official readings of Islamic texts by the Islamic regime. He argued that a democratic and modern interpretation of Islam could be formed through hermeneutics. Before saying how this can be accomplished, it should be noted that Karl Popper is an important source from whom Soroush benefits. He prefers to Popperian philosophy, which examines "historicity" of things; that is, examines historical events in their context. With reference to his model, Soroush articulated that religion and religious knowledge are different from one another because, for Soroush, historicity is a real phenomenon by which Islam is also affected. He argued that placing Islamic verses in a historical context in a Popperian way solves the tension between modernity and Islam. To him the meaning of religion - the faith and belief in God - is eternal. However, knowledge of religion can be changed through time. For example, the verses that defend the inequality between men and women can be understood in the 6th century, however rights-based system that characterizes the spirit of our age requires equality among citizens. So for Soroush, this can be reformed. His binary approach asserting a division between religion and religious knowledge made reform available through an alternative reading. This is a secularist demand on religion; moreover, it can be argued that this is an attempt to secularize religion. In the 2000s, this kind of soft secularism increased to a level that he voiced concrete demands such as a political secularism concept requiring the abolishment of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih and the fusion of state and religion making way for democracy.

Struggling against the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih is one common, intellectual and political discourse of reformist, religious intellectuals. The Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih is a Shi'a theory of Islamic government, re-invented by Ruhollah Khomeini in the 1960s. Khomeini argued that "it is the duty of the imams and fuqaha to use the government institutions to execute divine law, establish the just Islamic order, and serve mankind."[16] According to the the-

16 Hamid Algar (trans.), (ed.), *Islam and Revolution Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980),* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), p. 66.

ory, God bestowed the prophet of Islam the right to rule on earth as heir of divine will. After he passed away, it was given to Imam Ali. After his death, the mission was accorded to the twelve Imams. The twelfth Imam is accepted as lost, but he will come again as a redeemer. However, in his absence, Islamic *faqih* (expert) will rule the world. Thus, the Velayet-e Faqih system draws a direct line between political power and divine will. The fusion of state and religion is strict in Shi'a political theory. That's why political and intellectual struggle against the Velayet structure is important to study. As will be shown, the reformist, religious intellectuals try to shake the foundations of the system through politico-religious discourse in the 1990s and through political secularism in the second part of the 2000s.

## § 1.3 Mohsen Kadivar

Mohsen Kadivar represents clerical opposition among reformist, religious intellectuals. Because he is a Shi'a Islamic cleric, he initially showed less enthusiasm for secularism as a political principle in his studies coming to it later than Ganji and Soroush. The circumstance that made him argue for political secularism was the 2009 Green Movement; after that, he started to talk about a "moderate secularism" that takes religious views into consideration on the grounds of a separation of state and religion. However, Mohsen Kadivar does not support the separation of politics and religion, since believing that religious symbols and discourse can be used in a religious society, of which he gives Iran as an example. Opposed to Ganji, he does not exclude religion from politics. However, he believes that the political structure of Iran prevents the development of democracy, which is why he argues for the abolishment of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih. Instead, he propose democratic institutions that will reflect the demands of people and can be monitored by the people on the basis of political accountability. Kadivar has always argued for an elected, accountable political structure in Iran. Moreover, to realize a democratic political system, he demands that a rights-based legal system should be established that reflects the spirit of modern times - namely fundamental, basic, and human rights from birth to death. He argues that the traditional perception of proportional rights breeds inequality and injustice

exacerbating differences, for instance between women and men. Instead of these, human rights, which treat everyone as equal before the law, should be adopted. Moreover, to that end, he supports the re-reading of Islamic texts to comply with democracy. In that way, he argues that there are two kinds of Islamic verses; changeable ones and eternal ones. He argues the meaning of religion is eternal and spiritual; it is the perfection of what is human. However, verses are secondary tools for religious ends. That's why some verses are not eternal and can be changed such as verses that legitimate slavery or institute inequality between males and females. Kadivar argues that Islam should be spiritual rather than all encompassing. In that sense, his model secularizes religion by confining religion to the private sphere. Although he argues that he does not support the separation of politics and religion, in fact he works for privatization and de-politicization of Islam by confining it to the private sphere. In that sense, I argue that he secularizes his religion. In the second part of the 2000s, especially after the 2009 Green Movement, he is inclined to moderate secularism much more.

## § 1.4 Literature Survey

At the beginning of working on this thesis, I saw that the literature of post-revolutionary Iranian intellectuals focused on intellectual discourses of the 1990s and the first part of the 2000s. However, after 2005, a change took place; and they started to insist on the importance of a "political" conception of secularism. Thus, I argue that the literature on Iranian intellectuals missed recent changes in their discourses.

The existing literature on Iranian intellectuals focused on pre-revolutionary intellectuals, ideologues of revolution such as Ali Shariati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad.[17] In the 2000s, the number of studies on post-revolutionary intellectuals increased due to discussions of Islamic democracy around the world. However, few studies pointed to writings by Iranian intellectuals after 2005. Most focused on the era in which the reformist Khatami

17 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 8.

was in power which explains why most studies in the literature missed the recent points made by these intellectuals, which show that they have changed their minds about the applicability of secularism in Iran. For example, Arshin Adib-Moghaddam's article, *Islamic Secularism and the Question of Freedom in Iran,* refers to Soroush's and Kadivar's articles and speeches written before 2006. There is only one article by Soroush, written in 2007, that Moghaddam gives as a reference. This thesis makes up for this lack in Iranian studies and focuses on the articles of Iranian intellectuals beyond 2007 till 2015.

Moghaddam defines "religious intellectuals," among whom he includes Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar, as "Islamic secularists" since they put forward a liberal order that would include democracy, freedom of belief and a liberal society. Moghaddam argues that these intellectuals rethink and re-conceptualize Islam as a pluralistic, just, non-doctrinal, non-sectarian, and democratic.[18] Moghaddam asserts that Islam is secularized in these re-conceptualizations.[19] Moreover, he argues that the idea of freedom is crucial for an Islamic secularist agenda. That is why the re-conceptualized, and secularized Islam of the intellectuals goes hand in hand with pluralism, liberty, and democracy in Iran.[20] However, he states that even this secularized Islam views Muslims as superior Islam cannot justify killing, but it nevertheless aims to civilize the others.[21] He argues that even the secularized Islam of Iranian intellectuals does have a hegemonic essence that sets a hierarchy among different faiths.

In this thesis, it is argued that this new concept of Islamic secularism should be called "political secularism," a concept that excludes superiority and/or hegemony in the political sphere. Not all religious intellectuals agree that Muslims are superior to others. Mohsen Kadivar apparently thinks in this way; but Akbar Ganji puts forward a secular, democratic regime that will do away with any kind of exclusionary, superior identity in the political

18 Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, "Islamic Secularism and the Questiodn of Freedom in Iran," *Middle East Critique,* DOI: 10.1080/19436149.2015.1101873, p. 9.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid, p. 1.

21 Ibid, p. 12.

sphere. Abdolkarim Soroush, embodying "cautious secularism," provides contradictory statements about the superiority of Islamic identity. His recent talks point to the concept of political secularism as much as Islamic secularism. It can be argued that the notion of Islamic secularism does not cover the intellectual positions of all religious intellectuals. They do not present a unified argument to allow us to call them Islamic secularists. However, the intellectual search for social harmony and political freedoms in Iran indicate a tendency toward political secularism among post-revolutionary religious, reformist intellectuals.

Mehran Kamrava supports this claim, arguing that secular modernism in Iran grows out of religious reformism.[22] Kamrava argues that reformist, religious intellectuals are religious new thinkers (*no-andishan-e dini*).[23] He claims that although Islamic reformism had a long history in Iran, post-revolutionary reformist, religious intellectuals emerged against a theocratic political structure and official reading of Islamic texts by Islamic clergy.[24] He argues that reformist, religious intellectuals fit in one of two groups. One comprised of academic and philosophy-oriented intellectuals that spend their time on writing and teaching.[25] He puts Soroush and Kadivar into this group. He talks about a second group, the intellectuals of which devote their energy to political activism. He says Said Hajjarian falls within this group and although he does not mention, I believe Akbar Ganji also fits with this second group. As mentioned above, Kamrava argues that what religious reformists argue for may have contradictions and controversial points, but their struggle for democratic Islam or a liberal order paves the way for secular democratic intellectuals in Iran. Their struggle prepares the foundation for more concrete, brave, and non-controversial secularist arguments by secular intellectuals. Rather than defining it as Islamic secularism, as put forward by Arshin-Adib Moghaddam, I call it "political secularism," Islamic

22 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 43.

23 Ibid, p. 122.

24 Ibid, p. 120.

25 Ibid.

secularism establishes a hierarchy among different identities; political secularism does not. This tendency can be seen in the discourses of intellectuals.

Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi argue that a passive secularism is developing in Iran. Ahmet Kuru put forward the concept of passive secularism, and he mentions that the relationship between religion and secularism is not exclusionary as opposed to the exclusionary and aggressive secularism of models like in France, Turkey, and Reza Shah's Iran.[26] Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi further claim that religious texts can be interpreted in a way that makes Islam and democracy compatible.[27] It can give birth to a local style of democratic secularism. Thus, they perceive a complementary relationship between Islam and democratic secularism.[28] Naser Ghobadzadeh, in a 2001 article, calls tendency toward secularism in Iran a "religious secularity". For him, religious secularity is a politico-religious discourse, focused on depriving the so-called "Islamic" state of transcendental claims.[29] In Ghobadzadeh and Rahimi's mind, passive secularism and/or religious secularity complement each other by alluding to institutional separation of religion and state at the state level, but not necessarily in the whole of the political sphere.[30] Ghobadzadeh argues that secularity is point of view that does not want to identify the state with any specific religion or ideology. Rather than the total elimination of religion from the political sphere, it narrowly promotes the institutional neutrality of the state in religious matters.[31] Thus, it does not confine religion to private space.

Political secularism, rather than seeing the state as a neutral actor, perceives the state as a value-free site that may intervene with religious groups

26 Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi, "Islamic Reformation Discourses: Popular Sovereignty and Religious Secularization in Iran, *Democratization,* 19:2, p. 335.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Naser Ghobadzadeh, "Religious Secularity: A Vision for Revisionist Political Islam," *Philosophy Social Criticism,* 2013 39: 1005, p. 1007.

30 Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi, "Islamic Reformation Discourses: Popular Sovereignty and Religious Secularization in Iran, *Democratization,* 19:2, p. 335.

31 Naser Ghobadzadeh, "Religious Secularity: A Vision for Revisionist Political Islam," *Philosophy Social Criticism,* 2013 39: 1005, p. 1007.

and different identities on the grounds that it promotes equality, peace, tolerance, and freedom in and among religious faiths. Yet today, Iranian intellectuals are more prone to argue for a separation of state and religion that requires full neutrality of the state, as Ghobadzadeh and Rahimi put it. The growing demands for secularism in contemporary Iran reflect that passive secularism is more popular in the writings of post-revolutionary religious intellectuals, but this thesis argues for "political secularism," which is a more active form of secularism vis-a-vis Ahmet Kuru's passive secularism.

How does the literature take Iranian intellectuals into consideration? Asef Bayat defines reformist, religious intellectuals as post-Islamists.[32] To him, post-Islamism (religious reformism in post-revolutionary Iran) is a project that emerged after the exhaustion of Iranian political Islam because the Republic could not cope with the country's social, political, and economic problems such as a war with Iraq that resulted in thousands of casualties, war veterans, and declining oil prices and blockades.[33] It was understood that the Islamic economy was just a utopia. A war economy, inflation, recession, state control of the public sphere, a gender apartheid regime,[34] inequality, and expanding fault lines among socio-political and socio-economic classes destroyed social harmony and tired the Iranian people of political Islam. Bayat argues that post-Islamism is an endeavor to fuse human rights with Islam, emphasizing rights rather than duties.[35] Moreover, he argues that the political mission of the post-Islamist project mixes republican ideals and religious ethics with religious democracy. He says it is a recent phenomenon to make Islam compatible with democracy.[36] Bayat also asserts that they represent a break from pre-revolutionary intellectuals who defined freedom as freedom from foreign domination. Ali Shariati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad are two examples of such intellectuals active before 1979. However, for post-Islamist intellectuals, freedom is freedom from despotism and internal mechanisms of

32 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 10.

33 Ibid, p. 11.

34 Ibid, p. 98.

35 Ibid, p. 98.

36 Ibid, p. 50.

suppression.[37] They struggle for the institutionalization of freedom and democracy in Iran rather than criticizing these as alien Western concepts, as pre-revolutionary intellectuals including Shariati did.[38] The goals, tools, and definition of the idea of freedom changed between pre- and post-revolutionary intellectuals. This thesis explains this change.

Bayat explains that one of the most important features of "post-Islamist intellectuals" is their rejection of ideological approaches. Bayat also refers to them as "post-ideological intellectuals," which means they avoid grand, all-encompassing ideological frameworks.[39] Instead, they argued for reason, human rights, liberty, plurality, and science.[40] Bayat further argues that an absence of populist language is a significant mark of their intellectual discourse they do not refer to martyrs, military, war, discipline or bravery.[41] Bayat also posits that they were exposed to prominent Western philosophers including, Kuhn, Popper, Giddens, and Rawls,[42] and this contact between religious, reformists and Western philosophy partially form the intellectual and political vocabulary of religious, reformists in the 1990s. They reject the official interpretations by the Islamic Regime and put forward alternative readings that comply with democracy and republican ideals.[43] Bayat says these post-Islamist intellectuals called for the secularization of religion in the 1990s but did not hold onto secularism itself.[44] However, as it will be seen, political secularism was demanded by prominent figures among religious intellectuals in the second part of the 2000s so Bayat's observation about secularization was upturned in the second part of the 2000s. Although they were trying to secularize Islam in the 1990s, they put forward secularism as a political principle in the 2000s. Thus, their attempts at secularization were

37 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 87

38 Ibid, p. 87.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid, p. 86.

41 Ibid, p. 87.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid, p. 88.

44 Ibid, p. 95.

combined with arguments for political secularism in the second part of the 2000s.

Mehran Kamrava is one significant contributor to the literature on Iranian intellectuals. Kamrava quotes from Ramin Jahanbegloo, who argues that there are four generations of intellectuals in Iran. The first emerged during the Constitutional Revolution from 1905 to 1907, the second one from the 1920s to the 1950s; the third one from the 1960s to the 1970s. The present is the fourth generation of Iranian intellectuals.[45] Jahanbegloo determined these periods according to socio-political events in Iran. For example, he claimed that the first generation of intellectuals emerged prior to Constitutional Revolution and was effective till the Pahlavi dynasty.[46] The second generation started with Pahlavi's dynasty in the 1920s and lasted until the 1950s. Jahanbegloo asserts that the second group sometimes complemented the Pahlavi dynasty's top down attempts at modernization.[47] He argues that the influence of third generation of intellectuals started in the 1960s and the 1970s, though Kamrava argues that these were more ideologues than intellectuals.[48] Their first goal was to overthrow the shah's and his Western allies, and they launched a revolutionary, ideological campaign to that end. Kamrava, this time with reference to Musa Ghaninezhad, argues that this third generation of intellectuals was theoretically uninformed and was uninterested in scientific reasoning.[49] Ali Shariati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad were two ideologues of this generation who saw Western values such as democracy, liberty, and secularism as alien, Western concepts. Whoever argued for those concepts in Iran was labeled as Westoxicated. The third generation was ideologically rigid and full of enmity towards imperialism and the Western world. This opposition marked their discourse and their idea of freedom. This was also labeled as a third-world intellectual position.

45 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 46.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid, p. 52.

49 Ibid, p. 54.

However, Kamrava argues that the current, namely the fourth generation of intellectuals is different from their predecessors. According to Jahanbegloo, this group emerged after the 1979 revolution. Rather than negating it ideologically, this generation - which also includes religious intellectuals - establishes a dialogue with the values, ideas, and philosophy of the Western world.[50] In this respect, Kamrava defines the current generation of intellectuals as "deconstructionist," since they deconstruct grand, ideological approaches, and the given enmity against Western concepts. Instead they generate discourses of pluralism, modernism, and secularism.[51] Moreover, Kamrava explains that reformist, religious intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohsen Kadivar, and Shabestari present an alternative interpretation of religion opposed to the official reading.[52] Kamrava argues that they believe in the importance of critical reason but reject the absoluteness of critical reason.[53] In this thesis, this statement is taken to have emerged from an alternative conception of secularism. It can be read as a criticism of aggressive, militant secularism that makes on ideology of secular reason to the exclusion of other worldviews. They argue for an alternative conception of secularism that is non-exclusionary. In relation to that alternative, Kamrava believes that hermeneutics have become the tool for constructing their intellectual discourses.[54] One other tenet of religious intellectuals of the fourth generation is of course their attempt to de-ideologize religion and society.[55]

Ali Mirsepassi is one of the most important contributors to the literature on Iranian intellectuals. Mirsepassi informs readers that the underpinnings of the reactionary position of pre-revolutionary intellectualism in Iran was reactionary, German modernism and its prominent representative, Martin

50 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 60.

51 Ibid, p. 62.

52 Ibid, p. 124.

53 Ibid, p. 128.

54 Ibid, p. 144.

55 Ibid, p. 198.

Heidegger.[56] Mirsepassi explains that Heidegger's anti-modernist critiques were critiques of secular reason and the institutions and principles of the Enlightenment.[57] In his known work *Being and Time*, Heidegger argued that Western people were alienated from their own roots and lived inauthentically.[58] There should be a return to the roots. These kinds of reactionary discourses bolstered the creation of National Socialism and fascist politics in Germany. Mirsepassi explains that this thinking heavily influenced Iranian intellectualism in third-world atmosphere of the 1960s and the 1970s, in which the Western world and its values were seen as signs of colonialism. Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati defended to return to roots, and cultural authenticity in the Iranian context. "Being" was translated as "roots," and inauthenticity and rootlessness as Westoxication in Iran.

However, this debate took a new turn after the revolution in 1979. Mirsepassi declares that Soroush is the most prominent figure of post-revolutionary intellectual life in Iran.[59] He examines religious, reformist intellectuals, compares them to Soroush, and finds strong inconsistencies in Soroush's writings.[60] Although Soroush supports human rights and democracy, he still believes in a political Islam that contradicts his liberal thinking. Moreover, Mirsepassi says Soroush is too vague to offer a concrete model for actualizing democratic ideals. Rather than offering general principles of democracy, Soroush should give concrete explanations about what democracy is and how to realize it.[61] Thus, Ali Mirsepassi summarizes the three features of post revolutionary intellectualism as a strong insistence on Platonic philosophy, disregard for sociological facts, and a lack of vision for the future.[62] To Mirsepassi, they follow Platonic thought (binary thinking such as good-

56 Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 90.

57 Ibid, p. 86.

58 Ibid, p. 92.

59 Ali Mirsepassi, *Democracy in Modern Iran Islam, Culture, And Political Islam,* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), p. 87.

60 Ibid, p. 89.

61 Ibid, p. 89.

62 Ibid, p. 96-97.

bad, appearance-essence, etc.), which is evident in their discourse; their cultural criticism generates binary oppositions like tradition and modernity or religion and atheism.[63] Moreover, their lack of sociological training makes them blind to sociological facts and readings of society. Lastly, Mirsepassi argues that they lack a vision for the future, with reference to Soroush's ideal of a democratic religious state.[64] Mirsepassi explains that there can be no model that fuses democracy with a religious state, which is why he sees them as lacking a concrete vision. My contribution to this literature here will be a study of more recent writings by these intellectuals. In these writings, these intellectuals have gradually changed their positions. Soroush, for example, renounced the concept of a democratic religious state and argue for a political secularism that requires the separation of state and religion.

One other scholar studying Iranian intellectuals is Farhad Khosrokhavar. He argues that since the 1990s there are three strong social movements that struggle for democratization in Iran. These are intellectual, student, and women's movements.[65] He posits that intellectual movement in Iran has taken two routes: one secular and the other one religious.[66] Some religious intellectuals try to separate politics from religion, and he calls them post-Islamist intellectuals.[67] He gives Akbar Ganji and Abdolkarim Soroush as examples from this group of intellectuals.[68] He believes that the intellectual aims of this group are secularization of religion and autonomy of political activity.[69] Khosrokhavar claims that the main concern for post-Islamist intellectuals is not Western imperialism, as was the case for predecessors like Ali Shariati, but criticism of non-democratic cultural behaviors and traditions in Iranian

63 Ali Mirsepassi, *Democracy in Modern Iran Islam, Culture, And Political Islam,* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), p. 96.

64 Ibid, p. 97.

65 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Toward an Anthropology of Democratization in Iran," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* 9:16, p. 13.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid, p. 13.

society.[70] In that sense, Khosrokhavar posits that the object of criticism by post-Islamist intellectuals is society and its lack of freedoms, not foreign powers.[71] He observes a deconstructionist attitude in religious, reformist intellectuals, since while revolutionary intellectuals believed in absolute truth and behaved ideologically, post-Islamists question and criticize grand truth.[72] For him, Iranian reformist intellectuals represent a break with past intellectual trends of Marxism and third world intellectualism.[73] According to Khosrokhavar, religious intellectuals of the post-revolutionary era contributed to the secularization of religion by questioning the legitimacy of claims made by Islamic clergy.[74] Thus, they show that the religious regime was only one option among many others in the society. This model cannot claim superiority over the others.[75] The interesting point in Khosrokhavar's arguments as opposed to Ghobadzadeh's claims is the observation that these intellectuals demanded separation not only of state and religion, but also of politics and religion. This present thesis agrees that religious intellectuals favor the separation of politics and religion. Although they sometimes have contradictions within their own arguments, their overall desire is for separation of religion and politics. That is why I call them "cautious" secularists.

Mahmoud Alinejad is another scholar who has studied Iranian intellectuals. He argues that the new, religious intellectuals of the 1990s initially supported the emancipatory, egalitarian aspirations of the Islamic revolution.[76] Moreover, Alinejad argues that one of the main tenets of religious intellectuals is constitutionalism even though the Iranian constitution was based on sharia law, they believed it made the nation responsible for its own destiny

70 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Toward an Anthropology of Democratization in Iran," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* 9:16, p.17.

71 Ibid, p. 17.

72 Ibid, p. 18.

73 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "The New Intellectuals in Iran," *Social Compass*, 51:191, p. 200.

74 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "The Islamic Revolution in Iran: Retrospect after a Quarter of a Century," *Thesis Eleven*, 76:70, p. 79.

75 Ibid.

76 Mahmoud Alinejad, "Coming to Terms with Modernity: Iranian Intellectuals and the Emerging Public Sphere," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,* 13:1, p. 33.

and should thus guarantee the popular will of the nation.[77] To Alinejad, religious, reformist intellectuals are reviving the republican virtues of the Islamic revolution of 1979.[78] Alternative interpretations of Islamic texts have become a tool for religious intellectuals to find political pluralism in Islamic sources, with which they argue against the political and interpretative monopoly of the Islamic regime.[79] He also claims that the domination of religious politics in post-revolutionary Iran led to critical engagement of Iranian intellectuals with the country's Islamic traditions.[80] They proposed a democratic model of government as an alternative to autocracy.[81] Thus, for Alinejad, religious intellectuals balance Iranian cultural traditions and the modern world by criticizing internal structures and power mechanisms, including the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih.[82] Thus, they form a religious discourse that complies with the modern concept of human dignity free of cultural codes. Moreover, politically, this discourse opens up the public sphere for democratic movements.[83] Thus, Alinejad claims that religious intellectualism has become a strong politico-religious critique in Iran.[84] In this thesis, it will be observed that although religious intellectuals vary in their politico-religious discourse and instruments, they have one point in common: the rejection of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih.

## § 1.5 Methodological Concerns

In this study, I use primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are books, articles, interviews, lecture and seminar videos, and statements by Abdolkarim Soroush, Akbar Ganji, and Mohsen Kadivar. The secondary

77 Mahmoud Alinejad, "Coming to Terms with Modernity: Iranian Intellectuals and the Emerging Public Sphere," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,* 13:1, p. 34.

78 Ibid, p. 35.

79 Ibid, p. 38.

80 Ibid, p. 41.

81 Ibid, p. 40.

82 Ibid, p. 40.

83 Ibid, p. 44.

84 Ibid, p. 45.

sources are theoretical sources and articles and books written about these particular intellectuals. The primary sources are English translations of these intellectuals' writings and interviews. Since I am not able to read Farsi, there might be discrepancies between the original and translations. However, I had access to a great number of works in English, and these provided me a plenty of materials to work with. Most of these primary sources are available on the personal websites of these intellectuals. While Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar have a detailed and well-structured websites, Akbar Ganji does not have. Ganji's books in English, his articles, videos of university lectures and seminars, interviews for American television and articles in the *Huffington Post* provided me with ample material. There are also some French sources that examine secularism and intellectuals of Iran, as well as some interviews in French.

## § 1.6 The Structure of the Chapters

In the first chapter, I give my theoretical point of view, explaining secularism and relevant concepts with reference to discussions in the discourse of secularism. First, the differences among the concepts of secular, secularism, and secularization are discussed. Then, main discussions in the literature on secularization are explained with reference to debates between European and United States secularisms. Then, debates in the literature of Indian secularism and particularly Indian academician Rajeev Bhargava's political secularism are discussed. At the end of the first chapter, the political conception of John Rawls is discussed and the relation between political secularism and Iranian intellectuals is recalled.

In the second chapter, biographical information about Abdolkarim Soroush is followed by a discussion of his intellectual and political discourses including a re-thinking of his discourse on the basis of a political conception of secularism.

In the third chapter, a discussion of Akbar Ganji's changing discourse of reformism, civil disobedience, and his secular democracy follow his biographical information.

In the last chapter, Mohsen Kadivar's differences from these intellectuals are discussed with reference to his writings. His religious criticism approach of Islamic regime is analyzed.

# 2

## Political Conception of Secularism

The sociological field of secularism is controversial and has a rich literature. Existing debates focus on relationships among the state and religion, religion and the individual, and religion and the society. A clarification of the terms secular, secularization, and secularism is needed to better understand the increasingly secularist demands of Iranian intellectuals in the second part of the 2000s. Later, differences between political and ethical secularism will be discussed, and the notion of secularism as a political principle will be articulated to shed light on the discursive and political positions of Iranian intellectuals. With regard to "political," reference will be made to the works of American philosopher John Rawls, Indian academic Rajeev Bhargava, French academic Jean Bauberot, and German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. As a matter of fact, while defining political secularism, the differences between mainstream and alternative secularism models will be discussed.

First of all, it should be asked why considering secularism is so important in today, especially in the countries whose governments are shaped in the name of divine rules. In these countries, the domination of the state by one comprehensive, religious doctrine interferes into citizens' lives, and limiting them or putting pressure on different group of citizens. The arrangement of governmental institutions and social life according to one comprehensive doctrine results in exclusion of all kinds of differences and destruction of the public sphere. Here, it is argued that, rather than radical and aggressive secu-

larism of France, of Mustafa Kemal's Turkey and of shah's Iran till 1979, an alternative conception of secularism suitable to present day conditions should be re-thought for the arrangement of political power.

## § 2.1 Concepts: Secular, Secularization and Secularism

The differences among the definitions of secular, secularism, and secularization should be clarified for theoretical accuracy.[1] The term secular emerged as a result of the differentiation in the religious order of Christian Church in middle Ages. The differentiation was between mundane and sacred, thus the secular was used to underline the mundane concerns. It was used for priests who were serving society in the large parts of the countries rather than following the religious order at the center.[2] Moreover, the term was originally attributed to the clergy who were not limited by a monastic or religious order, whereas it meant "this worldliness" in Middle English defined against the sacred.[3] In that sense, the term secular originally meant this-worldly affairs against the sacred affairs of the Church. However, today secular means a lot more. The term secular denotes a modern epistemic category that has "theological-philosophical, legal-political, and cultural-anthropological (…) grasp, and experience a realm or reality differentiated from the "religious.""[4] In that sense, when somebody uses the term of secular, it should be understood as an episteme, a knowledge system whose ground is totally different from religious perception.

On the other hand, the term secularization addresses the process of that transformation and differentiation of the religious institutions from secular

1 Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, introduction to *Rethinking Secularism,* ed. by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 5.

2 Frank J. Lechner, "Secularization," http://sociology.emory.edu/home/documents/profiles-documents/Lechner-Secularization.pdf, (accessed 22 March 2016), p. 1.

3 Nikkie Keddie, "Secularism &Its Discontents," *Daedalus,* Vol: 132, No:3, p. 14.

4 Jose Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms," in *Rethinking Secularism* ed. by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 54.

institutions, like government, economy, art, science, philosophy etc.[5] Elsewhere, secularization is defined as the process in which religion loses its socio-cultural significance.[6] Craig Calhoun describes secularization as "a trend towards a world in which religion matters less and secular reason and institutions matter more."[7] Steve Bruce and Roy Walls define secularization as the process in which specialized institutions developed to deal with the social and individual issues are created. Once, social and individual issues were in the hands of only religious institutions, but now these functions passed to specialized institutions that provide health, education, welfare etc. separately.[8] Charles Taylor also accepts this institutional differentiation process and adds that secularization is a process in which basic functions and institutions of the Church were passed to the laymen.[9] Thus, the institutional separation thesis is a very strong pillar of secularization phenomenon.

Apart from that, Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce also add that secularization process results in a change on how people think and act.[10] In a similar way, Charles Taylor argues that secularization brought about the understanding that belief in a god, religion or any kind of transcendental concepts has be-

5 Jose Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms," in *Rethinking Secularism* ed. by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 54.

6 Frank J. Lechner, "Secularization," http://sociology.emory.edu/home/documents/profiles-documents/Lechner-Secularization.pdf, (accessed 22 March 2016), p. 1.

7 Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, introduction to *Rethinking Secularism* ed. by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 10.

8 Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, "Secularization: The Orthodox Model," in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis,* (ed.) Steve Bruce, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 12.

9 Charles Taylor, "Foreword What is Secularism," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* (eds.) Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. XVIII.

10 Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, "Secularization: The Orthodox Model," in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis,* (ed.) Steve Bruce, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 13.

come an option among many.[11] In that sense, he argues that although religion had the monopoly in social life, in modern times it has become optional among many choices. Overall, secularization can be interpreted as an institutional differentiation and decreasing power and scope of religion in social life.

## § 2.2 A Controversial Concept: Secularization

Those who research in the field of secularization are divided into two camps. On one side are those who argue that in modern times, the significance of religion as increased; on the other side, are those who assert the classical theory that claims an increasingly secular world diminishes the role of religion.[12] However, though they do not agree with each other on crucial points, they both accept that institutional differentiation is a real phenomenon observed through modern times.[13]

Philip Gorski summarizes four approaches by classical secularization theorists: "disappearance, decline, privatization and transformation of religion in modern times."[14] Ones who argue for the increasing significance of religion point to the United States as example to show increasing numbers of churches and participation by church members, which they maintain disprove the claims of classical secularization theorists. The argument of this group is called "the religious economy model."

In light of the first amendment of its constitution, which states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," the United States followed a non-establishment policy, choosing not to interfere with the religious affairs of

11 Charles Taylor, "Western Secularity," in *Rethinking Secularism* ed. by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 50.

12 Philip Gorski, "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: Church, State, and Society in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ca. 1300 to 1700," *American Sociological Review,* vol. 65, no. 1, p. 138.

13 Ibid, p. 140.

14 Ibid.

churches.[15] Proponents of the religious economy model argue that this deregulation started a chain of reaction consisting of pluralism of churches, competition among them, aggressive recruitment, demand for religious products, and thus greater participation.[16] Finke and Stark assert in their studies that religious adherence in the United States increased between 1776 and 1990 from 17% to 60%, disproving the decline of religioun argued by classical secularization theorists.[17] However, Jose Casanova in his study comparing the United States and European states from the perspective of secularism argues that proponents of the religious economy model rely on questionnaires carried out with United States citizens. He says that the outcomes of these questionnaires are deceptive because average American citizens exaggerate his own religiousness in interviews, while citizens of European states do the opposite. For Casanova, this is a real conundrum: Why do Americans show off their religiosity, while Europeans promote agnosticism and atheism?[18] The place and role of religion in modern times is a controversial topic for these two groups of academics.

However, in recent years, a third approach to secularization and the place of religion in the modern world emerged. David Yamane calls it the neosecularism paradigm, which underscores the vitality of religion in modern times.[19] It claims that religion did not decline in modern times, rather its scope and influence decreased at the societal level.[20] Yamane addresses prominent sociologists like Luckmann, Parsons, Wilson, Bellah, and Berger who focus on the transformation of the religion in modern society rather

15 Alfred Stepan, "The Multiple Secularisms of Modern Democratic and Non-Democratic Regimes," in *Rethinking Secularism* ed. by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 118.

16 David Yamane, "Secularization on Trial: In Defense of a Neosecularization Paradigm," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 36, no. 1, p. 111

17 Ibid.

18 Jose Casanova, "Immigration and the New Religious Pluralism: A European/United States Comparison" in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* ed. by Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 150.

19 David Yamane, "Secularization on Trial: In Defense of a Neosecularization Paradigm," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 36, no. 1, p. 109.

20 Ibid.

than its decline.[21] They argue that whether one takes United States or recent religious fundamentalism as an example, modern societies live under a secularized system in which people's acts are determined by their own choices and religious views have become one voice among many.[22] This is much like Charles Taylor's secularization thesis, and I take Charles Taylor as an important representative of this neo-secularization paradigm.

Why did a new paradigm emerge and people abandoned the arguments of classical secularization theories? What ideas changed the role and place of religion in modern world? Why do researchers and philosophers need a concept like post- or neo-secularism? The reason is found in the writings of Jurgen Habermas. In his article on questions of "post-secularism," he argues that in recent years religious thinking and communities started to take an undeniably significant role in the political arena. He argues that the world witnessed religious fundamentalism not only in Middle East, but also in Africa, on the Indian subcontinent, and in Southeast Asia. He posits that the focus of religious thought and communities on political ends has increased to an important extent in the world.[23] Indian academic Rajeev Bhargava says that Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka, Hindu nationalism in India, religious orthodoxy in Israel, Sikh nationalism, Islamic movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Ethiopia, Chad, and Senegal, the issue of headscarves in France "all reflect a deep crisis of secularism."[24] He also points out that the establishment of the first theocratic state in 1979 by the Islamic clergy of Iran shook modern secularism.[25] Moreover, Bhargava adds that today's Europe is faced with unprecedented diversity

21 David Yamane, "Secularization on Trial: In Defense of a Neosecularization Paradigm," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 36, no. 1, p. 110.

22 Ibid, p. 119.

23 Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," https://www.sandiego.edu/pdf/pdf_library/habermaslecture031105_c939cceb2ab087bdfc6df291ecofc3fa.pdf, (accessed 22 March 2016), p. 2.

24 Rajeev Bhargava, "Political Secularism: Why It is Needed and What Can be Learnt from Its Indian Version," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* ed. by Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 82.

25 Rajeev Bhargava, "*What is Political Theory and Why Do We Need It?*" (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 81.

with the flow of refugees and immigrants from Middle East, South-East Asia, and Africa.[26] The failure of European states to cope with the refugee crisis and immigrants points to a failure of secularism to cope with new comers who bring their religious faiths and lifestyles with them. The 2015 and 2016 attacks in Paris, the Danish cartoon affair, the growth of fundamentalist networks and attacks by ISIS and fundamentalist organizations in European cities illustrate the unease of the Muslim population with their host Western societies. This creates a sociological problem for European states about how to deal with diversity. Paradigms such as "post-secularism" and "neo-secularism" emerge along with claims that religion or religious identities are not declining in modern times.

Before going into a detiled description of secularism, some information should be given about French *laïcité* because Reza Shah's attempts to modernization Iran and Mustafa Kemal's notion of laïcité in Turkey in the 1920s and the 1930s were deeply influenced by the French laïcité model. In that sense, French laïcité is a strong model in both the academic literature and political history. Bhargava defines French laïcité as the "one-sided exclusion" of religion from the state, which means the state, can control and intervene to religion, but religion could not do the same.[27] French laïcité influenced modernization attempts in Iran and Turkey in the same way. Ramin Jahanbegloo explains that…

> … secularism has become part of an ideological process of de-sacralization of the world and de-emphasis of spirituality in public life; culminating in a modernist dream of a universal techno-scientific civilization… this modernist dream has taken the shape of an autocratic secularization from above.[28]

He gives Kemalist secularization and Reza Shah's reforms in Iran as examples of laïcite in Middle East. He argues that the modernist reforms in both

26 Rajeev Bhargava, "How Secular is European Secularism," *European Societies,* 16:3, p. 329.

27 Ibid, p. 331.

28 Ramin Jahanbegloo, "Two Concepts of Secularism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia,* vol. 31, no. 1, p. 14.

countries were deeply influenced by the monolithic and exclusionary practices of the French laïcité.[29]

## § 2.3 Rethinking *Laïcité*

Bauberot explains the history of the concept of laïcité with reference to its first theoretician in the 1870s, namely Ferdinand Buisson.[30] Bauberot explains that the main pillar in Buisson's laïcité concept is its history: the laicization process. Before the laicization process, all the power belonged to only one authority: religion. However, through the centuries-long process of laicization, Buisson wrote that some functions of the public life were differentiated and emancipated from the custody of the Church.[31] Anti-clericalism became one pillar of French laïcité. On the other hand, by emphasizing the historical process of laïcite, he posits that there is little difference between secularism and laïcité since the process that defines both is institutional differentiation. He claims laïcité is the institutional dimension of secularism in isolation.[32] What defines French laïcité becomes its anti-clerical and anti-religious tone, because historically it wanted to emancipate society from the authority of church. The anti-clerical tone of French secularism - understood as the exclusion of religion from both public and political spheres- thus influenced both Mustafa Kemal and Reza Shah. In this respect, it created pressure and tension among members of society. As an emancipator, laïcité became a pressure mechanism in Iran and Turkey. It resulted in top-down political mechanisms in the hands of elites, but did not provide a place for political participation of the masses. The emancipatory meaning of laïcité did not resonate in Iran and Turkey. Although it emerged as an emancipatory force that demanded the participation of the people in the socio-

29 Ramin Jahanbegloo, "Two Concepts of Secularism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia,* vol. 31, no. 1, p. 14.

30 Jean Bauberot, *Laiklik Tutku ile Akıl Arasında,* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009), p. 6.

31 Ibid, p. 8.

32 Ibid, p. 47.

political scene of France, it became a tool to exclude the people from socio-political sphere and thus ignored the will of the people to participate.

French academic Jean Bauberot re-defines laïcité from a new, different perspective. He argues that laïcite is not a French exception; it is the outcome of a socio-historical laicization process. He claims that laicization allows for the realization of human rights, and specifically freedom, equality, and fraternity. For Bauberot, laicization and laïcité are not only about the separation of the state and religion, or freedom of conscience, it is a continual process of emancipation and criticism of authority.[33] He says laïcité could only be understood together with laicization process. If the process of emancipation and criticism stop, laïcité can become like the authority of church. Bauberot quotes from a manifesto, which was produced in 2005 at a conference on laïcité, with the participation of 250 intellectuals from 30 countries. It argues that laicization emerges when the government, and the state are not formed or legitimized by a specific religion, identity, or idea. All citizens of the state can therefore appeal to their sovereignty in an equal and peaceful way.[34] Moreover, the manifesto argues that in every society, intending to harmonize the social relations among interests and doctrines of belonging to different moral and religious groups and individuals, laïcité emerges as a need. Laïcité does not belong to just one culture, one nation, or one continent: it can emerge differently in different contexts.[35]

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33 Jean Bauberot, *Laiklik Tutku ile Akıl Arasında,* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009), p. 236.

34 Jean Bauberot, *Les Laïcités Dans Le Monde,* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009), p. 3. The manifesto in French is as follows "Un processus de laïcisation émerge quand l'État ne se trouve plus légitimé par une religion ou une famille de pensée particulière et quand l'ensemble des citoyens peuvent délibérer pacifiquement, en égalité de droits et de dignité, pour exercer leur souveraineté dans l'exercice du pouvoir politique. (...) Des éléments de laïcité apparaissent donc nécessairement dans toute société qui veut harmoniser des rapports sociaux marqués par des intérêts et des conceptions morales ou religieuses plurielles. » La Déclaration ajoute : « La laïcité n'est l'apanage d'aucune culture, d'aucune nation, d'aucun continent. Elle peut exister dans des conjonctures où le terme n'a pas été traditionnellement utilisé."

35 Jean Bauberot, *Les Laïcités Dans Le Monde,* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009), p. 3.

In Bauberot's words, a different perception of laïcité emerges, unlike the militant and aggressive form other researchers perceive, which leaves religion outside of the public sphere. In the literature, French laïcité is presented as an aggressive, hostile form of secularism. Alfred Stepan argues that French laïcité was launched in 1905 to free the state from religion and clerics. The United States model, on the other hand, is seen as more friendly, which adopts a non-establishment and non-interference approach towards religious faith groups and their churches.[36] Why did Bauberot ask for a rethinking of the laïcité concept? Why did all 250 intellectuals in 2005 define laïcité so differently and less agressively?

There are several reasons. First of all, Jean Bauberot and the other intellectuals tried to redefine laïcité in an egalitarian, emancipatory, and progressive way that can contain all members of the society in a peaceful and just model. The warning of Jean Bauberot should be heeded: laicization will turn into its converse, if it stops criticizing and searching for human rights. In that sense, Bauberot's interpretation of laïcité - rather than being prohibitive and aggressive - is in line with political and socio-cultural freedom. His studies are significant for both the academic literature and socio-political life of various nations. With a re-appraisal of secularism on the basis of freedoms and basic rights, the chance of increasing of democratic politics is likely.

## § 2.4 The Relation between Secularism and Democracy

Is secularism a requirement for democracy? There are two possible answers in the literature. First, there are those who say no, led by American academic Alfred Stepan. He argues that democracy does not require secularism at all. He addresses the known works of Robert Dahl, Arend Lijphart, and Juan L. Linz on democracy. Stepan says none of these researchers and academics

36 Alfred Stepan, "The Multiple Secularisms of Modern Democratic and Non-Democratic Regimes," in *Rethinking Secularism* ed. by by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 118.

takes secularism as a prerequisite for democracy in their wide-ranging democracy studies.[37]

Stepan claims that although many contemporary democratic countries experience a secularization process, it would be a mistake to regard secularism as a normative concept for democracy.[38] Instead of a single model of secularism, he argues that there are multiple secularism models in different contexts that variously deal with the problem along the state-religion-society axis. He claims that instead of secularism, "twin tolerations" should be used in the formation of state-society-religion relations. This requires that democratic institutions should be separate from religious institutions, and citizens should live their religious faiths freely.[39] This is "twin toleration." It is not a model, but a value for solving the tension between state and religion. For Stepan, there is no need for complete separation of state and religion for social peace.[40] He examines four models in his study. Separatism in France, the established-religion model in Norway and Denmark, the positive accommodation model in Germany; respect all, positive corporation and principled distance models in India are successful examples.[41] He says the presence of religion in the public sphere and at state level in these models proves that secularism is not a requirement for democracy. Although these models accommodate, or accept, one or many religions at their state level, the states are democratic states in terms of democracy index scales.

## § 2.5 Arguments of Indian Anti-Secularists

Alfred Stepan is not alone in his thesis. Indian academics and researchers such as T. N. Madan, and Ashis Nandy argue the same for India, as well. Nandy argues that secularism is an ethno-phobic and ethnocidal concept

37 Alfred Stepan, "The Multiple Secularisms of Modern Democratic and Non-Democratic Regimes," in *Rethinking Secularism* ed. by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 115.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid, p.114.

40 Ibid, p. 117.

41 Ibid, p. 114.

that destroys local cultures when a country adopts it.[42] He advocates that rather than embracing secularism as a principle, the older notion of religious toleration in India should be supported, since it is a concept shaped by Indian history and society.[43] He argues that Indian religious tolerance allows for the co-existence of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Buddists.[44] He also sees both secularism and modernism as conflict-generating concept, resulting in anger and hatred among believers. He says that religious fundamentalism is a consequence of the impotence and feelings of having been disrespected by believers in a secularized world.[45] Nandy adds that secularism is a "state-linked internal colonialism in India" used by Indian elites to protect their power.[46] In that sense, his ideas are much like Alfred Stepan's multiple secularism models that explain Indian model in that context.

T. N. Madan's views about Indian secularism are similar. He believes that secularism in South Asia - specifically in India - is impossible under current conditions because most people in South Asia are followers of a religious faith; it is hard to find a secular tradition among South Asian people. Indeed they resist secular thinking and life.[47] He also argues that secularism is a product of Christianity and Western tradition.[48] He also sees secularism as an arrogant idea that excludes religious faiths of South Asian people.[49] Instead of an alien, Western concept of secularism, he defends the religious pluralism model of Indian history.[50] Indian academic Partha Chatterjee simi-

42 Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Toleration," in *Secularism and Its Critics* (ed.) Rajeev Bhargava, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 324.

43 Ibid, p. 338.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid, p. 342

47 T.N. Madan, "Secularism in Its Place," in *Secularism and Its Critics* ed. by Rajeev Bhargava, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 306.

48 Ibid, p. 308.

49 Ibid, p. 299.

50 T.N. Madan, "Indian Secularism: A Religio-Secular Ideal," in *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age* ed. by Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.192.

larly suggests that the idea of colonial Western modernity is alien and argues instead, that autonomy and tolerance should be accepted as principles in socio-political life.[51] To wrap up, these opponents of Indian secularism opposed to secularism for understandable reasons. Although secularism in India did not follow a top-down and authoritarian path as secularism did in Mustafa Kemal's Turkey and Reza Shah's Iran, Indian researchers and academics in post-colonial India argue for local traditions over the ideas and customs of colonial Western powers. However, present conditions of the world are different from the era of post-colonialism, and it means that the secularism and modernity interpretations of the 1980s and the 1990s are not useful for current socio-political circumstances of the world. The danger today is clash among different identities, worldviews, and socio-economic positions in the same society rather than the interference of foreign powers. There is an increasing phenomenon of fundamentalism that threatens the plurality and democracy. There is a need to rethink secularism as a political principle for social unity and democracy in opposition to fundamentalism and exclusionary policies.

## § 2.6 Proponents of the Relation between Secularism and Democracy

On the other hand, there are people who advocate that secularism is a requirement for democracy. Akeel Bilgrami says that "it seems more and more urgent to declare oneself a secularist in a time when wars are waged by a government dominated by thinking of the Christian right and terror is perpetuated in the name of Islam."[52] He is probably referring to United States government under the Bush administration and fundamentalist Al-Qaeda terror. S. Sayyid writes that there is a correlation between secularism and democracy, pointing to benefits of secularism. He posits that secularism is an

51 Ibid, p. 191.

52 S. Sayyid, "Contemporary Politics of Secularism," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* ed. by Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 186.

"epistemological category," which can be defined as a change in the centrality of understanding from God-based to Man-based thinking[53] that delegitimizes the monopoly on the production of knowledge by religious authorities.[54] This benefit is important for the post-revolutionary Iranian intellectuals as well, as they tried to delegitimize the Islamic regime's official reading of Islamic texts and Islamic knowledge. Sayyid argues that there are civic benefits of secularism such as peace and social harmony since secularism depends on the co-existence of differences, not the domination of sociopolitical sphere by one identity or point of view.[55] Sayyid proclaims that democracy requires an empty space of power that should be filled by the wills of the people.[56] To him, secularism made the removal of God and religion from this power space possible. Thus, it has been filled with the wills of people, leading to the notion of popular sovereignty. Thus, popular sovereignty replaced the sovereignty of God or clergy.[57] This point was also crucial to the discourses of post-revolutionary Iranian intellectuals; from the beginning, they have always emphasized the notion of popular will and popular sovereignty for the political reform and political re-arrangement of the country. Sayyid argues that in recent times, secularism has become a tool in the Western world to de-politicize the Muslim identity.[58] He believes that secularism is put forward not for social harmony or peace, but to deal with the problems of Muslim identity in West, such as the headscarf issue, fundamentalism among Muslim youth, and the integration of migrant Muslims. In that sense, although Sayyid argues that a distorted and deviant concept of secularism is on the rise in Europe, he believes in the vital and crucial benefits of secularism for democracy. He is not alone in his criticism of Western secularism.

53 S. Sayyid, "Contemporary Politics of Secularism," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* ed. by Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 188.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid, p.199.

Rajeev Bhargava also criticizes Western secularism for its difficulties dealing with different religious and ethnic groups.

Indian academic Rajeev Bhargava is one of the most important contributors to the literature of secularism both in India and the world. He is also one of those who advocate that secularism is a requirement for democracy. His debates with Ashis Nandy and T.N. Madan are especially significant discussions in the current literature of secularism.

First of all, he believes that secularism does not belong to the Western world.[59] For him, concepts have also histories that can change through time and space. He claims that although the concept of secularism developed in the West, development continued in the non-Western world. He explains that during the era of confessional states in Europe, established after 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, societies were homogenized and single-religion states were established and then secularism was established and developed under single religion/identity states.[60] Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Vonantwerpen support this view by arguing that religious minorities in the same era were persecuted to enforce religious homogenization.[61]

However, Bhargava argues that the migration to Europe in recent decades created an unprecedented diversity in Europe.[62] He claims that this situation has shaken the secularism dynamics of European states and societies,[63] since their secularism developed in the aftermath of homogenized, single-religion societies. Bhargava explains that the single religion societies and states of European world have been challenged by religious faiths and differ-

59 Rajeev Bhargava, "The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism," http://www.chereum.umontreal.ca/activites_pdf/session%202/Barghava_Distinctiveness%20of%20Indian.pdf, (accessed 22 March 2016), p. 4.

60 Rajeev Bhargava, "How Secular is European Secularism," *European Societies,* 16:3, p. 329.

61 Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, introduction to *Rethinking Secularism* ed. by by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 14.

62 Rajeev Bhargava, "How Secular is European Secularism," *European Societies,* 16:3, p. 329.

63 Ibid.

ences of immigrants.[64] However, non-Western societies have always had a wide diversity in their populations. In that sense, India and Indian secularism are significant, original model from which European secularism should benefit.[65] Indian society today is comprised of %82 Hindus, %13 Muslims, %2 Christians and Sikhs, %1 Jews, Jains and Zoroastrians.[66] Given this demographic make-up, Bhargava adds that the existence of Indian secularism in India becomes very important because it is difficult to find common understanding or shared community among these differences. According to him, although early and middle ages history of secularism concept belonged to Western world, its late history is being shaped by the non-western world.[67] Western states should take non-Western models especially Indian secularism under consideration.

For the same end, against the Indian anti-secular academics, he puts forward secularism as a political principle that can hold the unity of Indian society on the basis of liberal values including peace, toleration, equality, and religious liberty.[68] He believes that secularism can not be addressed as a Western, Christian concept, since he argues that in every society, that contains differences, the political power tries to present a peaceful model to make all differences live together. For Bhargava, this is a secularist action of the state.[69] Moreover, the concepts of peace, tolerance, equality, and religious liberty are not Western concepts, but universal concepts that belong to humanity.[70]

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64 Rajeev Bhargava, "Political Secularism: Why It is Needed and What Can be Learnt from Its Indian Version," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* (eds.) Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 83.

65 Ibid, p. 85.

66 T.N. Madan, "Indian Secularism: A Religio-Secular Ideal," in *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age* (ed.) Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.182.

67 Rajeev Bhargava, "The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism," http://www.chereum.umontreal.ca/activites_pdf/session%202/Barghava_Distinctiveness%20of%20Indian.pdf, (accessed 22 March 2016), p. 38.

68 Ibid, p. 35.

69 Ibid, p. 34.

70 Ibid, p. 37.

In that respect, he argues against T.N. Madan and Ashis Nandy's views on Indian secularism. Bhargava sees their way of thinking as too culturalist,[71] and although he does not deny the cultural effect of Western societies and Christianity on the secularism concept,[72] he believes the relation between secularism and Christianity is exaggerated.[73] He explains the arguments and positions of Indian anti-secularists through "cultural inadaptability," the idea that since secularism is a Western concept; it cannot flourish in India.[74] He accepts that many different religious and ethnic identities co-existed before development of secularism in India; however, the national identity of Hindus and Muslims was acknowledged in the early twentieth century, and the tensions between them increased after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1947.[75] Bhargava says the separation of most of the Muslim population and the remaining Muslims in India made political secularism after Second World War viable idea for providing communal harmony.[76]

On the other hand, most of the anti-secularists see modernism and secularism as conflict-generating ideologies, since in pre-modern times religious entities lived together peacefully, though not in modern times. Akeel Bilgrami quotes from Ashis Nandy, who argues that religion was just faith in pre-modern times but it has become an ideology in modern times, so it is modernism that brought about this change.[77] Thus, they saw secularism and modernism as harmful phenomena for non-Western people since the history of secularism and modernism is not their history. For them, cultural tradi-

71 Rajeev Bhargava, "The "Secular Ideal" Before Secularism: A Pre-liminary Sketch," in *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age* (ed.) Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 160.

72 Ibid.

73 Rajeev Bhargava, "Political Secularism: Why It is Needed and What Can be Learnt from Its Indian Version," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* (eds.) Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 107.

74 Rajeev Bhargava, "Liberal, Secular Democracy and Explanations of Hindu Nationalism," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics,* 40:3, p. 76-77.

75 "Pakistan," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan, (accessed 22 March 2016).

76 Rajeev Bhargava, "How Secular is European Secularism," *European Societies,* 16:3, p. 333.

77 Akeel Bilgrami, "Secularism, Nationalism, and Modernity," in *Secularism and Its Critics* ed. by Rajeev Bhargava, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 382.

tions and local history have already provided values such as tolerance of religious liberty. This kind of argumentation, - although culturalist and essentialist because it attributes a cultural essence to universal values (i.e. secularism belongs to Western people and not to non-Westerners) - it is a common style of argumentation used in many countries, including Iran. Because of the co-existence of diverse groups in pre-modern times, anti-secularist theoreticians emphasize cultural values, and local traditions of the country rather than universal principles like secularism and democracy.

However, Bhargava criticizes these culturalist claims because he argues "one may tolerate the religion of another person even as one treats him as inferior. Secularism, on the other hand, is grounded in notions of equality - equal concern and respect - and therefore goes far beyond the notion of inter-religious tolerance."[78] In that sense, Bhargava argues that secularism presents a "rights-based" system in which everyone benefits equally; toleration is not an issue of right but a behavior. Toleration is therefore too vague a concept to be trusted at the governmental and legal level.

Bhargava claims that the increase of religious fundamentalism around the world - not only in the Middle East, but also in different parts of the world - in South-East Asia, Israel, India, and Turkey, and the establishment of theocratic states in Iran and in Sudan, the failure of European secularism to deal with (specifically Muslim) immigrants disproves the religious decline thesis. To the contrary, he says that these phenomena indicate a crisis of secularism.[79] Moreover, both in academic and political spheres, many discussions and criticisms have erupted against secularism on the grounds that it creates conflict rather than peace and is a danger to plural identities.[80] However, Bhargava criticizes anti-secularist opponents, saying that rather than

78 Rajeev Bhargava, "The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism," http://www.chereum.umontreal.ca/activites_pdf/session%202/Barghava_Distinctiveness%20of%20Indian.pdf, (accessed 22 March 2016), p. 40.

79 Rajeev Bhargava, "Political Secularism: Why It is Needed and What Can be Learnt from Its Indian Version," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* ed. by Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 83.

80 Ibid, p. 84.

seeking an alternative to secularism, a rethinking of secularism is needed.[81] Considering the examples that differ from mainstream secularism models of United States and France - such as secularism in India - he believes that cross-references will empower the transcultural ideals like peace, tolerance, equality and respect.[82] He sees "political secularism," which developed in India after the Second World War, was a very important experience that can give European secularism a chance to re-define and re-think itself. To that end, Bhargava quotes from Isaiah Berlin who argues, "Grand liberating ideas slowly turn into suffocating strait jackets unless they are interpreted newly."[83]

Bhargava argues that Indian political secularism holds a great potential and significance for alternative rethinking of secularism, on the basis of its inclusionary and democratic principles. Before going into detail, it should be made clear that Bhargava sees a strong correlation between secularism and democracy. He argues that secularism and democracy were once supplementary notions, but because of the negative perception of secularism among the people, this connection was lost and, the relation between them today is seen as exclusionary.[84]

Bhargava says that the French laïcité, which excludes religion from the state, Turkish laïcité, Chinese and Soviet secularisms have brought about a negative perception of secularism.[85] However, Bhargava argues that there is a link between secularism and democracy and equal citizenship.[86] Democracy requires a state, because democratic conditions can only be met by the ar-

81 Ibid.

82 Rajeev Bhargava, introduction to *Secularism and Its Critics* ed. Rajeev Bhargava, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 3.

83 Rajeev Bhargava, "The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism," http://www.chereum.umontreal.ca/activites_pdf/session%202/Barghava_Distinctiveness%20of%20Indian.pdf, (accessed 22 March 2016), p. 2.

84 Rajeev Bhargava, "Liberal, Secular Democracy and Explanations of Hindu Nationalism," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics,* 40:3, p. 91.

85 Rajeev Bhargava, "The "Secular Ideal" Before Secularism: A Pre-liminary Sketch," in *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age* ed. by Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 62.

86 Rajeev Bhargava, introduction to *Secularism and Its Critics* ed. by Rajeev Bhargava, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 10.

rangement and management of the state. In this case, the state should be free of domination of identity, be it a class, ethnic group or a religious identity. Because secularism is the idea that requires the independence of state from any kind of identity, there erupts a link between democracy and secularism.[87] Here, Amartya Sen's definition of secularism benefits this discussion. Sen argues that in political sense secularism requires the separation of the state from any particular religious order. It goes against giving any religion a privileged position in the activities of the state.[88] Moreover, Amartya Sen, as a proponent of secularism, argues that forsaking secularism would render current problems faced by the world worse.[89]

Bhargava puts forward "political secularism" as an alternative conception of secularism that is in crisis both in academia and politics. Strong criticisms against mainstream secularism stem from exclusionary practices towards religious faith,[90] however religion has proved its existence in modern ages especially after it fused with the modern state. Bhargava argues that excluding religion from public space breeds resentment among believers.[91]

Bhargava further argues that it would be false to think only religious brings sectarianism and exclusionary demands into politics.[92] He also criticizes the mainstream conception of secularism for its context-insensitive, absolutist, and monolithic approach; that is to say it is considered superior and non-negotiable.[93] He puts forward Indian political secularism brings about peace, democracy and equality.

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87 Rajeev Bhargava, introduction to *Secularism and Its Critics* ed. by Rajeev Bhargava, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 12.

88 Amartya Sen, "Secularism and Its Discontents," in *Secularism and Its Critics* (ed.) Rajeev Bhargava, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 456.

89 Ibid, p. 484.

90 Rajeev Bhargava, "Political Secularism: Why It is Needed and What Can be Learnt from Its Indian Version," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* (eds.) Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 98

91 Ibid, p. 99.

92 Ibid, p. 99.

93 Ibid, p. 100.

## § 2.7 Rajeev Bhargava's Alternative Conception of Secularism

According to Rajeev Bhargava, political secularism is not only the institutional separation of state and religion.[94] Moreover, he says "there is a strong exclusion in political secularism as opposed to varieties of weak exclusion." Political secularism requires the exclusion of ultimate ideals for the protection of ordinary life and a peaceful polity."[95] In that respect, Bhargava's political secularism excludes ultimate ideals in the form of religious or secular fundamentalism from the state.[96] For him, the concept of secularism can be divided into political and ethical secularisms. He explains that ethical secularism has trouble with religious faith in the public sphere, excluding it from public space as in French laïcité. However, political secularism rejects that kind of exclusionary practices. It takes ethical secularism as itself an ultimate ideal that brings sectarianism into politics, just like religious faiths. Thus, Bhargava argues that political secularism can be deduced from ethical secularism with a principle of co-existence on the basis of equality, freedom and democracy.[97] Bhargava posits that a diverse society could live together peacefully if arranged by the principle of political secularism.[98] The only condition for the implementation of political secularism is the exclusion of ultimate ideals and values from the coercive public sphere, namely, state.[99] The state should be managed by the principle of political neutrality, as in Indian secularism.[100]

The French model upholds one-sided exclusion, in which the state can intervene in religion but religion cannot intervene with the state. On the

94 Rajeev Bhargava, "Political Secularism: Why It is Needed and What Can be Learnt from Its Indian Version, in *Secularism," Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* ed. by Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 88.

95 Rajeev Bhargava, "What is Secularism for?" http://law.uvic.ca/demcon/victoria_colloquium/documents/WhatisSecularismforPreSeminarReading.pdf, (accessed 23 March 2016), p. 10

96 Ibid, p. 5.

97 Ibid, p. 8

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid, p. 10.

100 Ibid, p. 8.

other hand, secularism model of the United States is based on "mutual exclusion," demanding a wall of separation between state and religion for the benefits of religious liberty.[101] Bhargava argues that political secularism does not aim to de-publicize religion, but de-politicize it by excluding it at the state level. In that sense, he argues that separation of religion can be handled in two ways: the separation of religion from the public sphere, and the separation of religion only at the state level. He argues that this can be accomplished only with political neutrality of the state, but this does not imlpy being blind, or excluding religions from the public sphere. He says, "This view allows the public or even the political presence of one some or all religions but only if their public face or politicization is complete with some previously defined values or principles, constitutive of secularism."[102] He addresses the main contours of secularism such as equality, equal citizenship, peace, and religious liberty.[103]

In that sense, Bhargava defines one of the main pillars of Indian secularism; "principled distance." He says that Indian secularism embraces all religions and differences, it does not permit them any place at the state level. Bhargava claims in so far as a state intervenes with a religion or religions, it must treat the differences equally. However, this equal treatment is not equidistance or blind neutrality. He argues that the principled distance is nonsectarian and differential in a manner of the constitutive values of secularism.[104] This means that if a country consists of 90 percent Muslims and 10 percent Christians, we cannot talk about same amount of protection, a public service. Obviously, Christians in a Muslim dominated population requires more protection and positive discrimination by the state to not feel alienated or isolated in the society. Thus, for Bhargava, equal treatment requires a differential treatment. With the principled distance, the state can intervene

101 Rajeev Bhargava, "How Secular is European Secularism," *European Societies,* 16:3, p. 331.

102 Rajeev Bhargava, "Liberal, Secular Democracy and Explanations of Hindu Nationalism," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics,* 40:3, p. 89.

103 Ibid, p. 90.

104 Rajeev Bhargava, "The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism," http://www.chereum.umontreal.ca/activites_pdf/session%202/Barghava_Distinctiveness%20of%20Indian.pdf, (accessed 22 March 2016), p. 28.

with religions, avoiding inter-religious and more importantly intra-religious domination, by promoting freedom, equality, and religious liberty with that intervention.[105] The principled distance as one of the markers of Indian secularism takes religious faiths into its sphere rather than excluding or shunning them.

Bhargava argues that it is immoral to exclude identities in a political community, because a political community is a non-contractual phenomenon in which the obligations and identities of a person is not determined or chosen by the individual himself/herself.[106] In that sense, he quotes from John Rawls that says "we enter a political community only by birth and exit only by death…Political society is closed, we come to be within it, and we do not, and indeed cannot, enter or leave it voluntarily."[107] According to Bhargava, exclusion of pre-destined identities is an immoral thing. That is why in a political community it is wrong to exclude one group of people for their ultimate ideals. So, Bhargava points to main features of Indian secularism, corresponding to the political secularism: its multi-value character, the method of principled distance, care with regard to the inter-religious and intra-religious domination, the aim to not de-publicize religion, active hostility to aspects of religion that creates inequality (i.e. limits on freedom, and unjust relations among the members of society - like gender inequality - in religious perspective).[108]

Bhargava believes that political secularism is for the common good of society; it aims to empower the common good with a rights-based system and equal participation of disparate identities. That is why he called political secularism "non-communitarian". As Charles Taylor puts it secularism is an important idea for this day and age, which cannot be left to secularists on-

105 Ibid, p. 106.

106 Rajeev Bhargava, introduction to *Secularism and Its Critics* ed. by Rajeev Bhargava, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 15.

107 Ibid, p. 15.

108 Rajeev Bhargava, "Rehabilitating Secularism," in *Rethinking Secularism* ed. by Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 104.

ly.[109] Rather than abandoning it, it should be re-conceptualized on the basis of equality, freedom, and justice but not exclude religious people and their faiths. It also means excluding any kind of ultimate ideals at the state level, thus inhibiting any comprehensive doctrine from becoming dominant and oppressive. Charles Taylor, as a person who argues that there are three principles of secularism: liberty, equality, and fraternity.[110] However, he points to the philosophy of John Rawls since these values requires an overlapping consensus and negotiation among the members of society.[111]

Jürgen Habermas brings up post-secularism concept, for him "post-secularism draws no strict line between knowledge and faith. It rejects a narrow scientistic concept of reason and the exclusion of religious doctrines from the reason."[112] He argues that secularism insufficiently guarantees equal religious freedom; however, it should be added that not only religious freedom, but freedom of thought is generally a valid in our day and age. He argues that although religious argumentation and the religious use of reason cannot take place at the state level, religious symbols and religious arguments can be in the public sphere.[113] He claims that the religious arguments can be translated to a proper language to be passed to the state bodies and assemblies. He believes that such translation would create a complementary learning process between the secular use of reason and the religious use of reason.[114] So, Habermas' definition of post-secularism concept is like the definition of Bhargava. Neither excludes religion in the public sphere, but both exclude religious doctrines from at the state level. At this point, the writings of John Rawls and his "political" conception will be explanatory.

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109 Charles Taylor, foreword "What is Secularism," in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* ed. by Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. XX.

110 Ibid, p. XII.

111 Ibid, p. XV.

112 Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," https://www.sandiego.edu/pdf/pdf_library/habermaslecture031105_c939cceb2ab087bdfc6df291ecofc3fa.pdf, (accessed 22 March 2016), p. 18.

113 Ibid, p. 10.

114 Ibid.

## § 2.8 John Rawls, Political Liberalism, and the "Political" Conception

American philosopher John Rawls' use of the "political" conception is very important to define secularism politically. In his *Political Liberalism*, he argues that modern societies include very different cultural identities, which can be "incompatible or reasonable."[115] He argues that political liberalism accepts incompatible and comprehensive doctrines as the normal consequence of human history.[116] Rawls defines a comprehensive doctrine as a system that "applies to all subjects and its virtues cover all parts of life."[117] He also says that when a conception is comprehensive, it defines the ideal and what is of value in life.[118] In that atmosphere of diversity, he asks, "How is it possible that deeply opposed though reasonable comprehensive doctrines may live together and all affirm the political conception of a constitutional regime? What is the structure and content of a political conception that can gain the support of such an overlapping consensus?"[119]

For Rawls, the main issue for modern societies is that they manage comprehensive doctrines that try to dominate both in public sphere and at the state level. Against this, he argues that a modern society can include comprehensive and reasonable doctrines, but the problem is to contain them "so that they do not undermine the unity and justice of the society."[120] What can be done to contain them so they do not pose a problem for other constitutents of the society? To him, the solution to this tension among different doctrines - be they comprehensive or not - is to use the "political" conception of justice.[121] What does it mean? For him, the political interpretation of the term could provide basic structure in which members of society could live as equals of a just and free society.

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115 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. XV.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid, p. XXXVI.

118 Ibid, p. 13.

119 Ibid, p. XVII.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid, p. XVII.

He argues that the main issue of political liberalism is to draw a political conception of justice for a constitutional democratic regime "that a plurality of reasonable doctrines, both religious and non-religious, liberal and non-liberal, may freely endorse, and so freely live by and come to understand its virtues."[122] Rawls claims that there is a strict difference between political conception and comprehensive doctrines. To him, comprehensive doctrines are for those who only confess it, but political conceptions are for everybody.[123] Moreover, he says that political conceptions do not follow from comprehensive doctrines.[124] Rawls argues that political liberalism accepts reasonable pluralism of the society, though the enlightenment secularism does not accept it. This is what differentiates Rawlsian political liberalism from Kantian liberalism. He explains it with reference to a discussion between David Hume and Immanuel Kant. Both philosophers focused on the question, of whether the moral order comes from human nature or an external source like God?[125] Rawls explains that both Hume and Kant believed moral order originates from human nature. However, there are only few people who can reach the knowledge of this moral order. In that sense, Rawls explains Kant argues that people should be made to do what is right and moral. Rawls expresses that this is enlightenment liberalism and he called it comprehensive liberalism that excludes religious use of reason and other doctrines.[126]

In defining comprehensive liberalism, Rawls formulates his own political liberalism that respects a political conception of justice, which accepts comprehensive doctrines in society so long as they are reasonable.[127] Rawls believes that social unity requires a general doctrine around which members of society can come together under a democratic constitutional regime without excluding eachother.[128] He argues that the main pillar of political liberalism

122 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. XXXVIII.

123 Ibid, p. XIX.

124 Ibid, p. 13.

125 Ibid, p. XXVI-XXVII

126 Ibid, p. XXVII

127 Ibid, p. XXVII.

128 Ibid, p. XXV.

is the political conception of justice that is not derived from any comprehensive doctrine.[129] In that sense, he believes that the main aim of political liberalism is to establish the public justification of a democratic constitutional regime.[130] Political liberalism is different from secular and comprehensive reason. However, it can still be considered in the secularism field since it excludes comprehensive doctrines, and in the words of Rajeev Bhargava ultimate ideals.

In order to reach a political conception of justice, Rawls addresses citizenship and democratic institutions that operate under a democratic constitutional regime. He sees "public reason" as one pillar of political liberalism. Rawls claims that "public reason is best guided by a political conception of principles and values of which all citizens can endorse."[131] He equates public reason with civic friendship, and the principle of reciprocity.[132] He argues that the principle of reciprocity - being reasonable with each other - form the fundamental institutions of society in economic, political, and social field. Rawls believes that the criterion of reciprocity would be the mark of a citizen under a democratic constitutional regime.[133] This kind of reciprocity would form and deepen a society's public culture. To sum up, Rawls believes that fair terms of cooperation among members of society are provided with reciprocity, basic rights and fair distribution.

The Rawlsian "political" conception is like political conception of secularism. Both exclude comprehensive, ultimate ideals from political sphere but not from public space. In that sense, they permit the public existence of religious identities on the grounds that they are reasonable, or in the words of Bhargava, if they promote the constitutive values of secularism like equality, tolerance, and peace. In that sense, there is a clear correlation between political secularism and "political." The concept of secularism needs to be reconsidered on the basis of political interpretation of Rawls. Rajeev Bhargava, Jean Bauberot, and Jürgen Habermas do already so. There are strong rela-

129 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. XXV.

130 Ibid, p. XIX.

131 Ibid, p. 10

132 Ibid, p. XLIX.

133 Ibid, p. LI

tions and similarities among the Bauberot's re-definiton of laïcité, Rawlsian political conception, Bhargava's political secularism, and Jürgen Habermas' post-secularism concepts. All point to a great need of re-think of the concepts on the basis of inclusionary and democratic models that does not exclude religious faiths and differences from social life. More importantly, all those concepts emphasize the exclusion of comprehensive doctrines - not only religious doctrines but also comprehensive secular reason - and ultimate liberalism. They believe that the only conversation stopper is not just religion, but any ideas that try to exclude others in the public and political sphere.

In this thesis, I argue that inclusionary, democratic political secularism has become a discursive tool in the hands of Iranian intellectuals in the post-reform period. They were already talking in the language of political secularism before the second part of the 2000s but with the beginning of Ahmadinejad's rule in 2005, they expressed their demands for political secularism more explicitly. They have understood that political conception of secularism was a principle that can bring political freedoms, equality, and justice in Iran while maintaining the unity of Iranian people with social cooperation. Iran has a potential for dissemination of the political conception secularism among members of society. Iranian intellectuals lead that by producing knowledge about political secularism and making it a popular discourse among Iranian people. Although Iran shook the crown of secularism in the twentieth century, specifically since 1979, it has the potential today to give birth to an alternative political secularism.

# 3

## The Secular Democratic Injection to Reformist, Religious Intellectualism in the 2000s: Akbar Ganji

Akbar Ganji holds a very significant place for post-revolutionary reformist, religious intellectualism. His investigative journalism brought him popularity and a public intellectual role. Ganji is different from Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar in terms of his discourses' explicitness. Even when he was in jail between 2000 and 2006, he argued for a secular democratic state in Iran. However, after he went exile, he met with Western philosophical discussions about the role of religion in modern times and how to deal with ultimate ideals and comprehensive doctrines that try to dominate both state and society, which consist of differences. His discussions with Charles Taylor, his acquaintance with John Rawls' political liberalism affected him and transformed Ganji into an intellectual who discuss the importance of secularism in Iran in the second part of 2000s. Thus, he bracketed his journalism and, instead, debated the socio-political problems of Iran and tried to make secularism co-exist with religion in Iran.

However, his search does not claim the crown of secularism as a top-down phenomenon, which suppress religious faith and exclude it, as Shah's modernization attempts did in Iran. Instead, he put forward a secular democratic approach that functions with democratic institutions and a democratic constitution in which human rights are adopted and the separation of state and politics is provided. In that sense, it can be argued that he claims the

current political structure of Iran is to be abolished, and instead, a secular democratic state with all its democratic institutions should be established that excludes any comprehensive doctrine from state, including a religious doctrine like political Islam or a secularist approach that excludes religion. Ultimately, Ganji puts forward secularism as a political principle that can hold the unity of socio-political differences of Iran in a democratic way. Thus, his secularism perception differs from mainstream secularism models like in France and United States. In this chapter, it is seen that his influence on reformist, religious intellectualism in the second part of the 2000s was too much. He injected "political" conception of secularism into the reformist, religious intellectualism and made it an important idea for a democratic Iran ideal. In order to better understand Ganji's secular democratic ideal and his influence over reformist religious intellectuals, it is better to start with his biography and put his ideas in a historical context.

Akbar Ganji was born in Tehran at 31 January 1961. His family was living in the southern part of Tehran that means they were, in socio-economic terms, from the poor side of the city.[1] Through the 1970s, Ganji was influenced from the internal and international events like anybody else in Iran. The ideology of political Islam had captured him as well. As a staunch supporter of political Islam's utopic ideals like justice and equality, he participated in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. After the revolution, he took part in the Revolutionary Guards as a soldier. His stay in Revolutionary Guards did not take long and he quit the Guards in 1982 because of the fact that he and some of his friends appealed to Khomeini to make a ceasefire with Iraqi government, which was rejected.[2] However, even today his days in Revolutionary Guards lead some people to question his democratic discourses with doubt because for those people being a soldier in Guards is a clear sign of regime support. When he was later reminded to him that he was a soldier in Revolutionary Guards, Ganji told them he was only a soldier not a commander in

1 "Conversation with History: Akbar Ganji," 7 February 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YohAwEnqTjk. (accessed 27 September 2015).

2 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. XII.

the army, and he left the Guards as soon as he understood the suppressive nature of the revolution.[3]

Most people who formed the intellectual cadres of reformist movement in Iran in a way participated in the revolutionary process either as soldiers or as officials in administrative posts upon the establishment of the Islamic regime. Then they were accused of being a supporter of Islamic regime by the other reformists or people who fought for freedom in Iran. Those who made such accusations against intellectuals pointed to the early period of Islamic revolution to give evidence that those intellectuals could not be trusted because they were *khodi* ("one of us," meaning supporters of the regime) unlike the *gheyr-i-khodi* ("the others") who desired change but not through the Islamic regime.[4] Ganji and others in this position never denied their participation in the revolution, but they emphasized the fact that as soon as they understood the political nature of the revolution such as its stance against the freedom and justice,[5] they resigned from their governmental posts and left the revolutionary camp. To sum, Ganji and others quit their positions because there dreams for an Iranian state and society before the revolution, starkly contrasted with the things that happened after the revolution.

Utopic ideals like a "classless society," "freedom from oppression" and "justice for all" were some of the failed mottos of the revolution. This became clear in the first part of the 1980s. Ganji explained that people started to see the repressive characters of the regime, and they were restless and uneasy about the routines imposed by the regime.[6] Under such circumstances, Ganji chose to leave the army and became a cultural attaché at the Iranian embassy

3 "Interview Akbar Ganji," 11 March 2007, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2007/03/interview-akbar-ganji, (accessed 27 September 2015).

4 For an explanation of the concepts of khodi and non-khodi, see Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 14

5 "Interview: Akbar Ganji," 11 March 2007, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2007/03/interview-akbar-ganji, (accessed 27 September 2015).

6 Ibid.

in Turkey in 1982. The assignment lasted for two years, and he returned to Iran in 1984.[7]

After returning to Iran, he was shaken by what he saw in political and social life: a society captured by the idea of martyrdom that increasingly had spread to every corner of political and social life in the 1980s.[8] A political structure dominated by clerics intervened in all parts of social and political life to the end of Islamizing these spheres. Before quitting the Guards, Ganji felt the oppressive, and uniformist nature of the Islamic regime that only recognized Shi'a Islamic identity. More importantly, the society had been radicalized as a consequence of the hostage crisis that took place in 1979 and the Iraq war that started in 1980 and lasted untill 1988. In that time, 12,500 Iranians were executed.[9] What all these events implied was the emergence of political and social spheres that radical oppressed every individual and community, legitimized in the name of the Islamic Revolution and Islam.

Collective executions of political opponents, inhumane behavior, and torture in prisons - especially in Evin Prison located near Tehran - became a symbol of the opression of the Islamic Regime of its opponents. Purges of political opponents in the universities must have awakened in Ganji's minds an appeal for the amelioration of this situation. He became an investigative journalist working outside of the influence of the regime. His earlier activism in political Islam facilitated his professional journalistic activities in that oppressive, stiffing atmosphere. He was not one of the persons who were put on trial and/or exiled because of their thinking or actions against the newly-established Islamic regime; indeed, his participation in the Islamic revolution and Iraq war most probably deflected the attention from him, allowing him pursue investigative journalism, despite harsh political oppression.

One of changes in Akbar Ganji's thinking happened in these times, in the second part of the 1980s. The idea of revolution gave way to the idea of

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7 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. XII.

8 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Towards an anthropology of democratization in Iran," *Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* 9:16, p. 6.

9 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 18.

reform that places freedom above the idea of justice. This formulation combined with Ganji's search for a just society. However, this important change brought him closer to the reformist movement of the 1990s. For him, there are always contrasting perspectives within the revolutions in terms of expectations and consequences, but without exception, revolutions do not bring a solution to the problem of justice. Worse yet, they give birth to new oppression that destroys freedoms.[10]

Ganji became a popular journalist in Iran especially in the 1990s due to both his efforts to reveal the corruptions, and unlawful actions of the Islamic regime and political atmosphere of Iran in the 1990s. He was not alone in this struggle. Prominent people of the Islamic regime, like Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, were dissatisfied with the political and social actions of the Islamic regime and expressed this publicly. The moment of this dissatisfaction arose is uncertain, but the events that took place in the second part of the 1980s must have motivated them to express their oppositions to the Islamic regime.

Grand Ayatollah Montazeri, who was supposed to be the *Vali-e Faqih* (Guardian Jurist) right after Khomeini, opposed the collective executions of the members of *Mojahedin-e Khalq* (People's Mojahedin Organization), amounting to three thousand Iranian opponents in the prisons. Furthermore, Montazeri's demands for and critique of the freedoms and the rights of people angered Khomeini, and he removed him from his close circle, thus rescinding is status as heir.[11] Gradually, an opposition was emerging from within; it had to emerge from within because there was no political space for any voices except for those within the regime.

Akbar Ganji was one of these voices of opposition from within. Oppositional voices were even found in high ranks of the Islamic regime like, that of Khatami. The reformist zeal was everywhere in Iran in the 1990s and Khata-

10 "Interview: Akbar Ganji," 11 March 2007, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2007/03/interview-akbar-ganji, (accessed 27 September 2015).

11 Babak Rahimi, "Democratic authority, Public Islam, and Shi'i jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani," *International Political Science Review,* 33(2), p. 198.

mi led this reformist movement. People wanted change at both the political, and social levels, both of which directly influenced their lives. Excitement about reform expanded freedom in Iran and was reflected in the publishing sector as well. Translations of imminent Western philosophers were done such as the works of Habermas, Derrida, Bourdieu, Foucault, Giddens, and Heidegger.[12] The pervasiveness of the translations of these philosophers was deemed as "an epoch making renaissance on political and cultural discourse."[13]

Reformists gave much importance to the notions of civil society, public sphere, tolerance, non-violence, modernization of faith etc.[14] to be able to expand the freedoms against the Islamic regime's oppressive institutions. That is why Habermas related articles increased in the same era. Though it was only 2 articles appeared in the newspapers in 1997, it reached to 75 in 2002.[15] In relation to it, between 1997 and 1998, 880 new publications came to life.[16] It reached to 1000 publications in the April of 1998.[17] From this reformist zeal, student, intellectual and women movements got their shares. Intellectuals engaged in new publications, university students were organized around social organizations. They also formed new local student magazines that amounted to 700.[18] It also encouraged women to take part in social life. We can see that penchant from the women's participation in universities. Before the revolution the female percentage in the universities was %30.5 in 1978-1979 but first time in the modern Iran history it surpassed the male's

12 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "The Islamic Revolution in Iran: Retrospect after a Quarter of a Century," *Thesis Eleven*, 76:70, p. 79

13 Ali Javaherian, "Iran: State, Civil Society, and Social Emancipation," *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory,* 38:2, p. 269.

14 Omid Payrov Shabani, "Reading Habermas in Iran: Political Tolerance and the Prospect of Non-Violent Movement in Iran," *Journal of Global Ethics*, 6:2, p. 144.

15 Ali Paya, "Habermas and Iranian Intellectuals," *Iranian Studies*, 40:3, p. 310.

16 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 109

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid, p. 108.

percentage in 2002-2003. It reached to %50.9.[19] Moreover, between 1997 and 2005, 150 women NGOS were founded under the reformist zeal.[20] The number of women NGOs reached to 330 in 2003.[21]

The reformist atmosphere also provided a suitable foundation for party politics. Before 1997 presidential elections, eighteen factions formed a coalition under the name of Second of Khordad Front (*Jebhe-ye Dovvom-e Khordad*), the candidate of which was Khatami. This front took its name from the date it was established. It was founded on the second of June. After Khatami came to power, 220 new political parties were founded.[22]

Political parties numbered 95 at the end of the 2000s, whereas it was 37 in 1997. Only in 2001, 1437 social organizations were established.[23] It was a full-blown explosion of democratic demands in Iran. 1997 was apex of a reformist movement that brought Khatami presidency, accelerating the pace of extended freedoms in Iran. Freedoms, limited as they were, also led to the expansion of the reformist press in quantity and quality. The number of periodicals and newspapers increased unprecedentedly. New newspapers were formed such as *Jameeh*, *Tus*, *Neshat*, *Khordad*, *Sobh-e Emrooz*, *Iran-e Ferda*, *Asr-e Mah,* and *Kiyan*.[24] Gradually, a new public space was formed amidst this reformist zeal. Moreover, extensive student demonstrations first took place in Tehran in 1999 following the decision of the Islamic regime to ban *Salam* newspaper, which had published secret, unlawful relations of the Is-

19 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Iranian Women's Pariticipation in the Academic World," *Iranian* Studies, 43:2, p. 225.

20 Leila Austin, "The Politics of Youth Bulge: From Islamic Activism to Democratic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa," *SAIS Review of International Affairs,* vol:31, no:2, p. 91.

21 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 109

22 Reza Razavi, "The Road to Party Politics in Iran (1979-2009)," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 46:1, p. 87.

23 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 108.

24 Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform,* (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2009), p. 65.

lamic regime that were behind a chain of murders.[25] By 2001, all elected offices and institutions were in the hands of reformists who took advantages of this politicization and free atmosphere.[26]

Ganji increased his popularity during the time of this reformist zeal. His popularity was such that his books became bestsellers and were read by thousands of people. His books are as follows: *Alijinab-i Surkpush va Alijinaban-i Khakistari* (Red Lord and Grey Lords reprinted twenty times between 1998 and 2000; *Tarikhana-yi Ashbah* (Dark Room of the Shadows) printed twenty four times in 1999; and finally *Tallaqi-yi Fashisti az Din va Hukumat* (The Fascist Perception of Religion and Government) published in 1999 and it reprinted eight times in two years.[27] But the events that brought him the most recognition were his reports on the chain of murders of political opponents of the regime in 1998. After Khatami came to power, the radicals and proponents of the *Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih* (Absolute Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist) system pushed for further oppressive methods against the reformists, contrary to expectations.

In 1998, three political dissidents were brutally killed. Those responsible for committing the crime were unknown. Ganji applied his investigative journalism to reveal the organization behind these killings. He published a series of reports about the murders that indicated those responsible were from the Intelligence Ministry, run by the person who was someone among the ranks of radicals and close to the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. What he wrote showed that the Supreme Leader was behind the political violence and massacre. When he wrote that, he was working for the newspapers of *Sobh-e Emrooz* (Today's Morning).[28] Then he published a book called *Dungeons of Ghosts* in which he collected his reports of serial killings together.

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25 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 95.

26 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 110.

27 Afshin Matin-Asgari, "The intellectual Best-sellers of Post-revolutionary Iran: on Backwardness, Elite-killing, and Western Rationality," *Iranian Studies,* 37:1, p. 74.

28 "Biography: Akbar Ganji," accessed on 14th September of 2015, http://www.cato.org/friedman-prize/akbar-ganji-biography.

This book became a bestseller in a very short period of time in 1999. The reports, the popularity of the message of the book helped reformists win more seats in the February 2000 elections because it increased the doubt, fear, and anger against the radicals of the Islamic regime.[29]

The popularity of Ganji's writings made him target. One of the most important characteristics of reformist intellectuals was their popularity, which increased the power of their discourses, but made them vulnerable to the Islamic regime. For the Islamic regime, the less popularity a political opponent possesses, the more freedom they were granted. If a political opponent's popularity was high, it became a target for the forces of the Islamic regime. This formulation also does not correspond with the accusation directed against the reformist intellectuals that their discourse was elitist. It is clear that reformist intellectuals were not isolated; on the contrary, their discourse used by women, youth, and particularly student movements.

When the democratic search by the reformist intellectuals combined with their popularity, they became the targets of the regime. They were beaten up, put on trial, jailed; some were compelled to go into exile. Ganji, after publishing those reports and his books against the regime, experienced all of these inhumane treatments. In April 2000, he was taken into custody and put on trial for the charge that he damaged national security. His participation in a 2000 conference at Berlin was given as evidence to show his anti-revolutionary and anti-Islamic stance.[30] He was sentenced to 10 years in Evin Prison.

While he was in prison, he wrote the *Republican Manifesto* in which he argues that religion and secular politics can live side by side in a modern democracy.[31] This was an important transformation for him; a maturation of his ideas.

In June 2005, he started hunger strike in Evin Prison because he saw the decision of the regime as illegitimate. From that time, he increasingly used

29 "Biography: Akbar Ganji," accessed on 14th September of 2015, http://www.cato.org/friedman-prize/akbar-ganji-biography.

30 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. XIII.

31 Ibid, p. XIV.

civil disobedience and non-cooperation with the illegitimate regime, though his health was bad. He said "Akbar Ganji will not cease his hunger strike until he achieves his goal of letting the world know that there is a committed democracy movement in Iran,"[32] and he continued the hunger strike and it lasted eighty days, at the end of which he was taken to the hospital because his body collapsed. International media, institutions, and human rights activists supported him and made appeals to the Islamic regime to release him.[33] Under the international pressure, Islamic regime had to release him in 2006.

After that, he chose exile and migrated to the West. He participated in many academic and political meetings in which he explained the oppressive aspects of the Islamic regime and he always underlined the fact that there is a strong demand for democracy in Iran among social forces that reject the fusion of state and religion, the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih, and inhumane treatments. In 2008, he wrote a book entitled *The Road to Democracy in Iran* in which he argued for the idea of secular democracy in Iran that can provide a common ground for every Iranian citizen to live as equal and free members of a just society.

Besides activism in human rights and journalism, he got awards from international institutions such as the Cato Institute Milton Friedman Prize, the John Humphrey Freedom Award, the World Association of Newspapers' Golden Pen Freedom Award, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression's International Press Freedom Award, and the Martin Ennals award for Human Right Defenders.[34]

While he was in exile, he participated in conferences and gave seminars in famous Western universities. Moreover, he had the opportunity to discuss with the prominent, contemporary philosophical figures that works on postmodernity, modernity, rights, equal citizenship, secularism etc. Ganji still lives in exile in the United States.

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32 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. XX.

33 "Biography: Akbar Ganji," http://www.cato.org/friedman-prize/akbar-ganji-biography, (accessed 14 September 2015).

34 "Akbar Ganji," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akbar_Ganji, (accessed 14 September 2015).

## § 3.1 Political and Intellectual Discourses

Ganji's political and social thinking has evolved over 30 years. As mentioned, he started to criticize political Islam when he decided to send a letter to Khomeini in support of a cease-fire with Iraq because of huge losses of people. There are two watersheds in the evolution of Ganji's political thought. First, his imprisonment in Evin prison from 2001 to 2006, and second, his time abroad as an exile after 2006.

The 1980s was a time for Ganji came to disagree with the revolution and its political structure, which shook his beliefs in political Islam and revolution more generally. The second part of the 1980s motivated him to take an increasingly critical position through journalism. Second, reformist zeal of the 1990s enabled him to increase his productivity in journalism as a result of presidency being assumed by Khatami and ensuing expansion of a free, reformist press. However, the 2000s are the most important years in the evolution of Ganji's political thought, so much so that he became a human rights activist.

Before the taken into prison, he was a reformist journalist who believed in reform within the constitution. Imprisonment forced change in his thinking. Most reformist intellectuals in Iran were excited about capturing the presidency, but regime forces increased their attacks on reformists leading to chain of murders of opponents, harsh repression of student demonstrations in Tehran in 1999, and bans of reformist newspapers and periodicals.[35]

Ganji, who directly suffered the harsh, and brutal repressions of the regime having been prisoned on the charge of being anti-Islamic, started to question the legitimacy of the regime, challenging the foundations of the Islamic *fıqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence). He dropped the reformist approach to political change that confined itself to solutions within the constitution of the Islamic regime.[36]

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35 Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran the Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform,* (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2009), p. 107, 109 and 111.

36 "Iran: Radio Farda Interview with Dissident Akbar Ganji," 28 July 2006, http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1070174.html, (accessed 27 September 2015).

In prison, Ganji thought about the civil disobedience and strategies of non-cooperation with the regime. He found these concepts humanistic and peaceful, but having potential to weaken the legitimacy of the regime. Second, his time after being released from prison carry special significance because he became involved in political philosophical questions and met with the ideas of the prominent Western political philosophers. He was affected from the concepts and philosophy of John Rawls in 2000s. In one discussion with Charles Taylor in 2007, he said he insists on a Rawlsian solution to the problems of Iran.[37]

The main difference in Ganji's political thought between the 1990s and the 2000s derived not from what he said, but how he said. While in the 1990s, he used the language of journalism in the fight against the Islamic regime, in the 2000s he had became familiar with the concepts of political philosophy such as civil-disobedience, non-cooperation, secular democracy, secularism, private and public spheres, gender equality, equality, and citizenship.

While already using some of these concepts in the 1990s, he approached these issues from a journalistic perspective focused on practical and daily problems of the Iranian people. But in the 2000s, he started asking fundamental questions such as how Iranian citizens could live together in peace as equal members of the country.

The evolution of Ganji's political thought and method indicates that while he was affected by philosophical currents of his country in the 1990s, he has since become one influence on others in terms of political and philosophical currents. He puts forward secularism as a political principle, which is critical to his thinking, which demands the separation of state and religion and saying all Iranians can live in a secular polity as equal and free members. In relation to that, Ahmedinejad's rise to power, increasing pressures from the state, the Green Movement, and the events which followed in 2009 created the appropriate conditions for Ganji's emphasis on secularism as a politi-

37 "Akbar Ganji in Conversation with Charles Taylor," http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/ganji-taylor-interview3.pdf, (accessed 27 September 2015), p. 14.

cal principle and a Rawlsian solution. Below the main intellectual discourses of Akbar Ganji are elaborated upon.

## § 3.2 Ganji's Views on Human Rights

Ganji used the notion of human rights as illuminating in his political thought. When he substantiates this notion, he claims that human rights cannot be rejected on cultural grounds that it is a Western notion; on the contrary, human rights are universal because according to him the common suffering of all humanity indicates its universality.[38]

Ganji emphasizes this fact because oppressive and dictatorial regimes use the discourse of cultural differences to justify their rejection of human rights, consolidating their rule by eliminating democratic demands.[39] To Ganji, the common pain and depression of people is foundation of universal human rights. It is not about race, ethnicity, or any cultural assets. Insisting on cultural differences and rejecting the inheritance of human rights because of its Western origin is very detrimental to freedom, and movements that want democratic change in dictatorial regimes. Before the revolution, Islamic and public intellectuals took an anti-Western stance in the name of authenticity that justified their discourses as a return to root.[40] This reasoning became useful in the hands of perpetrators of the Islamic regime.

The founders and perpetrators of the Islamic regime, whenever faced with a political or social controversy, used this anti-Western discourse to justify their rule and substantiate their legitimacy in the eyes of the Iranian people. The Islamic regime in Iran behaves as if human rights are a Western concept. Under this logic, the regime can legislate, make juridical decisions, and execute the affairs of the country outside of the framework of human

38 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 6.

39 Ibid, p. 3.

40 Ali Mirsepassi, "Islam as a Modernizing ideology: Al-e Ahmad and Shari'ati," in *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization Negotiating Modernity in Iran,* 96-128. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

rights. Against this, Ganji purports that there is but one set of human rights, which applies to all ethnicities, nations, classes, gender, races, and cultures.[41]

The concept of human rights is seen not only in the writing and speeches of reformist intellectuals, but also in that of reformist politicians. In the following chapters, elaborating on the discourses of Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar, it will be argued that human rights carry special significance for them too because they see human rights as not only an ethical ideal but also as a political tool to struggle against the inequalities and injustices of the Islamic regime. Ganji, as one of these reformist intellectuals puts forward human rights to justify his own humanistic, and egalitarian view.

For Ganji, the critique of this uniformist, oppressive reading of human rights is crucial in the Iranian context because this narrow, culturalist reading extends to other notions like democracy, secularism, participation, inclusion, and every other concept that increases the possibility of social and individual oppositions that may shake the foundations of a dictatorial regime.

Ganji deepens the controversy and explicates his epistemological views on this issue. He is consistent in his claim that there is no a priori essence that makes him challenges all kinds of essentialisms either in society or politics.[42] This has also been reflected in his political thinking that secularism as a political principle does not have any racial, gender, ethnic, or national references.

Being against a priori essences in politics brings him around to an inclusionary principle of secularism: a political tool that can unite people of different ethnicities, races, classes, religions, sects, and ideologies. He advocates both free will and the idea of autonomy to a principle of pluralism.[43]

Being against a priori essences in political thought, he rejects of one of the most important tenants of post-modernism: relativism. Though post-

41 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 3.

42 Akbar Ganji, "Can Islam be Reformed?," 11 February 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/can-islam-be-reformed_b_6649674.html, (accessed 27 September 2015).

43 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 13.

modernism also rejects a priori essences, it argues that knowledge is relative. Ganji asserts that dictatorial governments justify their non-democratic values, using this relativistic conception of knowledge. While rejecting any view founded on a priori knowledge - such as essentialist arguments - Ganji also stands against relativistic readings of human rights and other democratic concepts.[44] In a discussion with Charles Taylor in April 2007 at Northwestern University, he clearly disagrees with the main arguments of the post-modern relativism, and its political manifestation proposed by Taylor: "communitarianism." Such relativistic readings of post-modernism say there are many paths to modernity. At first sight, this sounds fair but in the political sphere, it is used by dictatorial regimes and governments to justify repressive administrations. They argue their path is different from that of alien Westerners, and their alien Western concepts.[45] Ganji is aware that this relativistic and essentialist reading leads to pain and suffering among populations of dictatorial regimes.

Ganji also uses the history of Islam to show the validity of human rights. He explains the logic of several precepts in the Qur'an. According to his research, 99 percent of the legal precepts in the Qur'an were already ratified at the time: Islamic rules and traditions were not invented, on the contrary, the existing legal rules of the age were assumed as Islamic rules.[46] From this perspective, Ganji argues that the most comprehensive and common legal rules and traditions of the age, such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights, should be accepted by all governments, including Iran.

In Ganji's mind, the defending of human rights requires not only a fight against political essentialisms and relativistic readings of human rights that the Islamic regime holds, but also against the cultural essentialisms that grip society. The Islamic regime has transformed these cultural essentialisms into

44 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 32.

45 Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *İran Entellektüelleri ve Batı*, trans. Fethi Gedikli, (İstanbul: Yöneliş Yayınları, 2001), p. 37.

46 Akbar Ganji, "The Quran of Pacifists and the Quran of Warmongers," 23 January 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/the-quran-of-pacifists-an_b_4628581.html, (accessed 27 September 2015).

structural injustices and inequalities.[47] What are these cultural prejudices, essentialisms, and structural inequalities? To Ganji, dogmas, superstitious beliefs, and prejudices about women are the major cultural biases and essentialist views. The main structural inequality in the Islamic regime is between men and women.

The Islamic regime was established with the understanding that women and men are not equal. To that end, the Islamic regime enacted laws that abolished rights of women that were gained under shah's regime. After the revolution, the Family Protection Law of 1967 was abolished by the regime. The rights to initiate the divorce, to custody of children in case of divorce, to travel without permission from a male guardian or authority in the home, and to be a judge were abolished.[48] Moreover, women were forced to wear *hejab* (black scarfs).

Second, Akbar Ganji complains about Iranian cultural prejudices. He purports that discriminatory laws against women originate from cultural prejudices about masculinity and femininity.[49] These prejudices assert the superiority of men as well as the idea that women are uninformed who need supervision and guardianship of men.[50] These prejudices are even reflected in witty sayings people use in daily life - such as "manly manner" to emphasize virtuous person or behavior.[51]

Third, cultural essentialisms have always been pervasive among Iranian society, which can be seen in the discourses pre-revolutionary Iranian intellectuals like Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati. Al-e Ahmad's concept of Westoxication suggested that the idea of Westernization is a sickness.[52] He

47 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 33.

48 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 71.

49 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 74.

50 Ibid, p. 70.

51 Ibid, p. 78-79.

52 Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization Negotiating Modernity in Iran,* (Cambridge :Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 98.

argued for a return to purity and authentic roots of Iran. This idea captured the minds of most revolutionaries during and after the revolution. They accepted that the Western concepts and values are inferior and in decline. Any attempt to adopt Western values was labeled as Westoxication. Even today, anyone who attempts to promote democratic values is called traitor or spy of the West. Of course, this reflects the culturally essentialist line that the Islamic regime and its supporters follow. In terms of political and cultural essentialisms, the situation deteriorated with the Islamic regime in comparison to shah's. In that respect, cultural prejudices, essentialisms, and structural inequalities are intertwined with one another. This provides a suitable foundation, on which the Islamic regime rose up and suppressed anybody who demanded equality.

Ganji says the worst structural inequality in Iran places the *faqih* (Islamic clergy who is expert on the fıqh) above everybody else, enabling them see people as uninformed and ignorant, who is in need of the guardianship of clergy.[53] By this logic of the Islamic regime, the people are ignorant and women are the most uninformed. Islamic clergy of Iran establishes and consolidates its power on the basis of Islamic fıqh, which grants the *faqih* a privileged status as guardians of the people.[54]

The Islamic regime uses women to exercise their radical position and preserve their privileges.[55] Ganji underscores that there is a gender apartheid regime in Iran that denies rights of women. He investigates the reasons and concludes that discrimination against women at every level of politics and society goes hand in hand with the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system and survival of the Islamic regime.[56]

The nature of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih divides society into ones who are mature and informed and ones who are not. This is the perception of

53 Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization Negotiating Modernity in Iran,* (Cambridge :Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 98.

54 Akbar Ganji, "Observations of the Repression of Women," 26 May 2007, http://www.roozonline.com/english/opinion/opinion-article/article/observations-on-the-repression-of-women.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

structural inequality in the Iranian context. Ganji argues that fundamental equality between men and women is crucial for shaking the legitimacy of the regime because to Ganji, the regime is nurtured by the structural inequality that it has created between sexes. With the help of this structural inequality between men and women, the regime secures its uniformist and oppressive nature. The radical inequality between men and women is the starting point of this discussion and struggle. Any attempt to criticize the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih or inequality is seen as a direct attack on the regime's founders and perpetrators: survival of the regime depends on the continuation of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih and inequality. That is why the Islamic regime uses oppressive and uniformist governmental methods.

In Iran, the Islamic regime has created a system of political, economic, and social privilege. The privileged people are clerics, their friends, and their relatives. Because of Iran's isolation in international politics due to economic sanctions since 1996, which have been lifted in 2015, and the regime's anti-western stance, Iran has remained isolated.[57] Clergy and recently Revolutionary Guards have established a clientelist and nepotistic system from which only their networks benefit.[58] The society is organized around mafia-style relations through which the Islamic regime consolidates its power.[59]

The resources of the country are shared and allocated within this small circle that holds economic and political power. The correspondence between the holders of economic resources and power has consolidated the privileged system of clerics. Innternational isolation has also contributed to the Islamic regime's consolidation of its system: it operates without international checks and monitoring. Worse yet, democratic movements and people are affected by this isolation because their voices rarely have extended over the Iranian borders beset with sanctions.

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57 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 146.

58 Ibid, p. 121

59 Kazem Alamdari, "The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientalism, and Militarization of the Government," *Third World Quarterly,* 26:8, p. 1288.

Under such circumstances, Ganji argues that the Islamic regime has created an apartheid regime that gained strength through discrimination among its citizens and identities in society. These privileges have been conceded according to race, religion, and loyalty to the regime. In one of his articles on the hardliners of Iran, Ganji uses a binary concept that defines this inequality regime: khodi (one of us) and gheir-i khodi (the others).[60] Khodi means the people or groups who work with the regime, whose allegiance to the regime is strong, on the other hand, gheir-i khodi are those remaining outside this circle such as democratic social movements of the country like women's, intellectual, and youth movements that showed themselves in 2009 Green Movement demonstrations.

Ganji argues that the foundation of a true democracy requires the principle of equality. For him, this is necessary but not sufficient, because formal equality is only the first step towards a democratic country. The next step is the democratization of the institutions that govern society.[61] Establishing formal equality together with the abolishment of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih is just the beginning or foundation on which democratization can take place. For him, democratization is building a common ground for a plurality of differences.[62] At the end of this process, Ganji imagines a just society in which all persons live as free and equal members without oppression by the state. The mechanism for that end is a secular state that abolishes both the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih and the fusion of state and religion.

60 Akbar Ganji, "Iran's Hardliners Might Be Making a Comeback – And the West Should Pay Attention," 13 March 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/iran-hardliners-comeback_b_6857656.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

61 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 18.

62 Akbar Ganji, "Forum What Killed Egyptian Democracy," 21 January 2014, http://www.bostonreview.net/forum/what-killed-egyptian-democracy/akbar-ganji-response-egyptian-democracy, (accessed 28 September 2015).

## § 3.3 From Reformism to Civil-Disobedience

Akbar Ganji has always worked to find an answer to how Iranians can live together in peace without oppression by the state as free and equal members of society. Recently, in exile, he has emphasized secularism as a political principle. His discourse on the method of political change as varied through decades. At the beginning of the 1980s, he adopted revolutionary methods of bringing about political change like most young people of his generation in Iran, but in the 1980s and 1990s, he was captured by reformism and constitutionalism.

Reformism was a popular current when the presidency and important ministries were in the hands of reformists (1997-2005), but in the second part of 2000s, - especially after Ahmadinejad came to power - reformist and gradualist methods started to wane at every level of society and politics. Ganji saw this situation and shifted his discourse on method of political change from reformism to civil disobedience, and civil resistance to the illegitimate regime.

As mentioned, the Islamic regime has created a clientelist network through which it allocates the political and economic resources of the country. Most people in Iran know that the regime has a de facto "binary citizenship model" described by Ganji as khodi and gheyr-i khodi. This approach of the Islamic regime has led to a country rife with inequalities. People in the street say without the support of some influential friends or *aghazadeh* (the term given to the sons of clerics), you cannot get lucrative jobs because all such jobs are controlled by *aghazadeh* or people who work within that clientelist network.[63]

The essence of this situation requires us to question the legitimacy problem of the Islamic regime. One known description of politics suggests, "Politics is an art of sharing." In Iran, sharing of the resources is confined to khodis. It includes the government officials, clergy, families, relatives of cler-

63 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 61.

gy, officials of the Revolutionary Guards, and merchants.[64] Khodis form the 15 percent of the Iranian population; but they autonomously control and dominate both politics and economy on their own.[65]

The network that bonds these people is *bonyads* (foundations) that control the 40 percent of the Iranian economy.[66] The question is who is in charge of bonyads. To answer it, we have to take a look at its brief history. After the revolution, revolutionaries have established bonyads to control economic resources. One of the most important them was *Bonyad-e Mostazafan* (The Foundation of the Oppressed), which seized the assets and resources of Pahlavi Foundation, rich supporters of the shah's regime.[67] Bonyads extended their scope of power in the 1990s, while in the 2000s Revolutionary Guards increased its power by appropriating businesses from the state. They acquire business in the fields of banking, finance, construction, energy, and telecommunication.[68] In 2004, Revolutionary Guards closed the International Imam Khomeini Airport because of security concerns (a Turkish company, TAV, was running the airport). The administration of the airport then passed to the Revolutionary Guards. When Ahmedinejad came to power in 2005, they increased their power in economy by appropriating more businesses from the government, as well as in politics by sending members[69] of Revolutionary Guards to the elected bodies.[70] They acquired the business of gas

64 David E. Thaler, Alireza Nader, Shahram Chubin, Jerrold D. Green, Charlotte Lynch, Frederic Wehrey, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics,* (Pittsburgh: National Defense Research Institute, 2010), p. 52.

65 Ibid.

66 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 61.

67 David E. Thaler, Alireza Nader, Shahram Chubin, Jerrold D. Green, Charlotte Lynch, Frederic Wehrey, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics,* (Pittsburgh: National Defense Research Institute, 2010), p. 57

68 M. Mahtab Alam Rizvi, "Evaluating the Political and Economic Role of the IRGC," *Strategic Anaylsis,* 36:4, p. 590.

69 Anoush Ehtestami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution,* (London: I.B Tauris, 2007), p. 82

70 Ibid, p.84.

pipelines.[71] All this was in return for *Basij* (paramilitary forces) and Revolutionary Guards support for Ahmedinajed. The common point of bonyads and the Revolutionary Guards is there support for the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system.

Revolutionary Guards derive their power from two sources. One is Article 147 of the Iranian Constitution that enables them to take part in economic activities, and the second is regime's power relations within the regime by which they increased their political and economic power.[72] Both bonyads and the Revolutionary Guards are accountable only to the Supreme Leader. Again, the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system emerges as a mechanism that establishes and consolidates power relations, this time in economy. Given Iran's economic isolation, it has to smuggle the goods of which it is in need. This smuggling has been conducted under the control of Revolutionary Guards and the bonyads. The total amount of such smuggling reached 9.5 billion dollars.[73] Some other foundations - *Bonyad-e Janbaazan*, *Bonyad Shaheed*, and the Imam Charity Committee - that is free from checks from any mechanism although it gets the fourth largest share of the government budget.[74] Moreover, in the 2014 Corruption Perception Index Report by Transparency International, Iran was given 27 points on a scale of 0 to 200, which zero is the most highly corrupt.[75] This clearly shows that power relations in Iran have established an isolated; corrupt economy that provides privileges to its supporters through bonyads and the Revolutionary Guards. The so-called benefactors of this clientelist and nepotistic network justify their ac-

71 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 153.

72 Ibid.

73 See M. Mahtab Alam Rizvi, "Evaluating the Political and Economic Role of the IRGC," *Strategic Anaylsis,* 36:4, p. 592, and Kazem Alamdari, "The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientalism, and Militarization of the Government," *Third World Quarterly,* 26:8, p. 1291.

74 Kazem Alamdari, "The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientalism, and Militarization of the Government," *Third World Quarterly,* 26:8, p. 1293.

75 "Corruption Perceptions Index: 2014 Results," https://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results, (accessed 28 October 2015).

tions in the name of Islamic fiqh, Islamic ideology with the brutal actions of the Basij and the Revolutionary Guards.

Although reformists took steps to destroy these privileges and inequalities, they were faced with brutal methods of oppression by the Islamic regime because the regime was unwilling to lose its privileged power. Although reformists held the office of presidency and some ministeries, and the majority in the *Majles* (Assembly) till 2004, they were unable to make significant changes in the political and economic structure of Iran.[76] In 2005, when the neoconservative Ahmedinejad came to power, most reformists argued that the reformism had come to an end. Some studies even refer to the "disappearance" of the intellectual elites in that era.[77] But it is significant to make a distinction between the political organization and intellectual side of reformist movement. Although politicians lost power in 2005, the intellectual discourses of reformist movement were still on the minds of the people who faced oppressive regime.

Apart from external oppression imposed on reformism by the Islamic regime, there were also internal controversies: discussions among intellectuals, and politicians within the movement about reformist method. Ganji's imprisonment, inhumane treatment in the prison, failures of the reformist Khatami government and other political and social events made him believe that the reformist solutions and gradualist approach were invalid.

A few times he accused Khatami of wasting a great chance to transform the regime into a democratic system.[78] Ganji has claimed that under these harsh circumstances, breaking illegitimate laws became the only option. In

76 For the reasons of failure of Reformist Movement in 2000s, see Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 131.

77 Anoush Ehtestami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution,* (London: I.B Tauris, 2007), p. 90.

78 "Iran: Radio Farda Interview with Dissident Akbar Ganji," 28 July 2006, http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1070174.html, (accessed 27 September 2015).

one of his speeches he said people should choose non-violent disobedience and civil resistance.[79]

Although the Islamic regime had already lost its legitimacy because of its clientelist, repressive, and discriminatory behavior toward its citizens, it maintains legitimacy through elections and ideology.[80] To understand it, we need to examine the concept of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih, which is crucial for political Islam in Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini put the idea forward before the revolution to shape the model of Islamic government.[81] According to it, the leader namely Vali-ye Fıqh is the head of a pyramidal political structure.[82] The idea says the source of the legitimacy is God: the right to rule on behalf of God on earth was passed to the Prophet of Islam. After his death, Shi'a claim that this right passed to the Twelve Imams. According to belief of the Imamah, the twelfth imam will come back to earth as redeemer to establish an Islamic government, under which people will live rightfully.[83] Khomeini updated this and he said in the absence of the twelfth imam, the Islamic experts - namely clergy - are responsible for the governance and ensuring that life complies with the Islamic values and precepts.[84] Thus, in the absence of the twelfth Imam, the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system is the appropriate government model for Shi'a Islam. It becomes the source of legitimacy. That is why reformist intellectuals including Akbar Ganji, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Mohsen Kadivar struggle against the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih and base their discourses around this target. The ideological struggle of political Islam

79 "Interview de Akbar Ganji," 20 November 2007, http://www.mcgill.ca/channels/fr/news/interview-de-akbar-ganji-27996, (accessed 28 September 2015).

80 Akbar Ganji, "Iran's Peculiar Election: The Struggle Against Sultanism," *Journal of Democracy,* 16:4, p. 42.

81 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual* Revolution, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 104.

82 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual* Revolution, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 101

83 "The Twelve Imams," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Twelve_Imams (28 October 2015).

84 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual* Revolution, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 102.

is shaped around the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih model; without it, political Islam in Iran is not safe.

This model's emphasis on state and government makes it vulnerable to criticisms from within and without. Criticisms from within include Ayatollah Montazeri's rejection of theocratic authority because it meant the end of accountability and popular sovereignty.[85] Instead, he argued for constitutional limits on the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih.[86] On the other hand, criticisms from abroad including those of academic Oliver Roy, who believes that the system of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih is merely the dominance of politics over religion.[87] Any attempt to consolidate the foundations of the Islamic state in Iran actually accelerated the pace of dominance of politics over religion. He called this de facto secularization, which led to a crisis and decline of the influence of religion.[88] He thought that the crisis of political Islam leads to the privatization of religion, which is considered under the thesis of secularization.[89]

Second, elections are seen by Islamic clergy as necessary but insufficient, since the divine source of legitimacy cannot be left to ordinary people. However, elections are seen as tools that increase the *maqbuliyyet* (amenability) and functionality of the Islamic government.[90] The principle of amenability and thus elections are a cover to hide the elitist and oppressive nature of the Islamic regime. It is necessary to take a brief look at the political structure of Iran.

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85 Babak Rahimi, "Democratic authority, Public Islam, and Shi'i Jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani," *International Political Science Review,* 33(2), p. 194.

86 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual* Revolution, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 114

87 Oliver Roy, "The Crisis of Religious Legitimacy in Iran," *Middle East Journal*, vol.53, no.2, p. 201.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid, p. 215.

90 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual* Revolution, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 107.

The Assembly of Experts appoints and supervises the Supreme Leader.[91] Ostensibly, people vote on the Assembly of Experts but there is a structural trick here. The Council of Guardians, which has twelve members, examines the files of candidates for the Assembly of Experts. The Council of Guardians can block the legislation or disqualify the candidates who run for the presidency, the Majles, and the Assembly of Experts. Six members of the Council of Guardians are appointed by the Supreme Leader, the remaining six members are appointed by the head of Judiciary, who is also appointed by the Supreme Leader. In other words, the Supreme Leader de facto appoints all the members of the Council of Guardians, who in turn have the power to disqualify the candidates running for the Assembly of Experts, who in turn have the power of dismissing, supervising, and choosing the Supreme Leader.[92] It is thus clear that Supreme Leader remains in power without any checks and balances.

In this respect, the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih becomes a powerful mechanism that collects all powers in the office of the Supreme Leader. Against this, Ganji argues that the Islamic regime fabricates its own legitimacy, should be delegitimized so that it collapses at the end of this process. The method for delegitimization is civil resistance, disobedience of the people who refuse to co-operate with the regime. He underscores that doing so requires a long struggle and activist defense of peace, human rights, and equalities.[93]

When he argues for an "activist defense of peace," he mentions that freedom is not free and anyone who demands it must fight for it.[94] Ganji accepts

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91 David E. Thaler, Alireza Nader, Shahram Chubin, Jerrold D. Green, Charlotte Lynch, Frederic Wehrey, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics,* (Pittsburgh: National Defense Research Institute, 2010), p. 28

92 David E. Thaler, Alireza Nader, Shahram Chubin, Jerrold D. Green, Charlotte Lynch, Frederic Wehrey, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics,* (Pittsburgh: National Defense Research Institute, 2010), p. 29.

93 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 36.

94 Akbar Ganji, "Iran's Peculiar Election: The Struggle Against Sultanism," *Journal of Democracy,* 16:4, p. 51.

that the Western democracy and tolerance are the result of centuries of wars, and conflicts.[95] He also cites the Indian example, especially Mahatma Gandhi's struggle as activist defender of peace.[96] Ganji says that Gandhi distilled the idea of civil disobedience from his political struggle in India. In the light of these explanations and examples, he argues that breaking the illegitimate laws of the regime through peaceful methods and political struggle is the only option.[97] Hunger strikes, election boycotts, protests, and non-cooperation namely to counteract peremptory legal and political actions by the regime are among peaceful methods of civil disobedience for Ganji.[98] All these methods indicate pressure from below. Ganji says without pressure from below, there can be no change above in terms of democratic values.[99]

Ganji stresses Iran there has a neo-patrimonial political structure that is a version of sultanism, a term used by Max Weber.[100] Power is in the hands of one man who governs the country however he wants according to his discretion. Against this capricious sultanism, Ganji argues for civil disobedience with the help of civil society, since it can unite the demands of people for a collective struggle stronger than individual struggles.

Civil disobedience, however, is incongruent with the motto of reformism that proposes "legalism" - namely searching for solutions within the current

95 Ibid, 40.

96 "Iran: Radio Farda Interview with Dissident Akbar Ganji," 28 July 2006, http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1070174.html, (accessed 27 September 2015).

97 Ibid.

98 Akbar Ganji, "Iran's Peculiar Election: The Struggle Against Sultanism," *Journal of Democracy,* 16:4, p. 51.

99 Akbar Ganji, "Iran's Peculiar Election: The Struggle Against Sultanism," *Journal of Democracy,* 16:4, p. 51.

100 He uses Max Weber's concept of "sultanism," "Where domination is primarily traditional even though it is exercised by virtue of the ruler's personal autonomy, it will be called patrimonial authority. Where it indeed operates primarily on the basis of discretion it will be called sultanism." See Ganji's article, "The Latter Day Sultan Power and Politics in Iran," November-December 2008, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2008-11-01/latter-day-sultan, (accessed 28 September 2015).

constitution.[101] On that point, Ganji clearly diverges from other reformist intellectuals and politicians who still insist on constitutional solutions to the problems. Ganji says you cannot get permission for a street demonstration from Internal Affairs, because according to them you are anti-Islam. Any demand by gheyr-i khodi will not only be rejected by the regime, but will be oppressed in other ways, as well.[102] He finds constitutionalist methods ineffective. But civil disobedience is different from the revolutionary methods in that it aims to delegitimize the government. This discourse directly correspondens to his life - especially to his prison time when he used hunger strikes, and boycotts to attract the international attention to reveal the strong democratic demands at the societal level in Iran.

When Ahmedinejad came to office in 2005, his radical discourses became the subject of both national and international politics. At the national level, he opposed the progress made so far by reformist intellectuals and politicians, using populist and anti-democratic arguments and actions.[103] He destroyed the reformist agenda and advocated a return of religion to the public spheres in constrast with reformist administration had liberalized public spaces including parks, bookshops, and university campuses.[104] Ahmedinejad and his supporters including Revolutionary Guards, Basij, and the clergy believed that reformism should have no share of the political power after eight years rule. Pressure on women increased and the "morality polices" started to challenge women who did not dress according to the Islamic values, especially in the streets of Tehran.[105] Intellectuals were isolated because of the repression imposed on them. Akbar Ganji, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Mohsen Kadivar, chose exile in this era. Many reformists, who held the

101 Akbar Ganji, "Iran's Peculiar Election: The Struggle Against Sultanism," *Journal of Democracy,* 16:4, p. 42.

102 "Iran: Radio Farda Interview with Dissident Akbar Ganji," 28 July 2006, http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1070174.html, (accessed 27 September 2015).

103 Anoush Ehtestami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution,* (London: I.B Tauris, 2007), p. 65.

104 Ibid, p. 73

105 Ibid, p. 92.

governmental and administrative posts, were forced to resign.[106] Ahmedinejad appointed a hard-liner conservative to the Ministry of Culture. In this era, 5 million websites were closed and thousands of bloggers were arrested.[107] Ahmedinejad era also caused a clash between youth and the regime. By trying to bury the revolutionary martyrs on university campuses, he targeted the public space, against which university students resisted. It ended with Basij raids on university campuses in 2009.[108]

At an international level, he brought the country to the edge of war because of his strong insistence on Iran's nuclear program. After the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration designated Iran as a member of the axis of evil. Around this doctrine, the Bush administration formulated its "War on Terrorism" concept to justify military intervention in the countries where democratic norms and principles were not implemented.

When these events took place, the possibility of war on Iran was raised. Ganji insisted that there was no need to deteriorate the situation with destroying the millions of lives of Iranian people with a war whose consequences would be dire. Ganji says the military intervention from international actors should be absolutely rejected, he believed that democracy in Iran can be brought about only through its own dynamics not by foreign forces and military power.[109] Ganji thinks that wars or the probability of war breeds insecurity and insecurity in turn breeds fundamentalism, not democracy.[110] In the Iranian context, thirty-five years of military threats by Iraq, United States, Israel, and other outside forces have "securitized" Iran. The process has consolidated the Islamic regime and its military branch, namely

106 Anoush Ehtestami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution,* (London: I.B Tauris, 2007), p. 90.

107 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 159.

108 Ibid, p. 160.

109 Akbar Ganji, "A Plea from the Iranian People," 24 September 2007, https://www.thenation.com/article/plea-iranian-people/, (accessed 28 October 2015).

110 Akbar Ganji, "Moving the Lawn in Iraq by Turning it into a Jihadist's land," http://www.middleeasteye.net/essays/mowing-lawn-iraq-turning-it-jihadists-land-843591656, (accessed 28 September 2015).

the Revolutionary Guards. Even the probability of war against Iran makes the Islamic regime more aggressively repressive towards the democrats on the inside. His anti-war and pro-democracy views were expressed in a letter to the General Secretary of United Nations, Ban-Ki-Moon, saying that the Iranian democrats reject military intervention in the name of democracy.[111] Against the wars, and fundamentalism in Middle East (specifically in Iran) her urges a secular peace that is not based on ethnic, religious or any world view but rather on the principles of human rights, secularism, democracy, equality and justice.[112] So, his anti-war stance went hand in hand with his insistence of democratic progress from within.

Moreover, the Bush administration's insistence on the option of military intervention made democratic individuals and movements in Iran vulnerable to the regime forces because those people were advocating concepts like democracy, secularism, and human rights that the Islamic regime attributed to Western origins. People who advocated these notions were labeled spies of the West, and traitors by the regime as a way to discredit them.[113] Ganji urges that the main challenge of Iran is to change its system from the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih to a secular democracy on the basis of human rights and separation of state and religion.[114] The best way to that end is civil disobedience of democratic movements of Iran including those of intellectuals, youth, and women. To sum, civil disobedience as a method of political change is one of the cornerstones of Ganji's political thought. It is not only an option for delegitimizing the Islamic regime in Iran but also as a strategic

111 Akbar Ganji, 24 September 2007, "A Plea From the Iranian People," https://www.thenation.com/article/plea-iranian-people/ (28 September 2015).

112 Akbar Ganji, "Confronting Terrorism and Stability in the Middle East: The Common National Interest of Iran and the United States," 23 June 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/confronting-terrorism-and_b_5516243.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

113 Akbar Ganji, "Why Iran's Democrats Shun Aid," 26 October 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/25/AR2007102502216.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

114 Akbar Ganji, "Rafsanjani and Khamenei: Rouhani Element," 27 September 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/09/rafsanjani-khamenei-rouhani-element-20139269541536640 4.html, (accessed 28 October 2015).

tool that sway international public opinion about the existence of democratic demands among Iranian people.

## § 3.4 Ganji's Secular Democratic Ideal

So far the concepts and intellectual struggle that were examined gather and flow towards secular democracy. Before examining Ganji's discourses on secular democracy, the multifarious components of Iran's population should be explained.

Iranian society is comprised of different ethnicities like Persians, Azeris, Kurds, Balochs, Lors, and Arabs; different religious groups including Shi'as, Sunnis, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Baha'is; different political groups like conservatives, nationalists, leftists, secularists, atheists and religious democrats, and many other identities and economic classes.[115] Respectively, Persians account for the 51 percent of the population, Azeris 24 percent, Kurds 7 percent, Arabs 3 percent, Lurs 2 percent, Baloch 2 percent, Turkmen 2 percent and the other 1 percent.[116] Predominant religious view Shi'a comprising the 89 percent of the population while 9 percent is Sunni. Iran has great diversity in its population; nevertheless international institutions and associations condemn Iran for discriminatory policies directed against its own citizens. According to United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (CIRF) Annual Report of 2015, Iran is among the countries of particular concern in terms of religious freedom.[117] The report claims that while even defenders of human rights can be accused of charging "enmity against God" and sentenced to death, and the situation of constitutionally recog-

115 For detailed information about minorities in Iran see Hussein D. Hassan, updated 25 November 2008, *CRS Report for Congress Iran: Ethnic and Religious Minorities*, https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34021.pdf, (accessed 28 September 2015).

116 For detailed information about minorities in Iran, see Hussein D. Hassan, updated 25 November 2008, *CRS Report for Congress Iran: Ethnic and Religious Minorities*, https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34021.pdf, (accessed 28 September 2015). p. CRS-3.

117 "United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report 2015," http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/09/rafsanjani-khamenei-rouhani-element-20139269541536640 4.html, (accessed 28 October 2015), p. 45.

nized minority groups is equally problematic.[118] Moreover, the European Union and the United Nations occasionally admonish the Iranian government to take care about human rights and oversee death penalty, minorities, and women rights.[119] In 2004 and 2005, the United Nations General passed a resolution, condemning the violation of human rights in Iran.[120]

Ganji thinks only secular democracy can provide unfailing equality, freedom, and justice amidst this diversity. In his mind, a secular polity is the only way to realize a peaceful and just society. In that sense, he sees secular democracy as a tool for reaching democracy in which every citizen has the right to think and to express it freely in the political and social realms. This is an important divergence from the mainstream perception of secularism. The political reflection of philosophical secularism is secular fundamentalism that excludes the arguments of religious people from the public sphere. Iranian society suffered a bitter experience under the shah'ss regime. The shah was so keen on a vulgar, and violent interpretation of philosophical secularism in political field that this resulted in exclusion of religious reason from public sphere. This kind of aggressive secularism is rejected by Akbar Ganji. He does not see secularism as an end unto itself, but as a political tool that can benefit not only the people of Iran, but in all of the Middle East.

Ganji uses secularism as a political principle that can provide democracy to the people and maintain the social unity while rejecting fundamentalist, uniformist, and repressive perspective in the implementation. Using secularism as a political principle, in theory, excludes the excluding mechanisms in the political structure thus ending the system of the privileged, and leading the way to an egalitarian society that recognizes differences, and respects natural, basic rights in the public sphere and at the governmental level.

Secularism as a political principle has been discussed by imminent figures including Rajeev Bhargava, who proposes political secularism as a principle of the state. Bhargava defines political secularism as the principle that

118 Ibid.

119 Kerim Yıldız and Tanyel B. Taysı, *The Kurds in Iran The Past, Present and* Future, (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 100

120 Ibid, p. 101.

rejects ultimate ideals in the state, to protect daily life.[121] It is about finding common good through equal participation by all identities in a community.[122] His goal is a durable polity on the basis of common good. On the other hand, he argues that the counterpart of political secularism is ethical secularism: an idea of secularism that excludes pious people. This has created a conflict between political and ethical secularism that is an ongoing discussion in Western world, as well.[123] Iran does not stand outside of this discussion because of what it has experienced politically and socially after the revolution. Ganji's notion of secularism is very close to Bhargava's.

Increasing religious fundamentalism is concrete evidence of religion's presence in modern day politics and social life. Religion has increasingly been used for political ends.[124] One of the consequences of such use of religion is the fusion of state and religion. In socio-politic terms, it is dangerous because incorporation of one religious view and/or identity with the state creates a dominatory and exclusionary power without check and open to exploitation. Iran is an important case study for the academics, which study secularism since it is a clear example of the fusion of state and religion.

The adoption of one comprehensive doctrine by the state always creates problems: the Islamic regime in Iran is no exeption. The fusion of state and religion in Iran has created a leviathan state that dominates every aspect of people's lives in the name of religion, while witholding some of the basic political and social rights as in the example of women. So, it is very understandable for Ganji to claim for secular democracy, which requires separation of state and comprehensive doctrines.

To emphasize the importance of secularism as a requirement of democracy, Ganji says that wherever there is democracy, you can find secularism

121 Rajeev Bhargava, "What is Secularism For?" http://law.uvic.ca/demcon/victoria_colloquium/documents/WhatisSecularismforPreSeminarReading.pdf, (accessed 28 October 2015), p. 10-11.

122 Ibid, p. 37.

123 Ibid, p. 7.

124 Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14:1, p. 2.

but inverse is not true.[125] The existence of secularism in a country does not necessarily imply the democracy. Shah's Iran is a clear example. It was a secular regime, but undemocratic. This is one of the most important aspects of Ganji's approach to secularism: he rejects fundamentalism in either form - religious or secular - because it is hostile to democracy.[126]

In his articles he argues against the secular fundamentalism of shah's regime that neither respected the rights of people nor provided democratic institutions at a social or political level to establish democratic culture and mechanisms. Ganji is aware that Iranian society was alienated by the state under Reza Shah government because of his inclination to rule like a despot.[127] His attempts to secularize society including walls on compulsory clothing and the regime's struggle to disallow veiled women in the streets led to societal and cultural violence. In the end, some women even committed suicide.[128] When his increasing tendency towards despotism combined with his interventions in social life, the result was a tension and controversy between the state and society. Islamic politicians and clergy have always used this tension.

On the other hand, the impositions of both the shah's and Islamic regime in regard to Iranian women are held up by Ganji to substantiate his rejection of fundamentalist, non-democratic political structures. He says shah's regime forced women to take off their hijab, while Islamic regime compelled

125 "Akbar Ganji in Conversation with Charles Taylor," http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/ganji-taylor-interview3.pdf, (accessed 27 September 2015), p. 7.

126 Akbar Ganji, "The Latter Day Sultan Power and Politics in Iran," November-December 2008, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iran/2008-11-01/latter-day-sultan, (accessed 28 September 2015).

127 Homa Katouzian, "Rıza Şah Döneminde Devlet ve Toplum," in *Türkiye ve İran'da Otoriter Modernleşme Atatürk ve Rıza Şah Dönemleri,* eds. Touraj Atabaki and Eric J. Zürcher (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2012), p. 38.

128 Homa Katouzian, "Rıza Şah Döneminde Devlet ve Toplum," in *Türkiye ve İran'da Otoriter Modernleşme Atatürk ve Rıza Şah Dönemleri,* eds. Touraj Atabaki and Eric J. Zürcher (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2012), p. 36.

them to wear them.[129] As legal requirements, both are authoritarian in nature.

Accordingly, Ganji asserts that the aggressive laïcité of France and that of Mustafa Kemal in Turkey, which are exclusionary, are detrimental to democracy and cannot be implemented, since they create inequality and a lack of freedom in practice.[130] Ganji cites Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's aggressive position, saying that Mustafa Kemal imposed laïcité from above in the mold of French model, creating tension in the society. This implementation of secularism led to the exclusion and alienation of some parts of the population. Furthermore, this imposition of aggressive laïcité - which is a fundamentalist form on the spectrum of secularism – was also adopted by shah's regime and it created the same political tensions and pains in Iran. Ganji suggests that instead of aggressive French laïcité, the more liberal United States constitution could be followed.[131] He refers to the first amendment to the United States constitution, which says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." This liberal perspective on secularism is favored by Ganji, which he proposed to the Egpytian people in the midst of the social maelstrom that was the Arab Spring. He discusses it because he argues that the secularism model of Mobarek regime resembled the aggressive laïcité of the French and Turkish models, which are incompatible with democracy.[132]

Against this kind of secularism, Ganji proposes secular democracy as a political principle on the basis of secular reasoning. The main argument is that the justification of political decisions, public policies; executive, legisla-

129 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 52.

130 Akbar Ganji, "Forum What Killed Egyptian Democracy," 21 January 2014, http://www.bostonreview.net/forum/what-killed-egyptian-democracy/akbar-ganji-response-egyptian-democracy, (accessed 28 September 2015).

131 Ibid.

132 Akbar Ganji, "Forum What Killed Egyptian Democracy," 21 January 2014, http://www.bostonreview.net/forum/what-killed-egyptian-democracy/akbar-ganji-response-egyptian-democracy, (accessed 28 September 2015).

tive, and judicial actions should be based on secular reasoning on the condition that they not exclude anybody from the public sphere or suppress reasoning and/or expression of any citizen.[133]

Ganji examines three definitions of secularism. He says there are three definitions of secularism. One is atheism, defined by Marx, Durkheim, and Weber through functional differentiation and de-mystification.[134] The second one delimits the role of religion in public sphere, which Ganji believes is impossible in the Iranian context. The third one is a separation of religion and government that is compatible with Islam. Ganji argues that religion can be present in public sphere, but any argument in public sphere should be put forward on the basis of secular reasoning.[135]

The importance of secular reasoning derives from the great diversity in terms Iran's society. Although multifarious nature of the society, the political structure has been dominated by a comprehensive doctrine such that only the Shi'a and Persian components of Iran wield power. More specifically, a radically conservative, Shi'a, Persian, male, identity group has assumed power in every corner of Iran. The doctrinal reflection of this identity is political Islam. Ganji thinks that instead of that comprehensive doctrine of political Islam, the collective secular reason via democratic institutions, and civil society on the basis of common good should govern.

Ganji purports that the system that has coordinated and perpetuated this kind of power relations in Iran is the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih, which derives its legitimacy from God, and bases reasoning on the Islamic Fiqh. So for Ganji, the first goal to realize a secular democratic polity is the abolishment of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system.[136]

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133 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 84.

134 Ibid.

135 Akbar Ganji, "Why Secularism is Compatible with the Quran and the Sunnah –And an 'Islamic State' Is Not," 27 January 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/secularism-islam-islamic-state_b_6426300.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

136 Akbar Ganji, "Rafsanjani and Khamenei: Rouhani Element," 27 September 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/09/rafsanjani-khamenei-rouhani-element-201392695415366404.html, (accessed 28 October 2015).

Ganji points out that although religion is an individual affair, it can be present in public sphere, in contradistinctions to the impositions of French laïcité against Muslim girls, prohibiting them from wearing hijab in public spheres like schools.[137] Ganji argues that religion is notl like clothe: you cannot pus aside your religion, when you enter the public sphere.[138] Both reasons encourage him to demand a public place for religions, but not at the political level. Justification in the public domain - namely public policies, legislation, judiciary acts, and executive actions - should be accomplished with secular reasoning.[139] Unless there are valid secular arguments, our lifestyle and behavior should not be limited moreover; the laws founded on secular reasoning should not limit people's lives or discriminate against any group on the basis that there identity is different from the ones in power.[140]

This reasoning could create a mutual trust and peace that have been long absent in Iran. Ganji supposes that a secular peace of this kind can be a foundation for a just Iranian state that provides freedom and equality. He searches for a common good for plurality of views and identities.

In recent years, Ganji occasionally refers to the work of John Rawls, an American philosopher, who puts forward political liberalism and "political" conception of justice as an inclusionary principle. He defines the differences of modern society as "reasonable pluralism," and the method for people to reconcile with their differences is political conception of justice or political liberalism that can create a peaceful and just society, the members of which live equally and freely. Rawls says a modern society consists of various comprehensive doctrines. The best way to overcome the problem is to find a rea-

137 "Interview Akbar Ganji," 11 March 2007, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2007/03/interview-akbar-ganji, (accessed 27 September 2015).

138 Akbar Ganji, "Why Secularism is Compatible with the Quran and the Sunnah –And an 'Islamic State' Is Not," 27 January 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/secularism-islam-islamic-state_b_6426300.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

139 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 84.

140 Ibid.

sonable basis of justification.[141] Significantly Rawls does not exclude religious arguments from private or public spheres on the condition that their arguments in the public sphere must be reasonable. But the constitution and the institutions of the state should be based on collective reason, in his terms, "overlapping consensus." The state and its institution cannot be dominated by a comprehensive doctrine.

Akbar Ganj encountered the ideas of John Rawls while in exile and Rawlsian ideas have influenced him. After 2007, Rawlsian ideas are apparent in his writings and speeches and have opened a space for Ganji to discuss and spread the concepts of "reasonable pluralism" and "overlapping consensus." These concepts were already in Ganji's mind before he encountered with them in theoretical form. The affect of Rawls helped to clarify Ganji's political and philosophical thought about the relations of state-society-individual and religion.

The ideas of Rawls are appropriate instruments for making the society more democratic and peaceful. Ganji recognizes these as the best political, philosophically ethical tools to the ends of a peaceful, egalitarian, and just society. In a 2007 discussion with Charles Taylor in Chicago, he put forward the Rawlsian solution for the problems of Iran.[142] After 2006, since he has been an exile, he has referred to John Rawls in his articles and speeches several times when discussiong the pluralism and the ideal just society.[143]

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141 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. XX.

142 "Akbar Ganji in Conversation with Charles Taylor," http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/ganji-taylor-interview3.pdf, (accessed 27 September 2015), p. 14.

143 See his articles referring to Rawls: Akbar Ganji and Richard Falk, "Outlaw State of Israel, Part I," http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/08/outlaw-state-israel-part-i-201481913415799046 2.html (accessed 20 April 2016), Akbar Ganji, "Observations of the Repression of Women," 26 May 2007, http://www.roozonline.com/english/opinion/opinion-article/article/observations-on-the-repression-of-women.html, (accessed 28 September 2015), and Akbar Ganji, "Forum What Killed Egyptian Democracy," 21 January 2014, http://www.bostonreview.net/forum/what-killed-egyptian-democracy/akbar-ganji-response-egyptian-democracy, (accessed 28 September 2015). Akbar Ganji in Conversation with Charles Taylor," http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/ganji-taylor-interview3.pdf, (accessed 27 September 2015).

It is worthwhile to explicate the main lines of John Rawls' thinking. First, Political liberalism or the "political" conception of justice asserts that a plurality of differences - including both reasonable and comprehensive doctrines - is a normal consequence of humanity.[144] Political liberalism accepts the plurality as "reasonable pluralism."[145] However, the question for Rawls is how is it possible for reasonable and comprehensive, incompatible doctrines to live together and accept a democratic constitution. What is the source of overlapping consensus?[146] To him, the "political" conception of justice in a democratic constitutional regime is the suitable answer.[147] Rawls argues that people have a diversity of views including both reasonable, and comprehensive. Comprehensive doctrines exclude the other views on the basis of its own supposed superior arguments. On the other hand, the "political" conception of Rawls is an idea that complies with all.[148] In that sense, Rawls does not present the conception of "political" as a superior "true."[149] In short, what Rawls desires is a social unity by removing comprehensive doctrines out of the political institutions and state. Only reasonable arguments may take part in state institutions.

Rawls' questioning and his answer inspired Ganji who was already arguing for the separation of state and religion, but thereafter substantiated his arguments on the basis of Rawlsian concepts that exclude comprehensive doctrines from the state.

Ganji is aware that the individuals who form the society have conflicting and comprehensive views in Rawlsian terms. As Ganji puts it, democracy means recognizing differences,[150] and the problem is to find a common

144 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. xv1

145 Ibid, p. XIX.

146 Ibid, p. XVIII.

147 Ibid, p. XVIII.

148 Ibid, p.XIX.

149 Ibid, p. XX.

150 Akbar Ganji, "Observations of the Repression of Women," 26 May 2007, http://www.roozonline.com/english/opinion/opinion-article/article/observations-on-the-repression-of-women.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

ground for plurality of views.[151] For Ganji, the main goal to attain to that end is to abolish the *Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih* and bring about a separation of state and religion.[152]

Ganji emphasizes that secularism can be the principle for all Iranians to live together in peace and without repression by the state. For example, in a discussion with Charles Taylor, he argues that political liberalism is the separation of moral views (a kind of comprehensive view) - namely religious teachings - from the state.[153] When he put forward the Rawlsian solution, he mentions that all "comprehensive doctrines" should be outside of the realm of the state. As Ganji puts it, in the formation of a secular polity in Iran, no group or individual in the society no matter how small can be sacrificed.[154] Without exception, a plurality of different views can be discussed freely and take part in politics and state without dominating and excluding others.

For John Rawls, the common ground for living together peacefully as equal and free members of a society is to hold to the "political" conception of justice that excludes comprehensive views from taking part in the process of political decision-making. On the other hand, Ganji asserts that for the common ground for a just society, the members of which equal and free, the state and religion should be separate and a secular polity should be established on the basis of secular reasoning that does not exclude any identities or arguments from public or private sphere. But at the political and judicial levels, the reasoning should be secular, because it is an all-embracing model. Whereas Rawls' approach to social and political problems of living together in peace is from a political reading of justice, Ganji's approach is a political

151 Akbar Ganji, "Forum What Killed Egyptian Democracy," 21 January 2014, http://www.bostonreview.net/forum/what-killed-egyptian-democracy/akbar-ganji-response-egyptian-democracy, (accessed 28 September 2015).

152 Akbar Ganji, "Co-opting the Struggle for Democracy," 23 November 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/11/co-opting-struggle-democracy-201311211134289197 32.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

153 "Akbar Ganji in Conversation with Charles Taylor," http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/ganji-taylor-interview3.pdf, (accessed 27 September 2015), p. 14.

154 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 26.

reading of secularism principle. I believe they share the same conception of "political."

Ganji is not a multiculturalist. Instead he puts forward the idea of commonality and common good among as universal values. An all-embracing state on the basis of common good and overlapping consensus in Rawlsian terms can be a suitable tool for reaching that end. He argues that the difference between Charles Taylor's communitarian ideas and Rawls' political liberalism is the struggle between the primacy of right and the primacy of good.[155] Multiculturalism or communitarian solutions are based on the primacy of rights and aims to provide rights to every identity group. On the other hand, the primacy of good desires to establish an overlapping consensus in society. It is about finding commonalities, while the primacy of rights carries the risk of isolation of different groups, and reducing the potentials of communication and connection in society. Secularism as a political principle arises from the basis of the common good.

Ganji also tries to de-substantiate the notion of Islamic government and the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih by claiming that Qur'an did not endorse any governance model instead left it to Muslims.[156] Ganji, taking strength from this reasoning, asserts that the best government for Muslims is secularism; moreover, it is the best antidote to religious fundamentalism in the Middle East.[157] The fact that Islam did not dictate any government model for people is an evidence for Ganji to show Muslims can live under a secular regime.

Furthermore he argues that modern Islam has no problem living under a secular polity based on the separation of religion and state. He goes on to claim that if Muslims do not demand a secular government, then the power

155 Akbar Ganji and Charles Taylor, "Akbar Ganji in Conversation with Charles Taylor," Northwestern University Discussion (Illinois, US), April 11 and 12, 2007, p. 14.

156 Akbar Ganji, "Why Secularism is Compatible with the Quran and the Sunnah –And an 'Islamic State' Is Not," 27 January 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/secularism-islam-islamic-state_b_6426300.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

157 Akbar Ganji, "Why Secularism is Compatible with the Quran and the Sunnah –And an 'Islamic State' Is Not," 27 January 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/secularism-islam-islamic-state_b_6426300.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

will be captured by the few who will use it to gain more power.[158] In that sense, a state based on Islam, which is a comprehensive view, is unacceptable according to Ganji.

Ganji argues that only by embracing secularism, can Iran create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Finally, Ganji says that Muslims can live with a secular polity that provides a peaceful and secure sphere - not only in Iran, but also elsewhere in the Middle East. For Ganji, the idea that Muslims cannot live in secular regimes – given painful historical examples like shah's regime and undemocratic secular regimes in other Arab countries including Egypt, Iraq, and Syria – is false. The model Ganji proposes is a political reading of secularism that has the potential to embrace all kinds of identities without placing one in dominant position at the political, state level.

To Ganji, secular Islam is an antidote to fundamentalist Islam. That is also one of the reasons why Muslims in the Middle East should support a secular polity that requires the separation of religion and state. Ganji claims that Islamic fundamentalism is the child of modern times, and a modern Islam that advocates a secular polity is in the best position to struggle against it.[159] For that reason, the struggle for democracy and secularism in Iran carries is significant. If a secular and democratic polity were to be established in Iran, it would be a gateway to other Middle Eastern countries troubled by fundamentalist groups. He says Middle East needs a secular peace based on human rights not ethnic, and religious or comprehensive convictions.[160]

Not only for Iran, but also for other Middle Eastern countries, the best solution is to take religion away from dictators and replace it with secular polity that rejects any comprehensive views at the political decision-making

158 Ibid.

159 Akbar Ganji, "Confronting Isis Has No Military Solution," 1 September 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/confronting-isis-has-no-m_b_5910772.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

160 Akbar Ganji, "Confronting Terrorism and Stability in the Middle East: The Common National Interest of Iran and the United States," 23 June 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/confronting-terrorism-and_b_5516243.html, (accessed 28 September 2015).

level, thus opening space for all who want to take part in political processes.[161]

To wrap up, Akbar Ganji's position evolved from reformism salt solutions within the Islamic regime to secular democratic principles. It can be argued that he has always worked for a democratic Iran in which all members can live peacefully as equal and free members. I think, he done through his intellectual endeavors and discourses both as a journalist a prisoner in Iran, and in exile through his theoretical discussions as a thinker and journalist. His dialogue with Rawlsian thought and Charles Taylor made him familiar with the Western political and philosophical discussions about the role of religion between state and individuals. That is why he refers to Western thought specifically to John Rawls. In the second part of the 2000s, he increasingly holds on to secularism as a political principle that can maintain the unity without excluding religion from the public sphere, but excluding it from the state.

161 Ibid.

# 4

## Transformation from "Cautious Secularism" to "Political Secularism": Abdolkarim Soroush

Abdolkarim Soroush is a leading figure among reformist, religious intellectuals. His effect on post-revolutionary religious intellectuals was so much that he was known as one of the founding fathers of reformist, religious intellectualism in the 1990s. Without taking his intellectual struggle into consideration, it is impossible to grasp the changing intellectual position of reformist religious intellectuals from "religious democracy" to "political secularism" in the second part of the 2000s.

Reformist, religious intellectuals, and specifically Abdolkarim Soroush, represents a break from the intellectual past of Iran in terms of discourse they use in their speech and work. They emphasized democracy, freedom, civil society, tolerance, and non-intervention of religion in the politics, while religious intellectuals of the pre-revolutionary period were influenced by Marxism, socialism, and third-worldism.[1] The best example of the pre-revolutionary period is Ali Shariati, which was counted among the main ideologues of the 1979 Iranian revolution. For him, the Iranian people should fight to topple the existing social and political order, because it provided nei-

1 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "The New Intellectuals in Iran," *Social Compass*, 51:191, p. 200.

ther a just nor equal political and social structure to the people.[2] The ideological power to that end was derived from the native Islamic roots, not from alien, Western concepts like democracy.[3] What he did was the fuse of religion and radical politics.[4] While pre-revolutionary religious intellectualism based on ideological and revolutionary Islam purified of alien, Western concepts, post-revolutionary reformist, religious intellectualism rejected ideological stance and championed the western concepts including democracy in the name of Islamic democracy.

Soroush used hermeneutics to provide alternative Islamic interpretations in compliance with democracy, popular will, political participation, and political accountability against official, rigid and ideological readings of the Islamic regime. By making interpretations of Islamic texts compatible with democracy, he tried to reform and secularize Islam throughout the 1990s.

The philosophy of science and Karl Popper were quite influential in his intellectual formation. He used Popper's concepts for his model, namely religious democracy. By referring to Popper's "historicity" concept, he put forward that Islam is a historical phenomenon, the sources of which should be examined and read in light of its historical context. He argued that although religion is eternal, the verses and behaviors that create injustice and inequality should be reformed and annulled. Moreover, in Soroush's works, he clearly and often used the concepts of philosophy of science like critical reason. In that sense, the ideas of Western enlightenment have affected Soroush. However, by claiming vague concepts such as "religious democracy," he avoided being called a Western, scientific, secularist intellectual. After all, these concepts had a negative image in Iranian history because of shah's top-down attempts at modernization. This dilemma made him cautious about using the Western concepts like secularism. Although he defended a secularized Islam, he did not mention it explicity till the second part of the 2000s. That is why I define his intellectual position in the 1990s as "cautious secularist."

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2 Ali Mirsepassi, "Islam as a Modernizing Ideology: Al-e Ahmad and Shari'ati," in *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization Negotiating Modernity in Iran,* 96-128. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 116.

3 Ibid, p. 116.

4 Ibid, p. 115.

However, due to changes in Iran's socio-political context, he expressed his ideas about secularism more explicitly in the second part of the 2000s. Furthermore, more than trying to secularize Islam, he argued for political secularism that requires the separation of state and religion in Iran. Thus, we see his transformation from "cautious secularist," to explicit "political secularism." Before examining his intellectual discourses, his biography will shed light his intellectual and political struggle.

Abdolkarim Soroush was born in Tehran in 1945. The name Abdolkarim Soroush is actually a pseudonym; his real name is Farajollah (or Hosayn) Dabbagh,[5] though everybody knows him by the pseudonym. He passed his university exams and studied pharmacy at Tehran University. After finishing, he went to London to study analytical chemistry as a graduate student.[6] He decided to make a post-doctorate study on the philosophy of science in 1974. He spent five and half year to the study of philosophy of science at Chelsea College in London. These years have become significant for both his intellectual career and intellectual movement of post-revolutionary Iran. There, as he himself puts it, he met with the ideas of famous philosophers of science including Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, and Paul Feyerabend.[7]

The study of the philosophy of science includes the examination of the development of rationality, critical thought, science, scientific idea, and secularization in Western world. These concepts and Karl Popper's philosophy directly influenced young Soroush and made him a staunch follower of these concepts and the philosophy of science. All his life, Soroush championed these concepts especially since the reformist movement took form at the beginning of the 1990s. Soroush introduced the philosophy of science, Popperian philosophy, and related concepts in Iran after he returned in September 1979 through conferences, publishing books and articles, and giving lectures

5 Afshin Matin Asgari, "Abdolkarim Soroush and the secularization of Islamic thought in Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 30:1, p. 96.

6 "Biography," http://drsoroush.com/en/biography/, (accessed 15 November 2015).

7 Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 9.

at Tehran University.[8] Soroush's articles after 1979 are indicative of the Popperian influence and his concern about the philosophy of science. The works include: "The Problem of Induction" (1982), "The Notion of Empirical Testing" (1985), "What is Science, What is Philosophy" (1982), and a newly published book, "*Critical Introduction to Dialectical Logic*" (1978).[9] Moreover, between 1980 and 1991, he gave the philosophy of science lectures at various universities including Tehran, Mashhad, and Shiraz universities.[10] He also compiled some of his works about the philosophy of science, secularism, and tradition, publishing books with famous Western publishing house like Oxford and Brill. Oxford University Press published *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam* in 2000; *Bast-e Tajrobeh-yi Navabi* was published by Brill Press under the name *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience* in 2009. Moreover, he published many books in Persian some of which include *Elm Cheest? Falsafeh Cheest*? (What is Science? What is Philosophy) in 1978, *Razdani va Roshanfekri va Dindari* (Wisdom, Intellectualism and Religious Conviction) in 1991, *Qabz va Bast-e Theoric Shari'at ya Nazariyeh-ye Takamol-e Mare'fat-e Dini* (The Theory of Evolution of Religious Knowledge or Text in Context) in 1991, *Dars–hay-ey dar falsafeh-e Elm-Ol-Egtema'e* (Lessons of the Philosophy of Science) in 1995, and *Sonnat va Secularism* (Tradition and Secularim) in 2002.

Translations of Popper's works along with articles, lectures, and conferences on his philosophy made him an important contributor to Iranian intellectual life. The dailies of *Kayhan Farhangi* and *Kiyan* printed columns on Popper related articles and discussions through the 1980s and 1990s.[11] The importance of Karl Popper's philosophy lies in his theory's epistemological flexibility vis-â-vis ideological rigidity. His term "historicity," emphasis on the experience, rejection of essentialisms, and premise of falsifiability formed

8 Ali Paya and Mohammad Amin Ghaneirad, "*The Philosopher and the Revolutionary State: How Karl Popper's Ideas Shaped the Views of Iranian Intellectuals,*" 20:2, p. 191

9 Ibid, p. 192.

10 Ibid.

11 For articles and translations of Popper, see Ali Paya and Mohammad Amin Ghaneirad, "*The Philosopher and the Revolutionary State: How Karl Popper's Ideas Shaped the Views of Iranian Intellectuals,*" 20:2, p. 200-201.

the nucleus of Soroush's intellectual discourses and his later political struggle against the ideologically rigid Islamic regime. It also influenced the intellectual discourses of the reformist movement examined below. The philosophical discussions about Popper's works directly influenced common people in Iran because those discussions delegitimized the foundations of the post-revolutionary political structure.

Soroush defines his study in London as a process of continuous contemplation. He says philosophy of science was a revelation to him, a watershed in his career that changed everything about his thinking.[12] He says thought in Aristotelian and Platonic terms before he went to London, but after he encountered with the philosophy of science, he adopted critical thought. To him, Platonic thought is the intellectual basis of despotism in Iran. Platonic thought requires a rule of philosopher king that sees society as binary. There are wise people who should rule and ignorant people who need the supervision of the wise. It is a discursive phenomenon that paves the way for elitist intellectualism. He argues that power holders and intellectuals in Iran behave as if they are enlightened despots ruling over trifling ignorant people in need of the reason of the enlightened, and chosen ones.[13] This was actually the philosophical basis of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system. On the other hand, the philosophy of science provides Soroush with a critical and scientific perspective that challenges essentialist knowledge and hiearchies in the society and politics. Although scientific thought is also criticized by scholars for establishing an elitist structure, it has been used to struggle against the Islamic elitism, dogmas, and political suppression in Iranian context. That criticism is not valid in Iran. Soroush's scientific perception directly rejects the nature of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih. The philosophy of science is not only a theoretical tool for Soroush, but a political instrument with which to challenge the authoritarian, Islamic regime.

His second reason to encourage Popperian philosophy concerns the philosophical rivalry between Marxism and Islamism in Iran during the

12 Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 10.

13 Ibid, p. XVI.

1970s. These years were the social explosion of the Iranian people against the repressive regime of shah. At the time, Marxism dominated the political language. It was a linguistic justification mechanism.[14] Even prominent figures of political Islam like Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati, who were main ideologues of 1979 Iranian revolution, talked about a classless society on the basis of Islamic principles.[15] Moreover, Shah also declared himself as the *rahbar* (guide) of the revolution launching his governmental measures such as land reform in 1963, which he called a white revolution.[16] Marxist discourses and terms dominated the political and social field, becoming a powerful political and philosophical rival of Islamism.

During those years, Abdolkarim Soroush was an Islamist. Marxism had a strong appeal for the masses in Iran; he was against both shah's regime and Marxist ideals. Soroush claims that Popperian thought could be used to beneficially challenge the Marxist ideas, and it could have contributed to Islamism in 1970s.[17] Soroush never abandoned anti-Marxist characteristics. In later interviews with journalists, he insisted on his anti-Marxist thinking.

When he returned to Iran in September 1979, the revolution had already taken place. Soroush claims that he was offered the Ministry of Culture, but rejected it because he had problems with Bani Sadr, the first president after the revolution.[18] After revolutionaries overthrew the shah's regime, power struggles among different factions of the revolution arose. The friction was mainly between Islamists and Marxists. Marxist domination of political language and their social influence passed over to the Islamists due to two events that took place at the beginning of the revolution. One was the invasion of American embassy by radical young Islamic revolutionaries, and the

14 A. Reza Sheikholeslami, "The Transformation of Iran's Political Culture," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* 9:17, p. 108.

15 Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 103 and p. 123.

16 Ibid, p. 109.

17 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Alas I Have Missed the Chance to Have Coffee with Popper," 1 September 2008, http://drsoroush.com/en/alas-i-have-missed-the-chance-to-have-coffee-with-popper/, (accessed 15 November 2015).

18 Ibid.

second was the war with Iraq.[19] The Mojahedin-e Khalq, one of the most important Marxist organizations at the time supported Iraq in the war, which became a justification for the Islamic regime to fight against the Marxists after the revolution.[20] Islamic clergy excluded the Marxists from political and social fields, using these events. Instead of a Marxist language, the regime fostered the using Islamic symbols of martyrdom between 1980 and 1988 as a consequence of war with Iraq.[21] Khomeini's increasingly charismatic leadership coincided with the populist language of war and martyrdom.[22] He impressed people with his revolutionary zeal, and he was easily able to grab the power in Iran. The invasion of the American embassy, and war with Iraq helped him and the clergy to convince people to fight with all their might against the enemies of the revolution. Thus, the rivalry between Marxism and Islamism ended with Islamism being the victor.

Reformist zeal was such that Islamic regime purged and excluded opposition in the universities. To Islamize the nation, consolidate the power of the clergy, the Islamic regime launched a vague political action called the Cultural Revolution.[23] Among the measures of the Cultural Revolution, there were the purges of university academics, and scientists, who supported the shah's regime. Universities were also the places in which Marxist organizations were strong. Because universities continued with their opposition, the Islamic regime closed them down in June 1980 to protect and consolidate its power.

A seven-member committee was created called the Advisory Council on the Cultural Revolution. Soroush was offered a position in the council and he

19 A. Reza Sheikholeslami, "The Transformation of Iran's Political Culture," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* 9:17, p. 108.

20 Ibid, p. 112.

21 Elisabeth Jane Yarbakhsh, "Green Martyrdom and the Iranian State," *Continuum,* 28:1, p. 79.

22 Kazem Alamdari, "The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientalism, and Militarization of the Government," *Third World Quarterly,* 26:8, p. 1286.

23 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 51.

accepted it.[24] His position in the council has been controversial for Soroush in later years, because he was accused of closing universities, purging academics, and Islamizing the universities and thus furthering the Islamic regime's repressive politics. Against this, Soroush has constantly argued that the task of the council was not to close down the universities, but to reopen them; the universities were already closed when the committee was established.[25] In relation to that, Soroush argues that this committee was not tasked with purging people: the purges of the universities were done by university administrations. He insists that the main task of the council was to peacefully reopen universities.[26] Lastly, he purports that contrary to the accusations against the council, it benefited the university students because revolutionary zealots wanted universities to remain closed for a longer time and demanded to purge them of leftist students.[27] Islamist students were enthusiastic to purge and clear way political factions in the universities.[28] Against this demand of radicals, he and other committee members propose to open universities as soon as possible with a curriculum change. What Soroush asserted is that the council softened the radical demands by revolutionaries. In order to reopen universities and prevent leftist students to be expelled, he and other committee members went to President Rafsanjani to convince Khomeini to reopen universities and to allow leftist students continue their

24 "New Scientist Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," 1 June 2003, http://drsorou"sh.com/en/new-scientist-interview-with-abdolkarim-soroush/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

25 "One Cultural Revolution was Enough: An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush, by Matin Ghaffarian," June 2007, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-One%20Cultural%20Revolution%20was%20Enough.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

26 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Sense and Nonsense (About the Cultural Revolution Again," 11 June 2007, http://drsoroush.com/en/sense-and-nonsense/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

27 Ibid.

28 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 66.

education.[29] Soroush claims that Khomeini responded positively, and the universities were reopened in 1983.[30]

He resigned from this post in 1984 on the grounds that the things were going badly in terms of administration, as evidenced by purges of university students and university academics, executions of political prisoners, enactment of laws that codified inequalities between women and men, increasingly radical slogans, and an increasing culture of martyrdom and sacrifice.[31] These are the same motivations for Akbar Ganji, as well. Ganji also took part in the early Islamic administration, but when he found that the Islamic regime was destroying socio-political freedoms day-by-day, he became disappointed with the consequences of revolution, left the administrative post and joined the opposition. Soroush was disappointed with the Islamic regime and chose to become a dissident. Mohsen Kadivar's history is similar. The reality is that these three intellectuals along with others formed the opposition in Iran shortly after the revolution; the intellectual cadres of the reformist movement were shaped in the first years of revolution. They decided to become opposition and criticize the Islamic regime. This buttressed the reformist movement in the 1990s, the outcome of which was the reformist Khatami's rise to power between 1997 and 2005.

Soroush and other intellectual dissidents started to write in the daily *Kayhan-e Farhangi* (Cultural Universe) in the 1980s. It became a safe place for oppositional figures to spread their ideas and discuss them publicly. Here, Soroush published important articles between 1984 and 1990. For example, his articles, clarifying the difference between religion and religious knowledge first appeared in *Kayhan-e Farhangi*. The importance of these articles comes from their main argument that although religion is sacred, the understanding and interpretation of it is human and non-sacred. This argument has opened the way for alternative readings of Islamic texts - including a democratic one – in the struggle against the Islamic clergy in Iran.

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29 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Sense and Nonsense (About the Cultural Revolution Again," 11 June 2007, http://drsoroush.com/en/sense-and-nonsense/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

30 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 67.

31 Ibid.

*Kayhan-e Farhangi* was closed down by the regime in 1990 but it re-opened in 1991 with its name changed to *Kiyan*. *Kiyan* was also closed down in 2001 by the regime, but until that time, it had a great affect on the political and social events of Iran. Soroush argues that it had 100,000 readers daily in the 1990s.[32] It became a forum in which secularism, secularization, critical thought, and western philosophers were discussed by the important figures of the reformist movement.[33] It was called the daily of the reformist movement. For example, Said Hajjarian, who was called the brain of the reformist movement, started writing in *Kiyan* in 1990, as well.[34] A relation can be established between Soroush and Hajjarian. Although Soroush was deemed the brain of intellectual cadres of reformist movement, Hajjarian was the movement's political strategist. Both are counted among the homegrown theoreticians of Iran.[35] Younger intellectuals and journalists, including Akbar Ganji and Alireza Alawitabar were also writing in *Kiyan*.[36]

People started to talk about a *Kiyan* circle. For example, Hajjarian and Ganji discussed Max Weber's concept of "sultanism" in *Kiyan* daily to show that the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih is a version of sultanism.[37] Moreover, Soroush's attempts to introduce Popper to Iran continued. One of his students

32 "Khatami's Election Victory was Detrimental to Kiyan: An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush, by Reza Khojasteh Rahimi," December 2007, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-Kian.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

33 Afshin Matin Asgari, "Abdolkarim Soroush and the Secularization of Islamic thought in Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 30:1, p. 100.

34 Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "From Etelâ'âti to Eslâhtalabi: Sa'id Hajjarian, Political Theology and the Politics of Reform in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 47:6, p. 989.

35 Yasuyuki Matsunaga, "The Secularization of a Faqih-Headed Revolutionary Islamic State of Iran: Its Mechanisms, Processes, and Prospects," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 29:3, p. 469.

36 Afshin Matin-asgari, "Iranian Post-Modernity: the Rhetoric of Irrationality?," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* 13:1, p. 38.

37 Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "From Etelâ'âti to Eslâhtalabi: Sa'id Hajjarian, Political Theology and the Politics of Reform in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 47:6, p. 994.

interviewed Popper, and this interview was published in *Kiyan* in 1992.[38] When Soroush was asked if *Kiyan* circle was a party, he said definitely not, because *Kiyan* circle consisted of intellectuals, who had different ideas and views.[39] The best comment on *Kiyan* is that it became a forum in which different ideas are brought together and discussed in a critical manner. The reality that a daily was uniting the opposition in Iran was important. Since the Islamic regime perceived *Kiyan*'s existence as dangerous for its own survival, it was closed down in 2001.

Soroush's claims against the Islamic regime are important for several reasons. First, he claimed that there could be no monopoly on the reading and interpretation of sacred texts. This directly challenged the power of Islamic clergy in Iran who have the monopoly of interpretation over religious texts and matters. Soroush proposed an alternative reading of Islam on the basis of democratic principles against what he called a fascist reading of religion. In that way, Soroush encouraged alternative readings on Islamic texts that decreased the power of clergy and for that reason, Soroush was called the Luther of Islam in Western media.[40]

Second, Soroush's position - after his disappointment with the actions of the Islamic regime - has been to reject any kind of ideological argument, whether it is Marxism or political Islam. Thus, he directly challenged the government theory of political Islam. Popperian arguments are critical. Soroush argues that anything can be understood on the basis of historicity, that is to say within a historical context. What does this imply? If this way is fol-

38 Ali Paya and Mohammad Amin Ghaneirad, "The Philosopher and the Revolutionary State: How Karl Popper's Ideas Shaped the Views of Iranian Intellectuals," *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science,* 20:2, p. 201.

39 "Khatami's Election Victory was Detrimental to Kiyan: An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush, by Reza Khojasteh Rahimi," December 2007, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-Kian.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

40 "An Iranian Luther Shakes the Foundations of Islam," 1 February 1995, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/News_Archive/E-NWS-19950201-1.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

lowed, Islam can avoid rigidity, fundamentalism, and ideological zealotry and a democratic society free from prejudices is possible.

Third, all his arguments are based on the fact that Soroush struggles against the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih. While in the 1990s, he emphasized religious democracy; in the 2000s he has voiced political secularism as the principle of social unity.[41] This brings him closer to Akbar Ganji, since Ganji championed the idea of secularism as a political principle in the 2000s.[42] This means that new characteristics have been added to Soroush's intellectual struggle: his demand of neutrality of state towards religions and institutional differentiation of state and religion.

Fourth, Soroush's intellectual discourses can seem contradictory and inconsistent. Although he often refers to and accepts the values, including critical thought, rationality, and science, he also defends the vague concept of religious democracy. The main reason for his contradictions is the political and social context of Iran. Soroush may have been afraid of the regime forces, which may have affected the consistency of his discourses in the process. The contradictory discourses of Soroush were voiced when he was in Iran; once in exile, his intellectual discourses are more concrete and clear. Obviously, he increasingly used political secularism notion when he was in exile in the 2000s.

Soroush increasingly became a leading dissident in the 1990s so much so that he was considered as the founding father and main ideologue of reformist movement. As mentioned above, he was perceived as a menace by the Islamic regime. The regime started to wield its power against prominent figures of reformist movement, especially against intellectuals. This is clear in Soroush's case. Soroush lectured in Tehran University between 1979 and

41 "The Social Sciences Have Been Iran's Most Bloodied Martyr over the Past Thirty Years: An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush by Farid Adib-Hashemi," 1 January 2010, http://drsoroush.com/en/the-social-sciences-have-been-irans-most-bloodied-martyr-over-the-past-30-years/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

42 Akbar Ganji, *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* trans. Abbas Milani (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), p. 84.

1995.[43] In 1995, he was deprived of the right to lecture in the university. Then Basij forces started raiding his conferences. In 1995, *Ansar-e Hezbollah* interrupted one of his conferences.[44]

The reformist movement's rise to power with Khatami's election increased tension between reformists and the Islamic regime because the reformist movement under the leadership of Khatami was demanding sociopolitical freedoms, basic citizenship rights, and delimitation of the political power of the regime. After that, the Islamic regime started cracking down on reformist politicians, intellectuals, press, and supporters. For instance, 108 reformist newspapers were banned between 1997 and 2002.[45] By May 2000 all reformist dailies had been banned and many journalists were imprisoned, one of who was Akbar Ganji, who was sentenced to 10 years in Evin Prison.[46] Student protests in Tehran in 1999 and their brutal suppression were other indicators of the Islamic regime.[47] In 1998, four prominent dissidents were murdered and Akbar Ganji's investigations showed that the Vali-ye Fıqh - namely Ali Khamenei - was behind the affairs. In March 1999, Mohsen Kadivar was also put on trial by the Special Court for Clergy and sentenced to 18 months in prison.[48] Said Hajjarian survived an assassination attempt.[49] The pace of violence and oppression against the intellectual cadres of reformist

43 Afshin Matin Asgari, "Abdolkarim Soroush and the secularization of Islamic thought in Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 30:1, p. 96-97.

44 "I am not the Reformists' Godfather: Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush by Reza Khojasteh-Rahimi," 20 August 2006, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-IAmNotTheReformistsGodfather.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

45 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 93

46 Ibid, p. 97.

47 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 122.

48 Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform,* (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2009), p. 107.

49 Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "From Etelâ'âti to Eslâhtalabi: Sa'id Hajjarian, Political Theology and the Politics of Reform in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 47:6, p. 990.

movement was so strong as to prompt Soroush's limited, contradictory comments on some topics including religious democracy.

The oppression against Soroush took place at a different time and in a different space. In 1995, the Foreign Minister of Iran announced that Dr. Soroush creates a problem for Iran in international politics. He continued by saying that although Soroush does not have a malicious intent, his arguments harm the nation.[50] The timing of the Basij and *Ansar-e Hezbollah* raids to the Soroush conferences coincide with the minister's declaration. In 1998, Soroush wrote a letter to Khatami, saying that "people of Iran elected you not to be a watcher but a safeguarding fighter," thereby demanding him to intervene in violent events.[51] The silence of Khatami with regard to the brutal oppression and attacks of the regime marked the first political fissures among reformists. For these reasons, Soroush left Iran and went into exile from 1997 to 2003. He says situation in Iran was futile so he decided to go into exile, giving lectures at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale University as a visiting scholar.[52]

When he returned to Iran in 2004, he continued giving conferences. But the oppression against him persisted as well. In 2004, vigilante groups beat him and Mohsen Kadivar in Khorramabad Airport.[53] In 2006, he was to take part in a seminar in Tehran, but the Intelligence Ministry warned him about security, and he could not present his paper. Instead, his son presented it.[54] He remembers this event as a deprivation of basic rights. Along the way, his

50 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Reply to Foreign Minister Dr. Ali Akbar Velayati," 31 December 2015, http://drsoroush.com/en/reply-to-foreign-minister-dr-ali-akbar-velayati/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

51 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Letter to President Khatami," 7 December 2015 http://www.drsoroush.com/English/By_DrSoroush/E-CMB-19981207-1.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

52 "I am not the Reformists' Godfather: Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush by Reza Khojasteh-Rahimi," 20 August 2006, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-IAmNotTheReformistsGodfather.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

53 Ibid.

54 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Whither Religion in the Modern Age?," 16 August 2006, http://drsoroush.com/en/whither-religion-in-the-modern-age/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

increasing popularity extended the boundaries of Iran. During the 2000s, on account of the events of 9/11, moderate Islam became a popular topic. Soroush was an important figure of moderate and democratic Islam in Iran. When he went into exile, he found an opportunity to discuss democratic Islam around the world. Soroush's intellectual discourse coincided with the international search for moderate Islam and he became popular, and was held up by famous international magazines as among the most influential Muslim intellectuals. He received the Muslim Democrat of Year award in 2004.[55] In that same year, he received Erasmus Prize, which he shared with Fateme Mernissi and Sadiq Al Azm, both are human rights activists and democrats. In 2005, 2008, 2009, and 2010 Soroush was held up as one of the most influential intellectuals in the world by magazines, including *Foreign Policy* and *Time*.[56]

After Ahmedinejad came to power, the oppression against intellectuals increased. As a result, Soroush again left the country and went to United States. He gave lectures at Columbia, Georgetown, and Chicago University as a visiting scholar. In 2010, the oppressions against him so increased that his son-in-law in Iran was pressured to give erroneous information about Soroush on a national radio program.[57] When he rejected it, the forces of the regime tortured him. These recent events took place because the Islamic regime feared intervention by Soroush in the Green Movement events after the June 2009 presidential elections.

The events started after the day election results were announced. On the 13 June 2009, the supporters of reformist president candidate Mousavi poured into the streets to protest the results, which they thought was fraudu-

55 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Dr Soroush's "Muslimc Democrat of the Year Award" Acceptance Speech," 28 May 2004, http://drsoroush.com/en/dr-soroushs-muslim-democrat-of-the-year-award-acceptance-speech/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

56 Wikipedia, "Abdolkarim Soroush," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdolkarim_Soroush, (accessed 17 November 2015).

57 Abdolkarim Soroush, "There is No God, I swear to God There is No God...," February 2011, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/By_DrSoroush/E-CMB-20110200-ThereIsNoGod.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

lent.[58] They thought the election results were manipulated by the Islamic regime so that Ahmedinejad was able win the presidency a second time. Scholars who worked on the Green Movement defined it as the largest, broadest opposition in last thirty years in Iran.[59] Hamid Dabashi calls that moment as the "commencement of a full-fledged civil disobedience." Thus, Ganji's emphasis on peaceful civil disobedience and political secularism resonated with Iranian society in 2009. I think Green Movement is a post-secular movement, meeting that a broad coalition of protestors demanded neither secular nor religious fundamentalism, but democratic rights. Political secularism as a principle is the political mirror of the post-secularism notion. It aims for peaceful-coexistence of equal citizens on the basis of democratic principles and rights. Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar could be inspired by Ganji's reasoning on civil disobedience and his search for political secularism. During the social and political turmoil, Abdolkarim Soroush, Akbar Ganji, Mohsen Kadivar and two other intellectuals prepared a manifesto, laying out the goals of Iran's Green Movement.[60] Thus, these three intellectuals intersected in 2010 at a very important turning point of Iranian politics. This clearly shows that these three intellectuals knew each other well and were able to agree on democratic principles, political secularism, and rejection of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih.

The manifesto argues for the election of all officials, independence of the judiciary, right to protest, release of all political prisoners, resignation of Ahmadinejad, free and fair elections, and the abolishment of vetting process by Council of Guardians.[61] The manifesto demanded basic rights, and no more. No officials from the Islamic regime commented on the manifesto, but it seems that the Islamic regime tortured Soroush's son-in-law to cut the re-

58 Hamid Dabashi, *The Green Movement in Iran,* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2011), p. 24.

59 Ali Afshari and H. Graham Underwood, "The Green Wave," *Journal of Democracy,* 20:4, p. 10.

60 Abdolkarim Soroush: "The Goals of Iran's Green Movement," 6 January 2010, http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Global-Viewpoint/2010/0106/Abdolkarim-Soroush-The-goals-of-Iran-s-Green-Movement, (accessed 17 November 2015).

61 Ibid.

lationship between the Green Movement and Soroush. This explains the aggressive behavior of the regime against Soroush. Due to the regime's aggressive behavior, he still lives an exile in United States. Now we can fully examine Soroush's political and theoretical concerns.

## § 4.1 Intellectual and Political Discourses

As mentioned above, Abdolkarim Soroush became a leading dissident in the 1980s and 1990s. After the revolution, the fusion of state and religion under Khomeini's doctrine of the Velayet-e Faqih, which derives its power from divine sovereignty, led to the exclusion of popular will.[62] Although the revolution came following a popular reaction against the shah's regime, the popular will was excluded from political structure of the Islamic regime. This vacuum has filled by Islamic clergy. Thus Islamism became elitist, confined to Islamic clergy, who by grasping the power launched a top-down processs of Islamization.[63] Compulsory donning of veils, laws that rescinded the equality between men and women,[64] closure of universities, purges of students and professors from universities, Islamization of public space, use of the Islamic penal code[65] to unjustly try, torture, and execute political opponents (12.500 opponents were executed between 1981 and 1988) were among the actions of the Islamic clergy in post-revolutionary Iran.[66] That is why Iranian sociologist Asef Bayat defines Islamism after the revolution as follows: "Islamism appeared exclusionary, monovocal and intolerant to pluralism, representing an absolutist and totalitarian ideology."[67]

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62 Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi, "Islamic Reformation Discourses: Popular Sovereignty and Religious Secularization in Iran," *Democratization,* 19:2, p. 336.

63 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 14

64 Ibid, p. 52.

65 Ibid, p. 52 and 53.

66 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 18.

67 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 54.

The social consequences of the revolution were heavy in Iranian society. Hundres thousands of dead and wounded people in the war with Iraq between 1980 and 1988, a war economy, war torn regions in the south, declining oil prices, blockades as a consequence of hostage crisis, inflation, recession, state control on leisure and behavior, and gender apartheid regime were among the consequences of the revolution.[68] Two-third of all faculty members, 180,000 students were purged from universities. Three million Iranians left the country.[69] The social fissures in society both deepened and expanded. The fault lines between the rich and poor, devout and secular, *Tehrani* (residents of Tehran) and those from the provinces, Persians and non-Persians, Shiites and non-Shiites, khodis and gheyr-i-khodis, Muslims and non-Muslims, and women and men deepened after the revolution.[70] Since male, conservative Shi'a Muslims dominated the Islamic regime, those on the other sides of the fault lines were either suppressed or excluded from making politics.

All these events indicate a social and political alienation in society that resulted in a loss of social harmony in post-revolutionary Iran. One reformist intellectual, Shabestari defines the Islamic regime's actions as advocacy of non-participation and theorized violence.[71] This is the discursive mirror of exclusionary and suppressive laws and policies in post-revolutionary Iran. All these were done with the help of the Velayet-e Faqih system that gave Islamic clergy an unchecked power. The Velayet-e Faqih system was coined by Khomeini, he detracted it from Islamic texts by re-interpretation of Shi'a political theology. Khomeini argued that the source of Islamic government is God so it is divine.[72] The form of the Islamic government is the Velayet-e Fa-

68 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 98.

69 Ibid, p. 99.

70 Navid Nikzadfar in Hamid Dabashi's *The Green Movemevent in Iran,* ed. Navid Nikzadfar, (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2011), p. 13.

71 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 81.

72 Hamid Algar (trans.), (ed.), *Islam and Revolution Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980),* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), p. 55 and 56.

qih. He argued that divine and popular sovereignty are inseparable and Islamic Shia clergy have the only authority to represent that divine will in the absence of Hidden Imam, reedemer.[73] He claims that "it is the duty of the imams and fuqaha to use the government institutions to execute divine law, establish the just Islamic order, and serve mankind."[74] Namely, right to rule only belongs to experts in Islamic fiqh (faqih), thus non-clerical people are excluded from making politics.

This system did not recognize differences and plurality in society. Whenever political opposition or social unrest erupts, the Islamic clergy resorted to violence in the name of protecting the Islamic government. That is why Shabestari calls the actions of the Islamic regime "advocacy of non-participation," and "theorized violence".

Islamism after the revolution shattered the principles of popular will, rights, and the Islamic clergy consolidated its powers through a monopoly over the interpretation of Islamic texts. These same events triggered the emergence of a new group of "religious intellectuals" (*rowshanfekran-e dini*). Against the suppressive, exclusionary and uniformist practices of post-revolutionary Islamism in Iran, former Islamists started to criticize the Islamic regime's social and political actions. These people gathered at institutions and newspapers such as the Strategic Research Center,[75] *Kayhan-e Farhangi*, *Kiyan*, *Jameeh*, *Tus*, *Neshat*, *Khordad*, *Sobh-e Emrooz*, *Iran-e Ferda*, and *Asr-e Mah*.[76]

The reason intellectuals gathered in those centers and newspapers is that they provided a place, and chance to discuss and spread their criticisms both about regime and with respect to philosophical, political, and economic top-

73 Alam Saleh and James Worrall, "Between Darius and Khomeini: Exploring Iran's National Identity Problematique," *National Identities,* 17:3, p. 198.

74 Hamid Algar (trans.), (ed.), *Islam and Revolution Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980),* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), p. 66.

75 Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "From Etelâ'âti to Eslâhtalabi: Sa'id Hajjarian, Political Theology and the Politics of Reform in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 47:6, p. 988

76 Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform,* (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2009), p. 65.

ics. Rowshanfekran-e Dini is a term first used by Khatami in 1993.[77] He said Islamism lacked a social theory so Rowshanfekran-e Dini may be a response to that lack. The Reform Movement (*Junbish-e Islahat*) in the 1990s was shaped around discourses that religious intellectuals put forward.[78] Furthermore, the intellectual language of post-revolutionary Iranian social movements - among youth, women, and intellectuals, were also influenced from the reformist, religious intellectuals.

It can be argued that religious intellectuals came from within the revolutionary ranks to pursue republican ideals and religious ethics.[79] Critical reason, rationality, human rights, plurality, secularization, science, civil society, and liberty are some terms that these intellectuals often used in the 1990s.[80] What they demanded basically was the establishment of a secular democratic state in compliance with religious democracy.[81]

Soroush, Kadivar, Shabestari, Said Hajjarian, Emadeddin Baqi, Akbar Ganji, and Alireza Alavitabar are some of the prominent figures of religious intellectuals.[82] Alireza Alavitabar defines one of the main tasks of religious intellectuals as follows: "Complete re-thinking of religion, also believe in the power and utility of critical reason."[83] Because of the ideologization of social life, reformist, religious intellectuals advocated critical thought to normalize social and political life. De-ideologization of religion and society were among the first goals of their intellectual discourses.[84]

Thus religious intellectuals in the 1990s questioned and criticized the divine sovereignty of the Velayet-e Faqih system and argued that the source of

77 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 85.

78 Ibid, p. 50.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid, p. 86.

81 Ibid, p. 90.

82 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 122.

83 Ibid, p. 128.

84 Ibid, p. 198.

power should be popular will.[85] However, they did not create a unified position against the Islamic regime and there were many quarrels among them. When Soroush was asked if religious intellectual newspapers like *Kiyan* were like a political party, he answered: definitely not, because of the plurality of views it contained. Basically, the religious intellectuals can be divided into two groups: one that struggles on the basis of non-jurisprudential arguments, and second one that makes criticisms on the basis of jurisprudential claims.[86]

As a leading dissident, Abdolkarim Soroush employs the non-jurisprudential arguments in his works is struggle. He was deemed as the founding father of religious intellectualism. He expoited an anti-clerical tone and defended critical rationality, critical thought, and hermeneutics. Soroush wanted to provide an alternative reading of Islamic sources in compliance with democracy.

Scholars who examine the social movements of Iran argue that there are three strong social movements in post-revolutionary Iran: movements of youth, women, and intellectuals.[87] Religious intellectuals forms an important part of these social movements since their discourses gave power, inspiration and courage to youth and women movements, and provided the ideals for which to fight. Student movement in Iran demanded more freedom of behavior, including sexual freedom, freedoms to drink and to dress, to listen Western music.[88] On the other hand, the women's movement demanded equality between women and men.[89] In that sense, religious intellectualism has never been an isolated intellectual movement confined to a few people.

85 Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi, "Islamic Reformation Discourses: Popular Sovereignty and Religious Secularization in Iran," *Democratization,* 19:2, p. 336.

86 Ibid, p. 337.

87 See Yüksel Taşkın, "Iran: Yol Ayrımında Bir Devlet ve Toplum," in Y. Doğan Çetinkaya (ed.), *Ortadoğu: Direniş, Devrim, Emperyalizm*; Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Towards an anthropology of democratization in Iran," *Critical Middle Eastern Studies;* Farhad Khosrokhavar and Olivier Roy, *Iran: Comment Sortir d'une Revolution Religieuse.* Farhad Khosrokhavar, "The Islamic Revolution in Iran: Retrospect after a Quarter of a Century," *Thesis Eleven 2004.*

88 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Towards an anthropology of democratization in Iran," *Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* 9:16, p. 20.

89 Ibid, p. 25.

The social situation of the country was so bad that if reformists had not come to power in 1997, a social explosion may have been inevitable.[90] The regime created a legitimacy crisis because its mechanisms of exclusion and violence angered the people. On the other hand, religious intellectuals demanded accountability for rulers, rule of law, civil society, pluralism, and a rights-based constitution. These were also reflected in the political slogans of reformist Khatami. He was using a dialogue of cultures, peaceful coexistence, compromise, and mutual respect in foreign policy.[91] Political strategist and one of the brains of the reformist movement, Said Hajjarian underscored the importance of political development[92] in the country in the form of participation, popular will, rule of law, and legality.[93] In short, the reformist, religious intellectuals in the 1990s founded their struggles on the illegitimacy of the Islamic regime.

Abdolkarim Soroush, as a pioneer among reformist, religious intellectuals, became known in the 1990s. He argues that religious society has two flaws: hypocrisy and ideologization of religion.[94] This formulation also explains the social situation of post-revolutionary Iran. In this context, Soroush contended that religious intellectuals emerged as a result of the social and political needs of the day. He argued that religious intellectuals would not have emerged or survived if they had not a role; their emergence and survival exposes the Islamic clergy's failure in post-revolutionary Iran.[95] According

90 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 21.

91 Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform,* (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2009), p. 49-50.

92 Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "From Etelâ'âti to Eslâhtalabi: Sa'id Hajjarian, Political Theology and the Politics of Reform in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 47:6, p. 989.

93 Ibid, p. 995.

94 Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (eds.), *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 21.

95 "Soroush Among Those for and Against," 16-17 June 1998, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-19980616-Soroush_Among_Those_for_and_Against.html, (accessed 7 December 2015).

to him, one of the main tasks of religious intellectuals is to destroy the epistemological foundations of the country's political tyranny.

After the revolution, the Islamic clergy produced an official understanding of Islam based on Shi'a traditionalism and political conservatism.[96] The main claim of them is the doctrine of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih and divine source of legitimacy. Mehran Kamrava interpreted Shi'a traditionalism and depicted the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih as the ideal government during the occultation of the hidden imam, redeemer.[97] This system derives its legitimacy from God, not from people. Worse yet, conservatives spread the idea that Islam is more than a set of moral and ethical principles. This paved the way for an all-encompassing Islam according to which politics and Islam are inseparable. They believe a government without Islam would bring about immorality and the collapse of Islam. Without Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih, Islam's goals cannot be achieved.[98] Islam thus emerges as an all-encompassing belief that should intervene in all social and political affairs.[99] As a consequence of this, political reading of Islam provides the Islamic clergy with a powerful mechanism of intervention.

Soroush calls this a fascist interpretation of Islam. For him, the main task of religious intellectuals is to provide an alternative reading of Islam that is consistent with modernity and democracy.[100] Post-revolutionary intellectuals differ slightly from predecessors in the pre-revolutionary period. Soroush proclaims that pre-revolutionary religious intellectuals such as Ali Shariati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad, focused on the idea of Islam, progress, and revolu-

96 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 87.

97 Ibid, p. 94.

98 Ibid, p. 97 and 99.

99 Ibid, p. 97.

100 "The Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21th Century, An Interview with Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush," 8 December 2003, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-20031208-The_Responsibilities_of_the_Muslim_Intellectual_in_the_21st_Century_An_Interview_with_Abdolkarim_Soroush.htm, (accessed 8 December 2015).

tion.[101] They aimed to expand the sphere of Islam. But current religious intellectuals demand minimization of religion in the social and political fields.[102] What does minimum religion mean? Soroush defines the minimum religion through its impact: religion should only influence individual's religious experience, but politics and economy should be out of its sphere of influence.[103]

Indeed, the pre-revolutionary intellectuals were iconic, emphasizing the strong relation between revolution and Islam. For example, Ali Shariati presented Shi'ism as an alternative to the ideologies of Marxism and liberalism in the 1970s.[104] He was saying a good Muslim should struggle to topple the existing order.[105] The result of that idea was the grip of political Islam on society and collapse of the shah's regime. Nevertheless, these discourses paved the way for the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system and pervasive political conservatism.

That is why one of the main tenets of post-revolutionary religious intellectuals is their anti-ideological stance.[106] Instead of blaming foreign domination for Iran's domestic and international problems, they examine the internal reasons. Instead of struggling against Western domination, they have struggled for freedoms, and democratic institutions in Iran.[107]

## § 4.2 Thoughts on Intellectuals

Soroush's definition of the intellectual is significant for understanding his more comprehensive thoughts on the issue. According to Soroush, intellec-

101 "Religion, Thought and Reformation, An Interview with Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush," 7 March 2001, http://drsoroush.com/en/religion-thought-and-reformation/, (accessed 8 December 2015).

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 Ali Mirsepassi, "Islam as a Modernizing Ideology: Al-e Ahmad and Shari'ati," in *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization Negotiating Modernity in Iran,* 96-128. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 114.

105 Ibid, p. 116.

106 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 87

107 Ibid.

tual activity is a thought process of critical reasoning.[108] Some secular intellectuals in Iran disparaged religious intellectuals and called them "inshallah projects" (hopefully projects), because of their arguments were based on a religious foundation.[109] Soroush complains about secular intellectuals saying that when reformist, religious intellectuals were strong at the end of the 1990s, they supported all intellectual groups; when they lost power, secular intellectuals started to scorn them.[110] Secular intellectuals scorn them either because of religious arguments - such as reinterpreting Islamic verses to show that Islam is compatible with democracy - or their positions in Islamic regime in the early years of the revolution. Second, secular intellectuals believe that religious democracy or a blend of Islamic values, and universal, democratic principles is impossible. They argue that religion is a deviation from secular democratic principles, so there cannot be a fusion of Islam and democracy.[111]

On the other hand, it is strange that secularism is central to secular and reformist, religious intellectuals.[112] Especially in the 2000s, there was a turn to political secularism, which will be examined later in this chapter. However, the clash between secular and religious intellectuals increased in recent years, which was evident during 2009 Green Movement events. One side claimed that the Green Movement showed that Iranian people did not trust religious intellectuals' discourse anymore. Instead, the increasing secular tendency among Iranian, especially among youth is beyond the discourses of

108 "The Social Sciences Have Been Iran's Most Bloodied Martyr over the past Thirty Years: An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush by Farid Adib-Hashemi," 1 January 2010, http://drsoroush.com/en/the-social-sciences-have-been-irans-most-bloodied-martyr-over-the-past-30-years/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

109 Reza Afshari, "A Historic Moment in Iran," *Human Rights Quarterly,* Volume 31, Number 4, p. 850.

110 "Interview with Dr. Soroush Broadcast on Homa TV," 9 March 2006, http://drsoroush.com/en/interview-with-d"r-soroush-broadcast-on-homa-tv/, (accessed 10 December 2015).

111 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 207.

112 Ibid, p. 206.

religious intellectuals.[113] But even these intellectuals agreed that the young people in Green Movement used reformist, religious discourses.[114]

For example, Reza Afshari insists that nobody has generated a tangible result from rereading or an alternative reading of Islam. But even as he said these words, leading, religious intellectual dissidents such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Akbar Ganji, and Mohsen Kadivar were writing a manifesto that laid out the goals of Green Movement, in which they argued for secular democratic demands including free means of mass communication, trials for torturers, independence of the judiciary, election for all offices, the right to protest, release of all political prisoners.[115] The manifesto shows that prominent figures among religious intellectuals decreased the religious tone of their discourses, adopting secular discourses and slogans. But the latter's perspective on secularism is different from that of secular intellectuals. What they demanded was political secularism: secularism as a political principle that rejects fundamentalist secularisms that exclude religious beliefs in the public sphere including restricting religious symbols and clothing. In the 1970s political dialogue was between political Islam and Marxism and now it is between religious and secular intellectualism.

For Soroush, the task of the intellectual stratum is to innovate terms and guide people from "one state of being to another."[116] The guidance of religious intellectuals demands a shift from divine source to popular will, from duty-based to rights-based laws, and from political tyranny to a democratic regime. Soroush claims that the innovative features of intellectuals –such as producing new concepts - gain importance in times of revolution, as for example, in the French and Russian revolutions. In the French revolution, this was equality, liberty and fraternity. In the Russian revolution that took place

113 Reza Afshari, "A Historic Moment in Iran," *Human Rights Quarterly,* Volume 31, Number 4, p. 851.

114 Ibid.

115 Abdolkarim Soroush: "The Goals of Iran's Green Movement," 6 January 2010, http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Global-Viewpoint/2010/0106/Abdolkarim-Soroush-The-goals-of-Iran-s-Green-Movement, (accessed 17 November 2015).

116 Ibid.

in 1917, it was classless society.[117] On the other hand, he confesses the lack of theoretical innovation in the 1979 Iranian revolution. All it produced was a reactionary Islamic government model, namely the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih, and a deference to Islamic laws in every part of the social and political life.[118] He criticized this situation and adds that Iranian revolution needed an injection of intellectualism, which reformist, religious intellectuals could have provided. Because of Islamic clergy's government model and emphasis on Islamic fiqh rules, society witnessed the ideologization of religion and hypocrisy that resulted in loss of social harmony and freedom. That is why one of the main tasks of reformist, religious intellectuals is to criticize Islamic fiqh rules and the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih.

Soroush criticized intellectuals who have continued to hold governmental posts and offices in the Islamic regime into the 1990s and 2000s. To him, an intellectual should keep a distance from his or her state.[119] Soroush believes that intellectuals have power without position: he claims that power can cause an intellectual's corruption.[120] He gives Heiddegger's case as an example of how the fusion of power and intellectualism leads to corruption.

In Iran, after the Second World War, an intellectual current erupted that focused on the discourse of Heiddegger. The person who introduced Heiddegger to Iran was a philosophy professor, Ahmad Fardid.[121] Counter to the Popper oriented lectures of Soroush, he gave lectures about Heiddegerian philosophy at Tehran University. A group of people has emerged called Heiddeggerians and Fardidists. In fact, Fardid was known as the Iranian

117 "Dr Soroush: The Islamic Revolution Lacked a Theory," May 2009, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-20090504Shie-Paris.html, (accessed 9 December 2015).

118 "Jameah Interview with Dr. Soroush," 1 June 1998, http://drsoroush.com/en/jameah-interview-with-dr-soroush/, (accessed 7 December 2015).

119 "Conversation with Abdolkarim Soroush Interview, *Intellectuals: The Powerless Wielders of Power*," 1 January 1999, http://drsoroush.com/en/intellectuals-the-powerless-wielders-of-power/, (accessed 9 December 2015).

120 Ibid.

121 Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 30.

Heiddegger.[122] Mirsepassi defines Fardidism as follows: "It values only ideas that are at once grand and highly abstract, unfamiliar and mysterious… while combining Islamic theology, Sufism, and ideas of literary nature… the consequences of imagining intellectuals as master thinkers with prophetic callings… have been extremely destructive in reality and have devastated the Iranian intellectual movement."[123] The influence of Heidegger and Fardid in Iran is important because one of Fardid's disciples, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, coined the term Westoxication.[124] This formed the main vocabulary of political Islam in Iran.[125] Mirsepassi argues that Heidegger repudiates the western enlightenment, secular-democratic institutions, and related values of the Western world.[126] In that sense, he criticized the secular democratic aspects of post-traditional societies, and defined the spiritual crisis of post-traditional societies as alienation. To him, the western world deviated from its roots, and took a technological and secular path that brought it to the edge of decline.[127] The result of that deviation from "being" or "root" created inauthenticity and rootlessness. So Heiddegger criticized secular-democratic values and cosmopolitanism as inauthentic and rootless. In that sense, Mirsepassi defines anti-modernism as a political stance rather than a geographical reaction.[128] That political stance influenced the twentieth-century Iranian intellectuals and people in the context of colonial clashes in the third world during the 1960s and 1970s. Mirsepassi argues that Anti-western intellectual

122 Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 32.

123 Ibid.

124 Westoxication is a doctrine that says modern and secular people in Iran were alienated from their Islamic roots and forced to live with alien Western values including democracy, secularism etc. It is an essentialist idea that rejects Western values and accepts them corrupted. In relation to that, it is a third wordlist reaction against the superiority of the west and an expression of hatred feeling.

125 Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 98.

126 Ibid, p. 100.

127 Ibid, p. 91.

128 Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 86.

discourses by pre-revolutionary figures including Jalal Al-e Ahmad, and Ali Shariati were deeply influenced by German counter-enlightenment school, and Heidegger.[129] Anti-western and anti-American feelings in Iran were nourished by the German anti-modernist philosophy becoming strong, and spreading throughout the society.

Thus in Iran, Jalal Al-e Ahmad's Westoxication became the local, anti-Western model and Ali Shariati championed the idea of returning to roots since Western values were in decline. They put forward the discourse of authenticity to struggle with the consequences of modernism.[130] The idea of Westoxication in Iran seems a Heiddegger-influenced, anti-Western concept. Thus, a fusion of German counter-enlightenment philosophy and third-worldism in Iran created a Shi'i Islamic revivalism, which resulted in political Islam's take over in 1979. Anti-enlightenment values, ideologization of religion, anti-secularism, anti democracy, and the authenticity discourses were then used by the Islamic regime to justify and consolidate the Islamic clergy's model of government in post-revolutionary Iran.

Post-revolutionary reformist, religious intellectuals supported Western values including democracy, and human rights. When Soroush says that intellectuals should keep a distance between them and power, he mentions that Fardidists and Iranian Heiddeggerians are offered governmental posts and support from the Islamic regime in return for theoretical support. They became bureaucrats and politicians at the governmental level.[131] Soroush blames them and says that Basij forces and Revolutionary Guards abuse the discourses of Iranian Heiddegerrians such as Westoxication, anti-Semitism, freemasonry, and Iran's global arrogance.[132] In that sense, political conserva-

129 Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.

130 Ibid, p. 96.

131 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Neo-Conservative Intellectuals in Iran," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* 10:19, p. 6.

132 "Interview with Dr. Soroush Broadcast on Homa TV," 9 March 2006, http://drsoroush.com/en/interview-with-d"r-soroush-broadcast-on-homa-tv/, (accessed 10 December 2015).

tism has made an alliance with Fardidist intellectuals.[133] The reason the regime supports Iranian Heiddeggerians is their elitist, suppressive philosophy that substantiate the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system. Farhad Khosrokhavar argues that the unique part of neo-conservatives in Iran is their support for the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih and their rejection of secularism and pluralism.[134] Thus the mutual relation between the Islamic regime and the Fardidists was established on the basis of supporting the Islamic government model and mechanisms of power of the of Shi'a clergy.[135] Iranian Heiddeggerians provide extra-religious, and intellectual support for the regime.

For that reason, Soroush complains that philosophy is too politicized in Iran due to Fardidist intelletuals' pursuit of their interests and ensuing alliance with the Islamic regime.[136] For example, Soroush claims that when Ahmadinejad was the mayor of Tehran, city municipality donated an important amount of funds to Fardid's foundation.[137] He says that Fardid's standing with respect to the Islamic regime is like Leo Strauss with respect to Bush administration during the Iraq intervention.[138]

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133 Today, the most influential Heiddeggerian and Fardidist of Iran is emeritus Professor Reza Davari who still gives lecture in Tehran University. Moreover he is currently a member of Council for the Cultural Revolution and head of the Iranian Academy of Science in Ali Paya and Mohammad Amin Ghaneirad, "*The Philosopher and the Revolutionary State: How Karl Popper's Ideas Shaped the Views of Iranian Intellectuals,"* 20:2, p. 195.

134 Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Neo-Conservative Intellectuals in Iran," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* 10:19, p. 6.

135 Reza Davari as one of the leading figures of Neo-Cons in Iran believes in the supremacy of the *Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih*. And they blame the ones who criticize *Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faq*ih as being traitor, freemasonry, and the agents of the West in Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Neo-Conservative Intellectuals in Iran," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* 10:19, p. 24.

136 "I'm a Neo-Mutazilites, An Interview with Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush," July 2008, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-Neo-Mutazilite_July2008.html, (accessed 10 December 2015).

137 "Never in Iran's History Has Philosophy Been So Political, Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," 30 January 2006, http://drsoroush.com/en/never-in-irans-history-has-philosophy-been-so-political/, (accessed 10 December 2015).

138 "Never in Iran's History Has Philosophy Been So Political, Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," 30 January 2006, http://drsoroush.com/en/never-in-irans-history-has-philosophy-been-so-political/, (accessed 10 December 2015).

Soroush also repudiates the authenticity-related discourses of Heiddeggerian intellectuals in Iran. To him, the demand of "authenticity" and a "return to roots" is a fundamentalism.[139] Soroush asserts that there are two movements of claiming a return to root.[140] One is active other passive. Activist "returning to roots" discourse is fundamentalism that resorts to violence to realize the return. ISIS can be given as an example of fundamentalism in terms of their methods of demanding a return to roots. The second movement is traditionalism, which does not use violence. Because he sees Westoxication as "an identity-based antagonism" against the West, he defines it as fundamentalism.[141] Moreover, although Westoxication is theoretical fundamentalism, it is worse, when fused with armed activism. That would be jihad for Soroush.[142] So, for that reason, Soroush argues that Middle Eastern countries need religious intellectualism that applies critical thought.

Soroush sees unquestioning devotion, non-critical thought, submission to authority, and fundamentalism as key to Heiddeggerian thought and its idea of authenticity. The quarrel between Soroush and the devotees of Fardid evolved into contest between Heiddegger and Popper in post-revolutionary Iran.[143] Reza Davari published articles that heavily criticized Popper. In the article, "Observations concerning The Open Society and Its Enemies," he argued that Popper is an advocate of Western hegemony and does not have any concern for the *mostazafin* (oppressed people). Thus, the discussion between Heiddegger and Popper evolved into a political discussion and polemic between regime supporters and opponents.

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139 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Whither Religion in the Modern Age?," 16 August 2006, http://drsoroush.com/en/whither-religion-in-the-modern-age/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

140 Ibid.

141 "The Muddled Dream of Returning to Tradition, An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," November 2006, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-The%20Muddled%20Dream%20of%20Returning%20to%20Tradition.html, (accessed 12 December 2015).

142 Ibid.

143 Ali Paya and Mohammad Amin Ghaneirad, "*The Philosopher and the Revolutionary State: How Karl Popper's Ideas Shaped the Views of Iranian Intellectuals,*" 20:2, p. 195.

## § 4.3 Popperian Affect on Soroush

When Soroush started to study in England during the first part of the 1970s, an intellectual storm over the philosophy of science dominated the class discussions.[144] Among articles that were discussed were those of Popper, Feyerabend, and Lakatos. The discussions of Popper's ideas influenced him, and after he returned to Iran, he became an expert in philosophy of science, opened similar discussions in Iran as well.[145] Soroush used Popperian concepts to criticize the official reading of Islam, Shi'a traditionalism, and political conservatism in Iran.

Soroush's studies on Popperian philosophy focused on the concepts of testability of a doctrine, experience, historicity, falsifiability, rejection of essentialism, and the idea of revolution. These terms shaped both the intellectual and political struggle of Abdolkarim Soroush. He has always tried to find a place to the Popperian philosophy in Iran to counter the Heiddeggerian philosophy. Soroush's usage of Karl Popper's terms mainly focuses on the experience and historicity of an event.

Soroush claims that any phenomenon, and event has a historicity. That means the historical events are best understood and interpreted in the context of their time and space. This is valid for religions and beliefs, as well. He says that he wants to show the historicity of religious knowledge.[146] This provides Soroush with different interpretations and meanings distinct from the Islamic regime's interpretation. The Popperian concept of historicity has become a philosophical tool Soroush's hands for weakening the Islamic clergy's monopoly on readings of Islamic history, since for the Islamic regime and

144 Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 9.

145 Ali Paya and Mohammad Amin Ghaneirad, "*The Philosopher and the Revolutionary State: How Karl Popper's Ideas Shaped the Views of Iranian Intellectuals,*" 20:2, p. 191.

146 "The Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21th Century, An Interview with Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush," 8 December 2003, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-20031208-The_Responsibilities_of_the_Muslim_Intellectual_in_the_21st_Century_An_Interview_with_Abdolkarim_Soroush.htm, (accessed 8 December 2015).

clergy; the meanings of sacred texts are rigid and unchangeable. Second, Soroush sees the principle of experience and experiment as the foundation of scientific and critical thought. That is why he insists on the idea of experience. In that respect, Soroush believes that the history is the locus of testability. In that sense, the best measure to test whether a political and/or religious doctrine is successful is history. Summarizing the idea of testability, he says, "history is the mirror" of a doctrine.[147] Thus, pointing to the failures of a political or religious doctrine's history, Soroush discerns the oppressive and outdated aspects of political Islam and make it comply with modernity and democracy.

Since Soroush is not able to criticize Islamic doctrine itself, he refers to other political doctrines to show the efficiency of a doctrine through its testability in a historical process. He cites the relation between Marxist doctrine and Stalinist Soviet Russia.[148] Stalin's rule includes purges, trials, tortures, and executions against political opponents, demonstrating the oppression of critical thought by Stalinist regime in the 1930s and 1940s.[149] For Soroush, such oppression of political opponents placed obstacles in the way of scientific thought suggest the susceptibility of a political doctrine to dictatorship. Instead of arguing that Stalinist era, and socialism in the Soviet Union was a misinterpretation of true Marxist theory, Soroush suggests that the history – or the testability of a doctrine in the history - should be taken as an indicator that the political doctrine itself was flawed from the beginning. He basically argues "philosophy of a doctrine reveals itself in historical process better than in theory and on paper."[150] When Soroush refers to Stalin's era and oppressive political measures of Stalinist administration, in fact he addresses the political actions of the Islamic regime in post-revolutionary era. By pointing to the failures of the ideological stance of socialism in Soviet Russia,

147 Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (eds.), *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 84.

148 Ibid, p. 78.

149 Afshin Matin Asgari, "Abdolkarim Soroush and the Secularization of Islamic Thought in Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 30:1, p. 99.

150 Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (eds.), *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 83.

he implicitly argues that political Islam in Iran made similar mistakes and it shows the failure of political Islam in history.

Third, Soroush uses Popperian terms to show that pursuing essentialist arguments is also problematic. Soroush rejects all kinds of a priori thought, because Popper's basic method is the criticism[151] of fixed, rigid a priori judgments, explanations, and actions.[152] In opposition to the prejudices of fixed and rigid ideologies including Marxism and political Islam, he recommends no political ideology in the political and social fields other than critical, scientific thought on the basis of a posteriori experience.[153] Soroush asserts, "if the real world obeyed the essentialists' imaginings, no change or combination or evolution would ever occur in it."

One of the most prevalent prejudices in Iranian society is the idea of Westoxication that has convinced people democratic, secular values are inferior and in decline in comparison with Islamic values. This is one of the strongest essentialisms in Iranian society. Moreover, insulting other identities while praising your own as a superior religion is also an essentialism that compels people to accept the superiority of Islamic values. It compels people to feel enmity and insult other identities.

Fourth, Soroush rejects revolutionary methods and instead supports reformism, namely step-by-step change. He is definitely against the idea of revolution. When he was called the founding father of reformist, religious intellectuals in the 1990s, he argued for reform and two revolutions would be too much for one generation in Iran.[154] For him, all revolutions result in the loss of reason and rationality.[155] The consequence of the loss of reason is ide-

151 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Alas I Have Missed the Chance to Have Coffee with Popper," 1 September 2008, http://drsoroush.com/en/alas-i-have-missed-the-chance-to-have-coffee-with-popper/, (accessed 15 November 2015).

152 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Milk and Sugar," 1 February 2008, http://drsoroush.com/en/milk-and-sugar/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

153 Ibid.

154 "L'Iran en quete de Justice," 6 March 2010, http://drsoroush.com/en/liran-en-quete-de-justice/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

155 Abdolkarim Soroush, "On Reason," 23 March 2007, http://drsoroush.com/en/on-reason/, (accessed 13 December 2015).

ological rigidity, which in turn destroys the basic rights and freedoms in society. He says that Popper suggests reforms instead of revolution that makes everything upside-down. He quotes Popper: "when it's raining, take an umbrella," which means you don't have to fight against climatic conditions; it is sufficient to take an umbrella with you.[156] Soroush rejects revolutions for two reasons. First, he experienced a social upheaval in 1979, lasting through the 1980s. In that atmosphere, he says reason was the first thing that was sacrificed and the last thing that returned.[157] Because Soroush conceptualized these events in theoretical terms, he was deemed as the founding father of religious intellectualism and reformism in Iran.[158]

Lastly, one of the most important Popperian concepts that influenced Soroush is historicity. For Soroush, the best way to break the political tyranny of the Islamic clergy in Iran is to break the tyranny of religion[159] by struggling against the Islamic clergy's monopoly over reading of Islamic texts, and reinterpreting them in mind with human rights, democracy, and liberty.[160] This reasoning led Soroush to claim a differentiation between religion and religious knowledge.[161]

156 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Alas I Have Missed the Chance to Have Coffee with Popper," 1 September 2008, http://drsoroush.com/en/alas-i-have-missed-the-chance-to-have-coffee-with-popper/, (accessed 15 November 2015).

157 Abdolkarim Soroush, "On Reason," 23 March 2007, http://drsoroush.com/en/on-reason/, (accessed 13 December 2015).

158 "I am not the Reformists' Godfather: Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush by Reza Khojasteh-Rahimi," 20 August 2006, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-IAmNotTheReformistsGodfather.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

159 "Jameah Interview with Dr. Soroush," 1 June 1998, http://drsoroush.com/en/jameah-interview-with-dr-soroush/, (accessed 7 December 2015).

160 Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (eds.), *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 22.

161 Ibid, p. 30.

## § 4.4 Theory of Contraction and Expansion: Religion Versus Religious Knowledge

At the beginning of the 1990s, Soroush published articles in *Kiyan* newspaper about this conceptual differentiation.[162] In 1995, these articles were collected in a book and published as *Bast-e Tajrobeh-yi Navab* (*The Expansion of Prophetic Experience*). A translation of the book was published also published by Brill Publishers in 2009. In these articles, Soroush argued that religion is different from religious knowledge. Although religion is sacred and eternal, the understanding and interpretation of it is human and earthly - that is, dependent on time and space.[163] So, knowledge of religion is temporal and human. Whenever a transformation of human sciences and knowledge erupts, the knowledge of religion, as well is transformed: "religious knowledge is temporal and in constant commerce with other realms of human culture."[164] That brings us to dynamic interpretations of sacred texts on the grounds that they are read in the context of a particular time and space. In that case, the tenant of historicity becomes the main tenet of religious verses, too. With his differentiation of religion and religious knowledge, Soroush puts forward a non-sacred understanding of religion that can join together with a non-sacred administration to shake the foundations of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system. His theory of contraction and expansion of religious knowledge in compliance with other realms of human culture paves the way for a democratic reading of sacred texts.[165]

For example, Qur'anic verses that say women and men are unequal should be reformed in compliance with modern day needs. Because of the historical frame of those verses, inequality between men and women should

162 "Khatami's Election Victory was Detrimental to Kiyan An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush, by Reza Khojasteh Rahimi," December 2007, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-Kian.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

163 Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (eds.), *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 31.

164 Ibid, p. 34

165 Ibid, p. 60.

be interpreted as a product of the circumstances of sixth century Arab society. Instead, the women's issues in Muslim societies should be interpreted according to logic or their spirit of the age, namely in accord with guarantees of basic human rights. He says that although religion is a private issue, religious knowledge is collective. Just like social sciences and history, it depends on the collective wisdom of people, especially historians. It can change through the exchange of views by scholars.[166] He summarizes his views as follows "It is in this sense that religious knowledge changes, evolves, expands and waves. It is temporal and in constant commerce with other realms of human culture."[167] Thus, Soroush presents religious knowledge as the science of religion. This concept is important because it provides a scientific and historical perspective on religious verse, which had been used by Islamic clergy to justify and legitimate their positions. This differentiation places religion outside of political life and provides an alternative reading of Islam that is consistent with democratic values. Providing the historical framework destroys the grounds of justification for the Islamic clergy on important issues such as the model of Islamic government, Islam's political stance, and its views on social and economic issues.

Furthermore, Soroush's argument is not limited historicity: he also proclaims that texts do not have a single - but several - meanings. He argues that text has not been understood: it has a potential and leads to many meanings.[168] Soroush is one of the people who introduced "hermeneutics" to Iran. He paved the way for the hermeneutical method of interpretation of sacred and philosophical texts. As mentioned above, Soroush believes that the texts have a number of potential meanings and lend themselves to an actually a plurality of readings when interpreted by different people. Hermeneutical reasoning has been used by Soroush to undermine the monopoly over the interpretation of Islamic sources by the Islamic clergy on Islamic sources. Soroush believes a critical reading of Islamic sources on the basis of herme-

166 Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (eds.), *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 34.

167 Ibid.

168 "Truth, Reason, Salvation," 1 October 2000, http://drsoroush.com/en/truth-reason-salvation/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

neutics by religious intellectuals can bridge the gap between Islam and democracy.[169] In order to destroy the uniformist and exclusionary political practices of the Islamic regime, it is necessary to deprive it of the source of its legitimacy i.e. religious and divine will. Thus, pluralism becomes one of the main tenets in Soroush's thought.

## § 4.5 Pluralism and Hermeneutics

For Soroush, people need to take an extra-religious perspective to better understand the nature of pluralism, because plurality is the norm of human history.[170] Soroush argues that there are three concepts which best explain the plurality of religious views in history. These are a) causes, b) reasons, and c) reasoned pluralism. To him, the historical birth of religions explains the plurality of views in religions.[171] He accepts every religious existence as a physical cause. Causes do not provide superiority, inferiority, or any relation that determines the supremacy of religion.

In relation to it, each religious perspective present itself as the only true religious perspective with respect to others. This is the justification level, which creates a reason for itself, of religious entities. On the "reason" level, every viewpoint finds a reason to establish its superiority over other views. This leads to a conflict among various viewpoints. Any attempt to justify the superiority of a religious perspective is a clash between its reason and cause. In that sense, Soroush says that there a tension erupts between causes and reasons.

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169 "The Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21th Century, An Interview with Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush," 8 December 2003, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-20031208-The_Responsibilities_of_the_Muslim_Intellectual_in_the_21st_Century_An_Interview_with_Abdolkarim_Soroush.htm, (accessed 8 December 2015).

170 "Jameah Interview with Dr. Soroush," 1 June 1998, http://drsoroush.com/en/jameah-interview-with-dr-soroush/, (accessed 7 December 2015).

171 "Truth, Reason, Salvation," 1 October 2000, http://drsoroush.com/en/truth-reason-salvation/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

Soroush argues that this can be solved by the idea of "reasoned pluralism."[172] To him, the best way to mollify the tension between causes and reasons is hermeneutics. Reasoned pluralism and the methods of hermeneutics examine the plurality of views in a historical frame and evaluate every view in its own context. He sees this kind of reasoning as very important and beneficial to solve that tension because otherwise Islamic regime tries to subsume all kinds of differences under one comprehensive doctrine, reason – the cause of Islamic Shi'a perspective – and suppress the rest. There is a similarity between Soroush's argument of "reasoned pluralism" and John Rawls' "reasonable pluralism." Both underline that a society consists of differences and that any attempt to make just one doctrine or view the only voice, destroys the social harmony and unity in society.

## § 4.6 Thoughts on Tolerance

For Soroush, any situation that tries to suppress the plurality of views is a "situation of intolerance." He gives an example from Voltaire who sees "tolerance" as a "natural right."[173] He also gives example from famous Iranian poet Hafez who advises tolerance in his poems, saying you should have magnanimity for your friends and tolerance for your enemies.[174] Soroush claims that if a philosophical view does not abide by tolerance principle, it will collapse.

Moreover, he argues that enmity for pluralism is intolerant behavior, and the worst intolerant behavior is violence to suppress those pluralities. The situation in Iran in the last 30 years is a clear example of intolerance to differences. Iranian population consists of 79 million people.[175] However, 51 percent of the population is Farsi in origin, while the remainder includes

172 "Truth, Reason, Salvation," 1 October 2000, http://drsoroush.com/en/truth-reason-salvation/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

173 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Treatise and Tolerance," 1 November 2004, http://drsoroush.com/en/treatise-on-tolerance/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

174 Ibid.

175 http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/iran-population/

Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Lurs, the Balochs, and Turkmens.[176] Clashes have never stopped in Iran between the regime and ethnic and religious minorities because of exclusionary and oppressive measures of the Islamic regime. Especially in Ahmadinejad's era, clashes increased because of the regime's Shi'a, Persian chauvinistic policies and speeches.[177] Kurds, who form the 12-15 percent of the population, has been oppressed since the revolution.[178] Due to their attempt to establish a Kurdish state in 1946 in the Mahabad region and subsequent upheavals, an antipathy and hostility was created in Iranian state against the Kurds.[179] For example, after 1979, Khomeini declared *Jihad* (Holy War) against Kurds of Iran, and labeled the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan as "the Satan".[180] 250,000 soldiers were deployed in the region in 1979 after Kurds demanded autonomy and democratic rights from Khomeini with an eight-points program.[181] It is estimated that 50,000 people lost their lives in those clashes.[182] The problems of minority ethnicities in post-revolutionary Iran are caused by low-level of representation, lack of educational opportunity, and few publications in their native languages, underdevelopment in their regions, migration, and discrimination.[183] The post-revolutionary Islamic regime also oppressed religious minorities. For example, Baha'is don't even have the right to assemble although they number be-

176 For detailed information about minorities in Iran, see Hussein D. Hassan, "CRS Report for Congress Iran: Ethnic and Religious Minorities," 25 November 2008, https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34021.pdf, (accessed 28 September 2015).

177 Ibid.

178 Kerim Yıldız and Tanyel B. Taysı, *The Kurds in Iran The Past, Present and* Future, (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 3.

179 Ibid, p. 15.

180 Ibid, p. 40.

181 Ibid, p. 22.

182 Ibid, p. 41 and 42.

183 For detailed information about minorities in Iran, see Hussein D. Hassan, "CRS Report for Congress Iran: Ethnic and Religious Minorities," 25 November 2008, https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34021.pdf, (accessed 28 September 2015).

tween 300,000 and 350,000.[184] Even reformists were judged for the charge of insulting Islam.[185]

Soroush argues that in today's Iran, tolerance is seen as a vice rather than a virtue.[186] Even believers are not tolerated, because the perpetrators of the regime or political conservatives think their actions are best, and others are wrong. Soroush does not attribute this lack of tolerance only to religiosity, because before the Islamic regime there was the secular shah regime that also rejected tolerance. He summarizes his views that neither religiosity nor secularity is sufficient for tolerance.[187] That is why he struggles for democratic principles on the basis of a rights-based citizenship and democratic and free institutions.[188] Soroush further puts forward three types of religiosities that are prevalent among contemporary Iranian society to weaken the intolerant and oppressive Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system.

## § 4.7 Three Types of Religiosity

Soroush asserts that there are three types of religiosity:[189] imitative, gnostic, and mystical religiosity. He states that imitative and/or utilitarian religiosity is the most prevalent type today in Iran. It is based on identity, and blind emulation. Soroush defines imitative religiosity as "emotional, dogmatic, rit-

184 For detailed information about minorities in Iran, see Hussein D. Hassan, "CRS Report for Congress Iran: Ethnic and Religious Minorities," 25 November 2008, https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34021.pdf, (accessed 28 September 2015).

185 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/09/rafsanjani-khamenei-rouhani-element-20139269541536640 4.html, (accessed 28 October 2015), p. 45.

186 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Treatise and Tolerance," 1 November 2004, http://drsoroush.com/en/treatise-on-tolerance/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

187 Ibid.

188 "The Beauty of Justice, CSD Interview," 1 November 2006, http://drsoroush.com/en/the-beauty-of-justice/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

189 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Types of Religiosities," 1 March 2000, http://drsoroush.com/en/types-of-religiosity/, (accessed 13 December 2000).

ualistic, ideological, legalistic, juristic, and traditional."[190] Islamic clergies have status like *Marja-e Taqlid,* which means the center of emulation. This idea accepts humans as immature beings who need supervision of the Islamic clergy. Emulation is a very significant mechanism of Islamic clergy in Iran to hold religious people under their authority. Second type is gnostic. Gnostic religiosity is the most prone among these types to place criticism over submission and utilitarianism. For Soroush, gnostic religiosity is based on theoretical rationality and rational wonder; it does not stop posing questions.[191] For him, gnostic religiosity is non-imitative, non-clerical, dynamic meaning it evolves through times, and it constantly questions and revises the information.[192] Soroush prefers gnostic to imitative religiosity since the latter rejects submission and blind imitation of clerics. Last type of religiosity is "mystical religiosity" or mysticism (*Tasavvof*). He argues that mysticism is a saintly type of religiosity and confined to few persons. He regrets that themost prevalent type of religiosity is utilitarian and imitative, as a result of the Islamic clergy's powerful position in Iran. Soroush clearly draws on a critical perspective of religion to weaken the sources of legitimacy of the Islamic regime through drawing alternative readings of Islamic texts.

## § 4.8 Legitimacy Problem of the Regime

Legitimacy is an important concept for Soroush. The religious democracy that he sought was a legitimate regime based on free and popular wills. That is why he constantly argued that sovereignty should be in the hands of the people. Soroush asserted that whether or not a religious democracy and a religious government (*hokumat-e dini*) are democratic depends on two conditions: respect for human rights and taking collective wisdom into consideration on the basis of public participation in the political processes.[193] Thus,

190 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Types of Religiosities," 1 March 2000, http://drsoroush.com/en/types-of-religiosity/, (accessed 13 December 2000).

191 Ibid.

192 Ibid.

193 Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (eds.), *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 126.

Soroush argues that a religious government can be established by the will of its people, but it does not mean the source of legitimacy is religion; on the contrary, whether a religious or secular government, the source of legitimacy should be derived from democratic principles and will of the people.[194] For Soroush, a democratic, religious government can be attained only by historicizing the religious understanding: differentiating between religion and religious knowledge.[195]

In the 1990s, Soroush stated that a religious government (*hokumat-e dini*) can be established by the will of people. Actually, this is the contribution of religious democrats in the 1990s. However, in the 2000s, reformist, religious democrats started to change their views on the character of religious democracy, arguing any government should be based on something beyond religious democracy. Ahmadinejad's rise and neo-conservatives' consolidation of power with the help of his government was influential, as was increased pressures on the reformists. Intellectuals were marginalized and many in the bureaucracy were forced to resign. Political conservatism escalated again. The Majles, for example, again made dress codes for women a priority.[196]

Soroush now argued that no democracy should become religious, but religion - specifically Islam - should be democratic. As opposed to extracting democratic values from Islamic tradition, he underscores that an extra-religious perspective should be adopted that defends universal norms, including human rights, freedoms, and justice. Most scholars who study democracy and Islam asserts that Islamic tradition (*sunnah*) include the assembly (*Shura*) tradition, referring to Islamic texts that show examples of democracy from the time of the Prophet Mohammed. However, the main difference of Soroush and religious intellectuals in the 1990s was their emphasis on an extra-religious perspective rather than religious democracy. They championed the idea of limiting power, supporting freedoms in the so-

194 "A Congregation of Bees, not a Congregation of Parrots, Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," 16 April 2009, http://drsoroush.com/en/a-congregation-of-bees-not-a-congregation-of-parrots/, (accessed 13 December 2015).

195 Ibid.

196 Anoush Ehtestami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution,* (London: I.B Tauris, 2007), p. 90 and 92.

ciety, adopting human rights as the main foundation of society, but were not concerned with extracting freedoms and democratic values from sacred texts.

For Soroush, democracy means rejection of tyranny on the basis of freedom of choice and free will. Democracy is the ground for right that gives the powers to citizens to install the rulers, criticize them and dismiss them.[197] He says in 1979 they replaced the shah's monarchical tyranny with religious tyranny in Iran.[198] The Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih is a religious tyranny, which expects duties from its citizens, which is to say the Islamic regime in Iran has a traditional duty-based model of citizenship.

## § 4.9 Rights Versus Duties

The emphasis of "rights" over "duties" is the cornerstone of the philosophy of Soroush and religious democrats. According to Soroush, secularization, secularism, and modernization are nurtured by a discussion between rights and duties.[199] However, the language of Islamic fiqh and the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system is the traditional duty-based system,[200] adopted by the Islamic clergy.[201] It is like an authoritarian family in which the father expects children to respect their duties, determined by him. The Velayet-e Mutlaq-e

197 "Democracy, Justice, Fundamentalism and Religious Fundamentalism, An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," November 2005, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-DemocracyJusticeFundamentalismNReligiousIntellectualism.html, (accessed 12 December 2015).

198 "The Current Iranian System Rests on Obedience, not Human Rights, Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," 1 March 2010, http://drsoroush.com/en/the-current-iranian-system-rests-on-obedience-not-human-rights/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

199 Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (eds.), *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 61.

200 Ibid, p. 62.

201 "The Responsibilities of the Muslim Intellectual in the 21th Century, An Interview with Dr. Abdolkarim Soroush," 8 December 2003, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-20031208-The_Responsibilities_of_the_Muslim_Intellectual_in_the_21st_Century_An_Interview_with_Abdolkarim_Soroush.htm, (accessed 8 December 2015).

Faqih is unsurprisingly a clear example of patrimonialism, fused with religion. In contrast to this duty-based perception, Soroush champions the idea of people as bearers of rights.

Against this duty-based citizenship model, Soroush says the relations between the Iranian state and society should be established on the rights-based modernism.[202] He gives examples from liberal democratic regimes and says that the spirit of modern law and liberalism concerns rights, but the spirit of Islamic law in Iran concerns duties.[203] He argues that whenever Islam is voiced in Iran, the penal codes and fiqh comes to mind. But, he adds that Islam should go beyond Islamic jurisdiction; the fusion of power and religion harms both Iranian citizens and religion.

## § 4.10 Justice, Morality, and Freedom

Justice and morality are significant in Soroush's political and intellectual thought. For Soroush, justice is the bond between politics and morality.[204] It can be argued that in his speeches, articles and studies, Soroush has formed a theory of justice that would provide equality, freedom, and justice to every Iranian citizen. After 1979 revolution, social unity among Iranian citizens was lost, because of Islamic regime's oppressive, divisive, and identity-based policies and actions.[205] Social unity refers to the social and political princi-

202 "The Muddled Dream of Returning to Tradition, An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," November 2006, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-The%20Muddled%20Dream%20of%20Returning%20to%20Tradition.html, (accessed 12 December 2015).

203 Ibid.

204 "Amsterdam Debate, June 2007, An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-Amsterdam%20Debate.html, (accessed 12 December 2015).

205 "One Cultural Revolution was Enough: An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush, by Matin Ghaffarian," June 2007, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-One%20Cultural%20Revolution%20was%20Enough.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

ples that hold society together namely justice. Indeed, Soroush talks of an ethical crisis after the revolution that damaged the social unity.[206]

For Soroush, there are two reasons for this ethical crisis. These are the tyrannical Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system and the Islamic regime's laws with emphasis on the fiqh. Soroush sees fiqh-dominated religiosity as pragmatist and imitative, destroying any questioning or critical perspective on the part of people. This caused alienation and social distress among Iranian people, which consists of plurality of views, ethnicities and religions. Soroush formulates his search for morality as follows: "Why do we place Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) above morality?[207] To him, domination by fiqh and the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih together oppressed the morality.[208] For conservatives in Iran, the only morality is the morality of Islamic rules, and penal codes. That is why they reject an extra-religious perspective of morality. In the 1990s, Soroush argues that religious intellectuals should undertake an ethical critique of Islamic jurisprudence;[209] meaning that human rights, freedom, rights-based stances should be adopted in Islamic regime's laws, policies, and actions.

But in the 2000s, Soroush and most reformist, religious intellectuals changed their mind about transforming the Islamic fiqh in favor of more secular discourses aimed at the separation of state and religion. Soroush's discourses about morality changed from a critique of Islamic jurisprudence and the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih on the basis of human rights to an outright rejection of fusion of state and religion. In the 2000s, he started to argue that morality, more broadly than religion, could provide social unity in Iran.[210] His discourses became increasingly secularized in terms of political and so-

206 "Ethics and Ethical Critiques, Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," 6 January 2004, http://drsoroush.com/en/ethics-and-ethical-critiques/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

207 Ibid.

208 Ibid.

209 Ibid.

210 "The Social Sciences Have been Iran's Most Bloodied Martyr over the Past Thirty Years: An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush by Farid Adib-Hashemi," 1 January 2010, http://drsoroush.com/en/the-social-sciences-have-been-irans-most-bloodied-martyr-over-the-past-30-years/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

cial principles he believes could hold society together. Instead of critiquing the Islamic fiqh, he argued for an Iranian state that transcends the fiqh. In 2006, he gives an example from the model of United States, claiming that to reach a just society, democratic institutions should be established that enables dialogue between the state and society, and the state and individuals.[211] That he gave democratic institutionalism in the United States as an example is important, because he started offering more concrete political models instead of vague religious democracy.

The link between justice and freedom is important in Soroush's discourses. He examines the period of Khatami (1997-2005) and Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) and argues that whereas the motto of Khatami was freedom, the slogan of the Ahmadinejad government was justice.[212] Soroush says justice is a vague concept that can be shaped by different groups to comply with their interests. On the other hand, Soroush thinks the term freedom is a more concrete term by comparison.[213] That is why he thinks; to reach justice a minimum amount of freedoms is required.[214] He thus sets preconditions for the use of justice; political freedom and democratic values, as mentioned. Thus he advocates for structural justice on the basis of freedom and basic equal rights in contrast with the Islamic fiqh, which provides individualized justice that depends on the race, gender, and age of the person.[215]

In the 2000s, Soroush admits that search for a morality can keep Iranian people together must be struggle against Islamic regime. It must seek justice

211 "The Beauty of Justice, CSD Interview," 1 November 2006, http://drsoroush.com/en/the-beauty-of-justice/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

212 Ibid.

213 "Democracy, Justice, Fundamentalism and Religious Fundamentalism, An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," November 2005, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-DemocracyJusticeFundamentalismNReligiousIntellectualism.html, (accessed 12 December 2015).

214 "New Scientist Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," 1 June 2003, http://drsorou"sh.com/en/new-scientist-interview-with-abdolkarim-soroush/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

215 Abdolkarim Soroush, "Reason & Freedom in Islamic Thought," 7 April 2001, http://drsoroush.com/en/reason-freedom-in-islamic-thought/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

on the basis of democratic institutions, and values. Thus we come to last search of Soroush's political and intellectual discourses: political secularism.

## § 4.11 Changing Intellectual Position towards Political Secularism

Secularism as a political principle that can hold Iranians together on the basis of democratic values entered Soroush's agenda in the 2000s. In the second part of the 2000s, especially after 2006, he underscores political secularism against both Islamic regime and fundamental secularists. Rajeev Bhargava defines political secularism as neutrality of state towards its citizens.[216] Political secularism demands the exclusion of comprehensive, ultimate doctrines at the state level: thus political neutrality becomes the main tenet of political secularism on the basis of protecting daily life of citizens.[217]

The political context of the 2000s compelled Soroush to be more concrete in terms of his discourses, because of increasing conservatism in Iran with Ahmadinejad's assumption of the presidency in 2005. After 2005, the power and influence of conservatives rose with Ahmadinejad's support. Soroush went into exile again in Ahmadinejad's era. The reformist movement's loss of power affected religious intellectuals as well. Most people in this era talked about the failures of both religious intellectuals and reformist politicians. Even some were from among religious intellectuals, including Akbar Ganji. He was jailed in 2000 for six years. In prison, he wrote the *Republican Manifesto* and then in 2007, when in exile, he wrote *The Road to Democracy in Iran,* in which he argued for secular democracy instead of vague religious democracy. Political failure of the reformist movement influenced his reaction.

On the other hand, others including Soroush argued that the failure of the reformist movement did not mean that the religious intellectual move-

216 Rajeev Bhargava, "What is Secularism for?" http://law.uvic.ca/demcon/victoria_colloquium/documents/WhatisSecularismforPreSeminarReading.pdf, (accessed 23 March 2016), p. 8.

217 Ibid, p. 10

ment was at an end.[218] Mehran Kamrava, for instance, claimed that the discourses of religious intellectuals influenced and provided a space for secular discourses and intellectuals.[219] Even as the existence and impact of religious intellectuals was being questioned, the Green Movement was making moderate, secular demands in July 2009. Although some scholars argued that these events actually demonstrated the failure of religious intellectuals, I believe these events showed their influence. People who blamed them were unable to see the shift in the discourses of religious intellectuals from religious democracy to political secularism. This shift owed its existence to the political context of the 2000s and especially to social upheaval of 2009 Green Movement. Religious intellectuals resonated in society and by 2009 their discourse was ready to shift to political secularism.

As one of the leading intellectuals, Soroush took this chance to put forward political secularism in his articles, speeches, and studies. He said that reformists needed the notion of political secularism[220] - that reformism could regain its popularity by emphasizing it. After 2006, the number of references to the political secularism in his speeches, and articles increased.

Soroush, classifies two pillars of secularism: political secularism and philosophical secularism.[221] Whereas political secularism is concerned with the sources of legitimacy and the state's neutrality with regard to identities within its political borders, philosophical secularism is about philosophical thinking, materialism, and rejection of the idea of God and religions.[222] Soroush argued that religious intellectuals had already moved towards political

218 "A Congregation of Bees, not a Congregation of Parrots, Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," 16 April 2009, http://drsoroush.com/en/a-congregation-of-bees-not-a-congregation-of-parrots/, (accessed 13 December 2015).

219 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 43.

220 "I am not the Reformists' Godfather: Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush by Reza Khojasteh-Rahimi," 20 August 2006, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-IAmNotTheReformistsGodfather.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

221 Ibid.

222 "We Must Have a Referandum in Iran, Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," 1 February 2010, http://drsoroush.com/en/we-must-have-a-referendum-in-iran/, (accessed 14 December 2015).

secularism without knowing that the values they were struggling for the values of political secularism.[223] In both religious democracy and political secularism, legitimacy does not derive from God or any divine source but from the will of the people. The concern for democracy is same for both as well. He recalls that the political motto of Khatami was "Iran for all Iranians," where the spirit of equal rights for all Iranians evoked political secularism.[224] He says that many religious people in Iran are political secularists and political secularism is a very "commendable idea" for Iranian state and society.[225] To that end, he puts forward a new term: "post-theocratic," "non-theocratic" state, or "state that transcends fiqh"[226] to define ideal state concept of political secularism in Iran.

His rejection of philosophical secularism is contradictory since he always emphasized notions like science, critical thought, and rationality. Why he rejects philosophical secularism is hard to understand. Perhaps his views can be understood when we recall his rejection of any kind of fundamentalisms. He rejects philosophical secularism because he sees it as a fundamentalist, ideological perception of secularism. He gives French laïcité as an example of its militant characteristics that should be rejected, since for Soroush, it is not democratic at all.[227] The French government's exclusion of religious values from the public space, disappointed many people, including Soroush. He also sees shah's regime as an example of fundamentalist secularism. He rejects philosophical secularism since he equates it with fundamentalism that destroys democratic values, and basic rights like the Islamic regime has done in recent thirty-six years. He says religion has always had a hand in politics, but

223 "I am not the Reformists' Godfather: Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush by Reza Khojasteh-Rahimi," 20 August 2006, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-IAmNotTheReformistsGodfather.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

224 Ibid.

225 "We Must Have a Referandum in Iran, Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," 1 February 2010, http://drsoroush.com/en/we-must-have-a-referendum-in-iran/, (accessed 14 December 2015).

226 "The Current Iranian System Rests on Obedience, not Human Rights, Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush," 1 March 2010, http://drsoroush.com/en/the-current-iranian-system-rests-on-obedience-not-human-rights/, (accessed 12 December 2015).

227 Ibid.

that does not mean it can be a source of legitimacy. Soroush claims that although religion can have a symbolic hand in politicsas in the United States,[228] the state and religion cannot be combined. He says it is best if we sever the link between state and religion.[229]

Many intellectuals in Iran seek to explain the difference between developed Western world and undeveloped Eastern world. Javad Tabatababi, Daryush Shayegan, and Hamid Inayet try to explain the decline of Islamic civilization. According to Tabatabai, Iran did not progress because it experienced religious revivalism between the nineth and thirteenth century, while the Western world prepared itself for science.[230] While the history of West is the history of the unraveling of reason, the history of East is the history of the unfolding of unreason.[231] This kind of reasoning is an important aspect of intellectual typology in Iran. Although Soroush rejects such essentialist arguments, he argues that Iran lagged behind because, while the Western world experienced secularization, which moved away from an omnipotent God, the Eastern world, specifically Iran created Sufism vis-à-vis an omnipotent God. Whereas a typology of active person developed in the West, Iran produced the passive man who isolates himself from the pleasures of the world.

Soroush's sociological analysis can be misleading because of his lack of sociological training, but he can be accepted as Weberian. He thinks that in order for secularization to emerge in the West, firstly the secularization of ethics was first realized.[232] To him, Western world firstly experienced secularization of ethical values and traditional vices became the new virtues.[233] He

228 "The Social Sciences Have Been Iran's Most Bloodied Martyr over the Past Thirty Years: An Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush by Farid Adib-Hashemi," 1 January 2010, http://drsoroush.com/en/the-social-sciences-have-been-irans-most-bloodied-martyr-over-the-past-30-years/, (accessed 17 November 2015).

229 Ibid.

230 Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Alireza Shomali, "The Unfolding of Unreason: Javad Tabatabai's Idea of Political Decline in Iran," *Iranian Studies,* DOI: 10. 1080/00210862.2014.926661, p. 3.

231 Ibid, p. 2.

232 Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (eds.), *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 41.

233 Ibid, p. 43.

argues that traditional vices such as skepticism, ambition, competition, and tolerance have become virtues and the foundations of the modern thought.[234] Soroush accepts these as the lifeblood of modern life. Western world has created a new episteme, which places the human at its center. Soroush says that the needed secularization of ethics and it can only be developed through science.

He also sees a challenge between secularization and religion as a precondition for secularization, which he deduced from the Western experience. He argues that since religion in Iran has never been challenged by modern, scientific thought, he is pessimistic about secularization. This is another contradiction in his thought, explained by his lack of sociological perspective. Because he argues that there is not one modernity nor one rationality, but modernities and rationalities, indicating his search for alternative readings on the basis of post-modern arguments. However, this plurality perspective is lost when he tries to explain the secularization model. If his views about pluralities are correct, then he must say that there is not one but many secularizations. However, he argues as if there is only one secularization model. I argue that his comments on this issue are inconsistent.

Soroush is a modernist intellectual who accepts critical thought as his benchmark in his view. On the other hand, political and social conditions in Iran compelled him to talk about inconsistent themes. He and his discourses are nevertheless influential in the intellectual life of Iran. Although secular intellectuals in Iran do not accept his discourses – both because he is not an ardent secularist and his history casts shadow over his popularity - his intellectual struggle against Islamic regime has paved the way for secular intellectual discourse. Recent political upheavals in Iran clearly indicate the increasing popularity of secularism.

234 Ibid, p. 52.

# 5

## A Democrat Cleric among Reformist, Religious Intellectuals: Mohsen Kadivar

Mohsen Kadivar as one of the leading figures of post-revolutionary reformist, religious intellectualism, contributed significantly to the religious intellectualism literature and political struggle in Iran. Although he took part in 1979 revolution, he realized that the Islamic regime increasingly became oppressive and limited the political and social freedom of Iranian people through the 1980s and 1990s. As a cleric who seeks to combine Islam, human rights, and democracy, he started criticizing the Islamic regime in the 1980s and he increased his critical tone and won popularity among the Iranian people in the 1990s due to reformist movement's successful political campaign and Khatami's assumption of the presidency. However, his intellectual discourses shift towards moderate secularism under the socio-political atmosphere of the 2000s.

In the second part of the 2000s, he argued for moderate secularism, especially during the Green Movement events of 2009. What is moderate secularism? I take it as political secularism. Political secularism excludes comprehensive doctrines at the state level. This comprehensive doctrine can be a religious faith or an ideology. However political secularism excludes exclusionary and domineering ideological and religious views, from political institutions in order to provide the best atmosphere for diversity in society. Political secularism in the Iranian context is first of all the separation of state

and religion. However, opposed to mainstream secularism models, political secularism does not exclude religion from the public sphere. Religion as one option among many can exist in the public sphere and intervene with the state on the grounds that it promotes equality, peace, tolerance and freedom. Political secularism does not have a problem with religion in the public sphere. Moderate secularism, as Kadivar puts it, provides this kind of secularism in Iran. This chapter analyzes Kadivar's intellectual and political discourses and puts forward that although his discourse did not change as much as Akbar Ganji's and Abdolkarim Soroush's in the second part of the 2000s, he reframed his discourses on the basis of moderate secularism, which is another name of political conception of secularism. The main intellectual struggle that marks Kadivar's intellectual life is against the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system. He argues that the Shi'a Islamic government model should be annulled and a politically accountable, elected, democratic government should be established by the will of the Iranian people. Kadivar further claims that a rights-based citizenship model should be adopted in Iran rather than a model where relations between the state and individuals are characterized by Islamic duties. In that respect, Kadivar defends the spirit of the age: the notion of fundamental rights opposed to duty-minded, traditional understandings of citizenship. His search for an Islamic democracy resulted in intellectual discourses that offer alternative democratic readings of Islamic sources. However, as argued above, he was inclined towards moderate secularism as a result of contextual events in the second part of the 2000s. In this chapter, his discourses and his transformations will be analyzed.

Mohsen Kadivar was born in 1951 in Safa,[1] a small village located in one of the southeastern provinces of Iran, Kerman.[2] In 1977, he entered the Shiraz University and started studying electrical engineering.[3] However, he was unable to finish his academic training at the university because in 1981 he chose

1 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 161.

2 Wikipedia, "Mohsen Kadivar," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohsen_Kadivar, (accessed 7 February 2016).

3 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

to undertake religious education at the Islamic seminary (*hawzeh-ye elmiyyeh*)[4] of Shiraz to become a cleric.[5] Then he moved to the city of Qom, the center of the hawzeh-ye elmiyyeh in Iran. There he took courses on Islamic jurisprudence, Sharia, the methodology of Islamic law, and Islamic history.[6]

One of the most important events to affect the life of Mohsen Kadivar was being a student of Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri.[7] Ayatollah Montazeri was a prominent, pioneer figure for religious intellectualism in Iran. He was actually the heir of Ruhollah Khomeini - the founding father of the Islamic revolution - in the first half of the 1980s. Though known as the successor of Khomeini, he was ultimately rejected and dismissed from successorship to the Velayet in March 1989 because of his criticism of the regime and his demand for political freedom and the democratic, republican aspects of the revolution.[8] The reasons behind his dismissal are significant for his influence on religious intellectualism - and specifically on Mohsen Kadivar.

Ayatollah Montazeri was one of the first in post-revolutionary Iran who criticized the unaccountable, exclusionary practices and absolutism by the Islamic regime, which was added to the constitution through amendments in 1989. The main conflict between him and the regime concerned the accession to the Velayet institution and its accountability. He was against the appointment by the Islamic clergy, argued for method of election by the people.[9] He further claimed that Vali-e Fiqh should be accountable to the people.

Ruhollah Khomeini devised the Velayet-e Faqih as an Islamic government model in the 1960s. Till then, the Islamic Shi'a clergy's political influence was non-interventionist and pacifist. Ayatollah Boroujerdi - the highest

4 Yasuyuki Matsunaga, "Mohsen Kadivar, an Advocate of Postrevivalist Islam in Iran," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 34:3, p. 317

5 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Shahrough Akhavi, "The Thought and Role of Ayatollah Hossein'ali Montazeri in the Politics of Post-1979 Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 41:5, p. 651.

9 Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi, "Islamic Reformation Discourses: Popular Sovereignty and Religious Secularization in Iran," *Democratization,* 19:2, p. 336.

ranking till Khomeini replaced him in 1961 - advised the Islamic seminarians trained in Qom not to become involved in political sphere.[10] This changed after Khomeini developed his model of the Shi'a Islamic government. According to Khomeini, divine and popular will/sovereignty are inseparable. Thus, the Islamic Shi'a clergy are the authority appropriate to govern on behalf of the Hidden Imams that take their power and sovereignty directly from God.[11] He claims that "it is the duty of the imams and fuqaha to use the government institutions to execute divine law, establish the just Islamic order, and serve mankind."[12] Namely, the right to rule belongs only to experts in Islamic fiqh (*faqih)*: non-clerical people are excluded from politics. Khomeini combined the modern understanding of the state with the Shi'a theology and the result was the Velayet-e Faqih system. Ayatollah Montazeri supported the institution of the Velayet-e Faqih before the 1980s and he was a supporter of the revolutionary conception of Shi'a Islam.[13] He was working in the Assembly of Experts in 1979, the group that added the Velayet-e Faqih doctrine to the constitution.[14]

However, political, economic, and social events in post-revolutionary Iran convinced Ayatollah Montazeri of the need for an accountable and elected Vali-e Fiqh. Asef Bayat summarizes the socio-politic turmoil that Iran faced after the revolution as follows: the idea of Islamic economy failed, war with Iraq between 1980 and 1988 led to a war-torn economy, declining oil prices brought declining national earnings, leading to international blockades and sanctions, inflation and recession characterized the economy, the number of war veterans rose, the regime's control and suppression of lei-

10 Babak Rahimi, "Democratic Authority, public Islam, and Shi'i Jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani," *International Political Science Review,* 33:2, p. 195.

11 Ibid, p. 198.

12 Hamid Algar (trans.), (ed.), *Islam and Revolution Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980),* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), p. 66.

13 Babak Rahimi, "Democratic Authority, Public Islam, and Shi'i jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani," *International Political Science Review,* 33:2, p. 195.

14 Ibid, p. 198.

sure and behavior increased, gender and religious discrimination among the members of society prevailed.[15] Moreover, universities were closed for a period of time, and when they were reopened, two-third of the faculty and 180,000 students had been dismissed for political reasons.[16] Three million people left Iran because of fears and concerns about the Islamic regime.[17] The revolutionary ideals like freedom, equality, social peace, and harmony were not realized.[18] Worse still, they deteriorated day-by-day for people living their daily lives under the Islamic regime. At the social level, gender discrimination was supported by Islamic penal codes, and rules of Islamic fiqh made veils compulsory dress for every woman.[19] In the case of divorce, the custody of children would be directly given to the husband. Every man had the right to divorce; however it was limited for women.[20] The freedom of travel for women depended on permission from a father, husband, and/or brother. The imposed inequalities between male and female in society were echoed by other dichotomies: rich and poor, devout and secular, Persians and non-Persians, Shiites and non-Shiites, *Tehrani* and residents of the provinces, khodi and gheyr-i khodi.[21] All of these events and fissures accelerated tensions in the Iranian society and dissuaded even some who worked within the Islamic regime and established its main institutions. Ayatollah Montazeri was one of them.

Montazeri's political ideas were within Islamic frame, but he was not a full-fledged conservative. He did not deny the divine source of sovereignty and argued that whomever rules in the name of the divine should be elected and accountable to the people. Montazeri sees a contractual relationship between state and society: he purports that legitimacy comes from the consent

15 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 98.

16 Ibid, p. 99.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid, p. 100.

19 Ibid, p. 52.

20 Ibid.

21 Navid Nikzadfar in Hamid Dabashi's *The Green Movemevent in Iran,* ed. Navid Nikzadfar, (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2011), p. 13.

of people.[22] In the absence of the Hidden Imam, wills of the people should be the source of state authority.[23] What he rejected was just the appointment and unaccountability of the ruler of the Islamic state. Babak Rahimi defines his method as democratic *usulism* (Methodism), which he explained as follows: "such a new paradigm envisions a form of religious legitimization led by elected rulers, guided by the sacred law Islamic legal norms, while being held accountable to the people". Montazeri was against theocratic authoritarianism,[24] even though he had sympathy for a theocratic regime in which the governmental apparatuses come to the power through election by the people. His democratic usulism involves electoral participation and respect for the rights of citizenship, as well.[25]

In the second part of the 1980s, the political tensions between him and Khomeini increased to such a degree that in March 1989, Khomeini dismissed him as heir to the institution of the Velayet.[26] The events that created tension were Montazeri's speeches about freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and his negative depiction of the post-revolutionary situation in Iran. He demanded prisons should be emptied and called for the end of censorship imposed on people.[27] Moreover, he insisted on the importance of political rights in an Islamic regime and argued there should be no oppression and/or limitations on the rights of the people.[28] What he struggled for was a democratic, Islamic republic based on elections, in which leaders were ac-

22 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 115.

23 Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi, "Islamic Reformation Discourses: Popular Sovereignty and Religious Secularization in Iran, *Democratization,* 19:2, p. 339.

24 Babak Rahimi, "Democratic Authority, Public Islam, and Shi'i Jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani," *International Political Science Review,* 33:2, p. 194.

25 Ibid.

26 Shahrough Akhavi, "The Thought and Role of Ayatollah Hossein'ali Montazeri in the Politics of Post-1979 Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 41:5, p. 651.

27 Ibid, p. 651.

28 Babak Rahimi, "Democratic Authority, Public Islam, and Shi'i Jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani," *International Political Science Review,* 33:2, p. 199.

countable to the people through electoral processes.[29] His son-in-law, Mahdi Hashemi was executed by the regime for revealing secret meetings between the Rafsanjani government and the Reagan administration during the Iran-Iraq war. The execution elevated Montazeri's critical tone.[30] Furthermore, Khomeini decided that members of the leftist Mojahadin-e Khalq organization should be executed because of their radical, political stance, and Montazeri opposed these executions. The number of executed political prisoners was estimated to be 4482 in 1988 according to Amnesty International.[31] In this case, Montazeri was accused of defending the Mojahadein-e Khalq organization and western liberalism.[32] Thus the tensions between him and the Islamic regime accelerated and on 28 March 1989, he was dismissed from the status as heir to the Velayet.[33]

In 1989, Iranian officials decided that amendments should be made to the constitution of Iran. That year, the amendments were made which increased the status of the Velayet-e Faqih (Guardian Jurist) to the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih (Absolute Guardian Jurist). With this change, the scope of his authority expanded. Among the new powers the articles gave Supreme Leader, he had an absolute mandate to appoint the head of judiciary, to determine all kinds of policies, to appoint radio and television officials.[34] Lastly, the re-

29 Babak Rahimi, "Democratic Authority, Public Islam, and Shi'i Jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani," *International Political Science Review,* 33:2, p. 199.

30 Ibid, p. 198.

31 Access from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1988_executions_of_Iranian_political_prisoners, (accessed 7 February 2016). However, the total number of execution between 1980 and 1988 is estimated as 12.500 in Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 18.

32 Shahrough Akhavi, "The Thought and Role of Ayatollah Hossein'ali Montazeri in the Politics of Post-1979 Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 41:5, p. 657.

33 Ibid.

34 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 39

quirement that the supreme leader be a Marja-e Taqlid, which requires they have expert knowledge in the Islamic fiqh,[35] was revoked.[36]

The abolition of this requirement of Marja-e Taqlid is important because prior to these amendments, the Supreme Leader was supposed to be both politically and jurisprudentially capable. Marja-e Taqlid could be described as possessing a superior of knowledge in Islamic jurisprudential issues, thus marjas are accepted as the highest authorities in Islamic legal issues with the capacity to wisely manage. However, this principle was abolished with the 1989 amendments to grant the office of Supreme Leader to Ali Khamenei, who did not have such an expert position, in contrast with Montazeri who did. Olivier Roy calls these amendments as "de-facto secularization,"[37] "statization," and "Iranization of Shi'ism."[38] According to Roy, the abolition of the requirement to be expert in Islamic jurisprudence meant that the concern of survival of the regime preceded the religious concerns in post-revolutionary Iran. This is what Roy calls the rule of politics over religion that results in de-facto secularization, - that is to say the politicization of the religion.[39] Thus, one marja namely Ayatollah Montazeri was isolated, in the political sphere and this situation was legitimated through constitutional changes. It is interesting that the sacrifice of religious expertise took place quite so early on in the first theocratic model of the twentieth century.

In the 1990s, Montazeri constantly criticized Ali Khamenei for his lack of knowledge in Islamic jurisprudence, and reminded that a marja should be a Vali-e Fıqh.[40] Thus he tried to delegitimize Ali Khamenei on the grounds of Islamic ruling. To Montazeri, a Guardian Jurist should be at a marja level,

35 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 90.

36 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 39.

37 Olivier Roy, "The Crisis of Religious Legitimacy in Iran," *Middle East Journal,* Vol:53, No:2, p. 201.

38 Ibid, p. 208.

39 Ibid, p. 202.

40 Babak Rahimi, "Democratic Authority, Public Islam, and Shi'i Jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani," *International Political Science Review,* 33:2, p. 199.

which entails the "specialization in and knowledge of matters of Islam, exemplification of justice and piety, acquaintanceship with the matters and issues of the day."[41]

In 1994, in an interview with German newspaper, *Welt am Sonntag* he declared: "A government system cannot and must not be concentrated in the hands of one person… We need a collective government in which the people play a dominant role… the clergy's absolute power is bad."[42]To that end, he argued in 2005 that the mission of the Vali-e Fıqh is to supervise and guide people just in the religious matters, nothing more.[43] To him, the management of political and economic affairs should be left to specialists like economists, engineers, architects, and academics.[44] For him, the Islamic clergy can only advise on the issues of morality; they should not intervene in political affairs.[45] In 2009, Montazeri spoke publically and defined the Islamic regime as illegitimate, because of its oppression of its own citizens.[46] He argued that the people had a right to choose their government rather than one chosen by their fathers a generation ago.[47] These words are like the words those of Thomas Jefferson who said each generation has a right to form its own government. In that sense, we see an important correlation between Montazeri's and Jefferson's words: the republican approach. As Mehran Kamrava argued, Montazeri balances between principles of republicanism and Islamic

41 Shahrough Akhavi, "The Thought and Role of Ayatollah Hossein'ali Montazeri in the Politics of Post-1979 Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 41:5, p. 659.

42 Ibid, p. 648.

43 Babak Rahimi, "Democratic Authority, Public Islam, and Shi'i Jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani," *International Political Science Review,* 33:2, p. 204.

44 Shahrough Akhavi, "The Thought and Role of Ayatollah Hossein'ali Montazeri in the Politics of Post-1979 Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 41:5, p. 649.

45 Babak Rahimi, "Democratic Authority, Public Islam, and Shi'i Jurisprudence in Iran and Iraq: Hussain Ali Montazeri and Ali Sistani," *International Political Science Review,* 33:2, p. 204.

46 Ibid, p. 199.

47 Shahrough Akhavi, "The Thought and Role of Ayatollah Hossein'ali Montazeri in the Politics of Post-1979 Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 41:5, p. 666.

commitment.[48] To him this balance was sacrificed on the altar of the Islamic revolution to consolidate the power of Islamic regime; however, Montazeri thinks that this balance should be re-established.[49] During the Green Movement events in 2009, he claimed that the regime in Iran is neither Islamic nor republican.[50]

The main tenets of religious intellectualism in Iran embodied in Montazeri's speeches and struggle were against the Islamic regime. His demands revolve around concepts of openness, tolerance, constitutionalism, pluralism, and reforming an unaccountable and exclusionary Islamic government model.[51] Although he voted for the Velayet-e Faqih, as the pillar of the Islamic regime in 1979, he then struggled to inject democratic qualities to it. His emphasis on democratic rule influenced his student, Mohsen Kadivar, who studied with Ayatollah Montazeri in Qom seminary.

Kadivar, in recent years, argued that democratization of the Velayet-e Faqih is not sufficient for political freedom in Iran. He argued for the separation of the state and religion. This does not lead him to completely separate politics and religion since: although he stands against the fusion of state and religion, he also supported the idea that Islam should be in the public space. Kadivar's political thought went one step further than Montazeri and argued for the separation of state and religion. Second, Kadivar also probed and claimed that being a Marja-e Taqlid is important and that Khamenei did not have such knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence. Thus as Montazeri, he tried to delegitimize Khamenei's appointment to the Supreme Leadership. Third, political rights and freedoms are significant for Kadivar, as well. He puts forward the notion of fundamental, human rights acquired at birth, which

48 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 114.

49 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 114

50 Mohsen Kadivar, "Routinizing the Iranian Revolution," 22 November 2013 http://en.kadivar.com/2013/11/22/routinizing-the-iranian-revolution/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

51 Shahrough Akhavi, "The Thought and Role of Ayatollah Hossein'ali Montazeri in the Politics of Post-1979 Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 41:5, p. 665.

become a cornerstone in his political struggle against the Islamic regime. Lastly, like Abdolkarim Soroush, he argues that the monopoly by radical clerics over the interpretation of Islamic texts should be broken and that Islamic texts should be reread in the light of the needs of modern age on the basis of fundamental rights. In that sense, Montazeri inspires Kadivar's political struggle and way of thinking. He took one step further, claiming the separation of state and religion. Thus, as a cleric, Kadivar carries the torch of "religious intellectualism" after Montazeri. This is the first difference that separates Mohsen Kadivar from Akbar Ganji and Abdolkarim Soroush. While Abdolkarim Soroush received a doctorate in the philosophy of science and worked as a high ranking official in post-revolutionary Iran, and while Akbar Ganji was a soldier in the Revolutionary Guards and later a journalist, both resigned from their posts. Mohsen Kadivar is a trained cleric, whereas Ganji and Abdolkarim Soroush neither had a formal Islamic training nor worked as a cleric within the Islamic seminary. It is important because Kadivar directly represents the opposition within the Qom seminary, during and after Montazeri. Both his and Montazeri's demands were seen dangerous because they used religious arguments - like alternative readings of Islamic sources in compliance with democracy and just gender relations - using Islamic expertise and fiqh to delegitimize the political basis of the Islamic regime.[52]

Kadivar, after entered the seminary in 1981, studied Islamic theology for 16 years. He also taught at the university. The content of his lectures varied from speculative theology, political thoughts, philosophy, and to human rights in Islam.[53] He gave lectures in Shahid Beheshti, Imam Sadegh, and Tarbiat Modarres Universities in Tehran between 1992 and 1998.[54] In 1991, he chaired the department of Islamic Thought of The Center for Strategic Re-

52 Elaine Sciolino, "Iran Dissident Alarms Clerics with Calls Islamic Democracy," 18 September 2000, http://en.kadivar.com/2000/09/18/iran-dissident-alarms-clerics-with-calls-islamic-democracy/, (accessed 20 February 2016).

53 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

54 Ibid.

search[55] and he kept that position untill 1998.[56] This center is important for both Kadivar's intellectual career, and the reformist movement because it became a place where reformists gathered, contacted with one another, and disseminated their views.

The Center for Strategic Research was established in 1989 by Said Hajjarian, who is considered by Yasuyuki Matsunaga to be a homegrown theoretician of Iran, while the President was President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.[57] Hajjarian brought many among the Islamist opposition together and offered a free atmosphere for debate. Said Hajjarian is an important figure for the reformist intellectual movement of the 1990s. His discourses on political development influenced the reformist intellectual movement and the reformist Khatami, who became the president in 1997. His insistence was on the priority of political development, which includes the principles of popular sovereignty, political participation, and the accountability of the government. He saw economic development, and reconstruction of post-revolutionary Iran as secondary problems. Thus, with that focus, reformist intellectuals debated topics including sources of legitimacy of the state, participation problems, legitimacy of the regime,[58] modernization, political and strategic theory, and theories of revolution.[59] Among the intellectuals he brought together in the center were Mohsen Kadivar, Bahzad Nabavi, Abbas Abdi, Alireza Alavitabar, and Hashem Aghajari,[60] all of whom later became important figures of the reformist intellectual movement. Mohsen Kadivar studied Shi'a political thought there and published several books such as *The Theories of the State in the Shi'ite Jurisprudence: Political Thought in Islam Series* (*Nazariyyeh-ha-*

55 Yasuyuki Matsunaga, "Mohsen Kadivar, an Advocate of Postrevivalist Islam in Iran," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 34:3, p. 318.

56 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

57 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 94.

58 Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "From Etelâ'âti to Eslâhtalabi: Sa'id Hajjarian, Political Theology and the Politics of Reform in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Iranian Studies,* 47:6, p. 988.

59 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 94.

60 Ibid.

*ye Dawlatt dar Fiqh-e Shi'a: Andishe Siyyasi dar Eslam*), *Theocratic State: The State under the Juridical Authority]*, and *Political Thoughts in Islam Series* (*Hokumat-e Vela'i: Andishe-he Siyyasi dar Eslam*).[61]

The situation for Kadivar changed in 1997 when the reformist Khatami won the country's presidential contest. The positive post-election atmosphere was disrupted by the violent attacks on reformist intellectuals and politicians by radicals who feared losing power. The reactions of radical clerics ranged from attacks on intellectuals, beating university professors, raiding their lectures, to killing them. Radicals also threatened Kadivar's classes in university.[62] Abdolkarim Soroush's lectures were raided at around the same time by Basij forces; in 1995, Ansar-e Hezbollah interrupted one of his conferences.[63] Seminary students, Basij forces and other radical groups organized street demonstrations against the reformists. Prominent radical figures of the Islamic regime claimed that they should silence the people who demand a new Islamic interpretation in compliance with democracy.[64] In 1997, leaked investigation reports showed that a group of people within the Intelligence Ministry killed three prominent figures of the reformist movement.[65] This was called a "chain of murders." After that, Akbar Ganji, who was a popular journalist of reformist movement at the time, wrote articles in the newspaper *Sobh-e Emrooz* (Today's Morning), in which he showed the web of relationships behind these murders linking them to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.[66] Moreover, in 1999 a number of periodicals and newspapers were closed by the regime on the charge of insulting Islam and misleading

61 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

62 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

63 "I am not the Reformists' Godfather: Interview with Abdolkarim Soroush by Reza Khojasteh-Rahimi," 20 August 2006, http://www.drsoroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-IAmNotTheReformistsGodfather.html, (accessed 17 November 2015).

64 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 114.

65 Ibid, p. 117.

66 "Biography: Akbar Ganji," accessed on 14th September of 2015, http://www.cato.org/friedman-prize/akbar-ganji-biography.

people.[67] In April 2000, fourteen newspapers were simultaneously closed on similar charges.[68] This atmosphere of political violence affected Mohsen Kadivar as well.

Kadivar started to criticize the regime in the second half of the 1980s.[69] In a brief period after reformist Khatami came president, he and other intellectuals and politicians started to criticize the Islamic regime more heavily. Kadivar published an article in the daily *Salam* that said people had chosen Khatami and reformists, thus they stood against the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih, and rejected privileged, Islamic clergy and their networks, violence, and despotism.[70]

In his speeches, Kadivar talked about religious prohibitions against terror, and argued for the right to life in a religious society.[71] When the speeches and articles of a cleric who dared to criticize the Islamic regime from within resonated with society, the regime became increasingly suspicious of him and perceived Kadivar's popularity as a threat. The opinions of reformist, religious intellectuals were not only popular and influential in society, but also among the seminarians and oppositional figures of the Islamic clergy of Qom city.[72]

Especially after the chains of murders against the opposition figures, Kadivar increased his criticism. In that year, he was prevented from giving lectures in Imam Sadegh University in Tehran.[73] In 1999, the Special Court for Clergy (*Dadgah-e Vizheh-ye Ruhanniyyat*) sentenced Kadivar to eigtheen months in Evin prison.[74] He was sentenced twelve months for spreading er-

67 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 119.

68 Ibid.

69 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

70 Yasuyuki Matsunaga, "Mohsen Kadivar, an Advocate of Postrevivalist Islam in Iran," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 34:3, p. 318.

71 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

72 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn,* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 91.

73 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

74 Yasuyuki Matsunaga, "Mohsen Kadivar, an Advocate of Postrevivalist Islam in Iran," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 34:3, p. 318.

roneous information and disturbing the public opinion, plus six months for propagating information against the Islamic Republic of Iran.[75] The existence of the Special Court for Clergy is important for understanding the oppression tools of the Islamic regime. It was founded in 1987 to discipline the opponents among clergy.[76]

After eighteen months in prison, Kadivar was released in July 2000.[77] In October 2000, he started to teach as an assistant professor in the Philosophy Department of Tarbiat Modarres University in Tehran.[78] He worked there until 2007, but after Ahmadinejad came to power in 2005, the situation worsened for all reformists, working in position of public service.

After Ahmadinejad came to power, the power of radicals increased and they started to eliminate the reformists or reformist-oriented people from public service. Some scholars even call the first Ahmadinejad term as the "disappearance of intellectual elites."[79] In this period, the Ahmadinejad administration and radical conservatives supported the economic well-being policies of the government, rejecting reformist agenda that demanded political freedoms and civil-society. The Ahmadinejad administration created an illiberal atmosphere for its opponents including academics and senior officials.[80] Most were forced to resign from their posts; dismissal processes were launched for those[81] who held different points of view about liberal values, freedoms, civil society, and democracy.[82] To that end, in his first years, 600 key figures were dismissed from public offices.[83]

Mohsen Kadivar, as one of the leading intellectuals of reformist movement suffered the same pressure under the Ahmadinejad administration and

75 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

76 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 33

77 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

78 Ibid.

79 Anoush Ehtestami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution,* (London: I.B Tauris, 2007), p. 90

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid, p. 91.

83 Ibid.

was forced to leave his tenured position in the university. The regime approached to Kadivar in this way: in 2007, he was transferred from Tarbiat Modarres University to Iranian Research Institute of Philosophy.[84] In biographical information section of his official website, it is argued that although he had the qualifications of a professor, he was demoted as an associate professor in 2008.[85] In 2009, he was invited to Duke University in United States to give lectures for the 2009-2010 academic year.[86] Since 2008, he has lived exile in the United States and has given lectures in different, prestigious American universities including Columbia, Eastern Mennonite, George Mason, Northwestern, Stanford, Austin, DePaul, Lake Forest, George Washington, Georgetown, Washington Saint Louis, Virginia, California Los Angeles, North Carolina, Duke, Harvard, and Hartford.[87] Since 2009, he has worked in the Religious Studies Department of Duke University as a research professor.

In June 2009, a presidential election took place in Iran. The candidates were Ahmadinejad, Mehdi Karroubi, and Mir-Hossein Mousavi.[88] The last two were from the reformist camp - or at least they were not radicals and the regime did not support them. Regime forces were behind Ahmadinejad. At the night of elections, all short-messaging services were closed, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was seized for protection, all reformist centers were seized, and it was declared that the Ahmadinejad won the presidential race against Mousavi.[89] The declared election results showed that Ahmadinejad won 63 percent and Mousavi won 34 percent of the votes.[90] Voters were angered with the election results because they believed these election results were faulty, and the regime forces had deceived them. Hearsays of fraud in the election

84 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

85 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

86 Ibid.

87 "Biography," http://en.kadivar.com/sample-page-2/, (accessed 7 February 2016).

88 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini Iran Under His Successors,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 166.

89 Ibid, p. 168.

90 Ibid.

became a cornerstone in the process.[91] Kadivar defined that night as a "coup d'état against election."[92] That same week, millions of people gathered in the streets and protested.[93] On June 14, Basij forces raided the university campuses and killed at least seven students. The number of deaths was estimated at 200 in mid-July 2009.[94] The movement was called the Green Movement because protesters used the color Green in their demonstrations. The slogans of "Allahu Akbar,"[95] "death to the dictator," "freedom for Iran," "we will die but never compromise,"[96] and "where is my vote" were the known slogans of the movement. Iranian academic Hamid Dabashi called Green Movement as commencement of full-fledged civil disobedience.[97] All these events deteriorated the sources of legitimacy of the Islamic regime.[98] Thus, Iranian citizens who searched for the reliable results of the elections heavily criticized the source of legitimacy.

Mohsen Kadivar had close relationships with the leaders of the Green Movement, and together with Abdolkarim Soroush, Akbar Ganji, Ataollah Mohajerani, and Abdolali Bazargan wrote a manifesto that established the goals of Green Movement.[99] Among the demands, there were the resignation of Ahmadinejad, free and fair elections, abolishment of the vetting process by Guardian Council, release of all political prisoners, the right to protest,

91 Leila Austin, "The Politics of Youth Bulge: From Islamic Activism to Democratic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa," *SAIS Review of International Affairs,* vol:31, no:2, p. 86.

92 Mohsen Kadivar, "A Narrative of the Iranian Green Movement: The Green Call," http://en.kadivar.com/2014/11/07/the-green-call/, (accessed 10 February 2016).

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid, p. 170.

95 Hamid Dabashi, *The Green Movement in Iran,* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2011), p. 28.

96 Ali Afshari and H. Graham Underwood, "The Green Wave," *Journal of Democracy,* 20:4, p. 9.

97 Hamid Dabashi, *The Green Movement in Iran,* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2011), p. 25.

98 Leila Austin, "The Politics of Youth Bulge: From Islamic Activism to Democratic Reform in the Middle East and North Africa," *SAIS Review of International Affairs,* vol:31, no:2, p. 87.

99 Abdolkarim Soroush: "The Goals of Iran's Green Movement," 6 January 2010, http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Global-Viewpoint/2010/0106/Abdolkarim-Soroush-The-goals-of-Iran-s-Green-Movement, (accessed 17 November 2015).

independence of the universities and the judiciary, the election of all official positions.[100] This manifesto was quite influential for the Green Movement, since these demands became the demands of the people. Throughout the process, Kadivar argued from in different platforms elected and politically accountable legal institutions should replace the Supreme Leadership.[101] Kadivar believes that the Green Movement is a manifestation of the people's criticisms of the corrupt Islamic regime in Iran.[102]

Kadivar also wrote that the process of the Green Movement is divided into two phases.[103] The first phase was between July and November 2009. During this phase, the leitmotiv was the protest against the stolen votes, however the leitmotiv for the second phase was the anti-authoritarian demands of the people.[104] Kadivar argued that the problem at the time in Iran was that no just institutions were left in the Islamic regime. In contrast to just institutions, Kadivar said the regime held Stalinist-type trials against the opponents.[105] Kadivar explained in an article that "no regime lasts without honoring the citizens' right of critique, without accepting the right of protesting and peaceful demonstrations, without and independent press."[106] Moreover, Kadivar claimed that the Green Movement is against religious despotism: it favors intellectual and merciful Islam.[107] In relation to that, Kadivar adds that the Green Movement is against the use of religion as a political tool.[108]

In a way, Kadivar, Soroush, Ganji and other reformist, religious intellectuals forged the discourses of the movement. Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi note that, "the current green movement is in many re-

100 Ibid.

101 Mohsen Kadivar, "A Narrative of the Iranian Green Movement: The Green Call," http://en.kadivar.com/2014/11/07/the-green-call/, (accessed 10 February 2016).

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.

107 "Interview with Mohsen Kadivar, The Expose of Religious Despotism is Voiced," 31 August 2009, http://en.kadivar.com/2009/08/31/the-expose-of-religious-despotism-is-voiced/, (accessed 23 February 2016).

108 Ibid.

spects a manifestation of their scholarly thoughts."[109] On the other hand, this movement is a turning point for these intellectuals from a different angle, as well. As anybody can understand from the manifesto they prepared, the demands did not include a religious government. They felt the need among members of society for peaceful co-existence, political freedoms and a just, fair political system that does not exclude anybody on the basis of their identity. Thus this was a turning point, especially for Kadivar. As a cleric, he would normally demand a model of religious democracy, but he did not. I believe this was the spirit of the Green Movement. The Green Movement forced some important changes in the intellectual discourses of religious intellectuals, even for a cleric like Kadivar. He was one of the last intellectuals in that circle to believe in the importance of political secularism. In the rest of this chapter, I will elaborate his intellectual inclination towards political secularism in the 2000s and his contradictory expressions on secularism and religious democracy.

## § 5.1 Intellectual and Political Discourses

Reformist intellectuals hold different views and sometimes publicly argue with each other. This shows that the reformist intellectual movement is not unified, cohesive whole. Reformist intellectuals are not a political party. They do not hesitate to show different views to the public. However, there are points that unify them against the Islamic regime. The lack and suppression of political freedoms, the monist and exclusionary Velayet institution, corrupt regime officials and the need for a democratic interpretation of Islamic texts unifies them under a banner of reformist or religious intellectual movement.

Although Abdolkarim Soroush, Akbar Ganji and most reformist intellectuals are not from clerics, Kadivar was trained as a cleric and gave lectures in Islamic seminaries for many years. He was the student of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri. His clerical education in Islamic seminaries gave him a method

109 Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi, "Islamic Reformation Discourses: Popular Sovereignty and Religious Secularization in Iran, *Democratization,* 19:2, p. 337.

of clerical thinking. What does that mean? It means that although Akbar Ganji and Abdolkarim Soroush more loudly voiced the concept of political secularism in the second part of 2000s, Kadivar hesitated to do the same. Only after the events of the 2009 Green Movement, he started to demand the separation of state and religion in line with his intellectual circle. In that sense, although Mohsen Kadivar demanded a spiritual Islam - which is more private and between religion, and individual - rather than all encompassing, hegemonic, political Islam, his demand for "moderate secularism," which I take as political secularism developed recently. Akbar Ganji's inclination and declaration of the necessity of secularism for a democratic Iran started in the first part of the 2000s and accelerated in the second part of the 2000s, especially after the Green Movement. Abdolkarim Soroush, for his part, demanded support for political secularism in his speeches and articles after 2006. The social atmosphere of the Green Movement and the attitudes of his intellectual circle influenced Kadivar's thinking and strategy, and he argued for moderate secularism perhaps because he now lives outside of Iran.

Second, Kadivar because of his clerical origin perpetuates fiqh-based argumentation. He is critical of the Islamic regime but his arguments generally come from the fiqh and the Islamic texts.[110] Although Soroush and Ganji also employed fiqh-based argumentation, Kadivar's jurisprudential emphasis much more than theirs.[111]

Third, Kadivar's intellectual struggle focuses on the political theology of Islam: the relation between government and Islam. He believes the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system lacks a religious foundation.[112] He sees it as an invention of religious revivalist currents of the 1960s and 1970s and demands that Islam should be more spiritual than political. His model entails the minimization of the religion at the state level and the abolishment of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system. That is why his thinking was deemed dangerous by the regime, and explains the charges directed against him in the Special

110 Yasuyuki Matsunaga, "Mohsen Kadivar, an Advocate of Postrevivalist Islam in Iran," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 34:3, p. 323.

111 Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi, "Islamic Reformation Discourses: Popular Sovereignty and Religious Secularization in Iran, *Democratization,* 19:2, p. 337.

112 Ibid, p. 338.

Court for Clergy. In recent years, he argues that a separation of the state and religion should also be established apart from the abolishment of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih.

Fourth, Kadivar says that democracy can be derived from within Islam. In that sense, he puts forward the idea of rereading and reinterpreting the Islamic texts like Abdolkarim Soroush, he argues that Islamic precepts are divided into fixed and changeable ones.[113] Thus, the precepts that do not comply with the conditions of modern age can be reformed.

Fifth, he puts forward the idea of fundamental rights in contrast with the Islamic system of proportional rights that doles out rights to the people according to their racial, gender, and social characteristics. Against this, he argues that the leitmotiv of the modern law is fundamental rights held by every person from birth to death. In that sense, Kadivar strictly argues the equality between men and women.

Thus we see that Kadivar forms his intellectual and political struggle by claiming the notions of equality, freedoms and democracy. He believes the society of Iran can live with peacefully if the *Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih* system gives way to a democratic state that on the basis of separation of the state and religion.

## § 5.2 Thoughts on the *Velayet*

Kadivar, as a cleric deeply influenced from Ayatollah Montazeri, studied the concept of the Velayet and tries to find counter-arguments in Islamic fiqh and Islamic history that show that the Velayet concept is not founded in Islam, but is rather an invention of twentieth century Shi'a Islamic political theology. This intellectual struggle against the Velayet concept forms one of the benchmarks of his political struggle, as well.

In order to better illustrate the place of the Velayet in Islamic history, Kadivar points to the modern division of the public and private sphere. According to him, the public sphere belongs to humanity, which means that the

113 Naser Ghobadzadeh and Lily Zubaidah Rahimi, "Islamic Reformation Discourses: Popular Sovereignty and Religious Secularization in Iran, *Democratization,* 19:2, p. 325.

management of it belongs to every constituent member.[114] The God of Islam does not intervene in the affairs of the political and the public sphere. He also claims that God has given humans the right to run their own affairs in the public sphere.[115] In that view, people are seen as politically capable, mature individuals who can decide and choose their own destiny according to their own reasoning.[116] However, the notion of the Velayet sees the people who live under its jurisdiction as immature and incapable - in need of Islamic supervision or guardianship in every aspect of public space. Thus what Kadivar envisions for an Islamic society is completely contrary to the Velayet institution.

In his theoretical approach to the Velayet, Kadivar argues that the vote of people is one of the main criteria of the system.[117] If it is incorporated into the political structure, a religious society is able to live democratically. He claims that the political authorities are the representatives of the people and they realize their representative roles under the supervision of people, they represented.[118] So, his criticism of the *Velayet* depends on basic republican claims.

Kadivar uses fiqh-based argumentation to explain and justify his views; his Islamic argumentation style is clear. While he discusses political rights of the Muslims, he says that Islam sees the will of the people as an issue related to the public sphere. In relation to it, he gives references to some Islamic verses that say, "Every man as god's viceroy can take part in determining the political destiny of his country."[119] According to Kadivar, such verses from the Qur'an apposite to the idea that God has granted men the right to run their own affairs without intervention. Thus, for Kadivar, the notion of

114 Mohsen Kadivar, "The Political Rights of the People in Islam: The Right to Choose Destiny," 20 January 2001, http://en.kadivar.com/2001/01/20/political-rights-of-people-in-islam/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.

guardianship requires an explanation,[120] which is why he spent most of his intellectual career studying and criticizing the Velayet institution.

Kadivar's goal is to discern the material conditions for socio-political freedoms rather than make vague, philosophical explanations. However, he uses a vague language that fails to point the material conditions for a democratic regime. This marks one of the most salient features of religious intellectuals in post-revolutionary process. Though, he sees a correlation between man - who has reason and is thus able to conduct his own affairs without intervention from above - and the modern socio-political freedoms. In that respect, his model assumes mature, capable, and enlightened human being who can decide her/his own affairs without the guidance of others. This is also the foundation of Western Enlightenment philosophy. Immanuel Kant describes the enlightened person as the individual, who uses his own mind without guidance of others.[121] In that sense, there is much in common between Kadivar's intellectual world and the Enlightenment on the grounds that both emphasize reason.

Mohsen Kadivar explains that there are three points of views in the theory of Islamic government.[122] These are in order, Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih (absolute guardianship), *Velayet-e Muqayyidah* (limited guardianship), and religious, democratic government supported by religious intellectuals.[123]

Kadivar explains them one by one. He posits that the first theory of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih or namely *Velayet-e Entasabi-e Mutlaqeh* (appointed absolute guardian) is based on absolute power, which excludes democratic aspects like the elections or accountability.[124] In terms of government, second one - Velayet-e Entekhabi-e Muqayyidah (elected and limited guardian)

120 Ibid.

121 Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?," http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html, (accessed 19 February 2016).

122 Mohsen Kadivar, "Wilayat-al Faqih and Democracy," 13 November 2011, http://en.kadivar.com/2011/11/13/wilayat-al-faqih-and-democracy/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid.

- is the limited version of the first one. Kadivar presents the type of ruler under these theories as "absolute faqih," and "faqih with limited authority."[125]

Kadivar explains that while the Velayet-e Entesabi-e Mutlaqeh governs all aspects of people in the public sphere, the person who rules as the Velayet-e Mutlaq makes decisions without any limitation of law. The term for office is unlimited, appointed by the 86 clerics of the Assembly of Experts, whose election takes place under the supervision of the Council of Guardians, whose members are appointed by the Velayet-e Mutlaq, and who claim their legitimacy from God.[126] Kadivar adds that the institution of absolute guardianship acts on behalf of others and it decides without consulting people.[127] Moreover, Kadivar lays down other aspects of absolute guardianship as follows: it is obligatory not elective, it is accountable only to God, the legitimacy for all decisions in public life depends on the approval of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih, and his power is absolute because he appoints all of the important governmental and judicial positions on his own, including the head of judiciary, officials of the executive branches, the armed forces, and the media.[128] Thus, Kadivar considers the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system as to be contradictory to democracy and analogous to religious or clerical autocracy.[129]

Kadivar puts forward that the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih system does not have a credible foundation in Islamic fiqh.[130] The Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih is thus a reflection of political despotism in the Eastern world; more specifically, it is a continuation of the Persian notion of kingdom. He adds that it is

125 Mohsen Kadivar, "Theories of Government in Shi'i Fiqh," 26 May 2008, http://en.kadivar.com/2008/05/26/theories-of-government-in-shii-fiqh/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

126 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 168.

127 Mohsen Kadivar, "Wilayat-al Faqih and Democracy," 13 November 2011, http://en.kadivar.com/2011/11/13/wilayat-al-faqih-and-democracy/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

supported by the Platonic theory of the philosopher king,[131] whereby the wise rules the incapable masses. By emphasizing the correlation between Platonic theory of philosopher king and the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih, he underlines the historical origins of despotism before Islam and its effects on the Islamic governmental theory.

Kadivar sets forth the second view, namely the Velayet-e Entekhabi-e Muqayyidah was supported by the Islamic reformist clergy including Ayatollah Montazeri.[132] Perhaps he was one of the most ardent supporters of this idea. These Islamic reformists did not want to put forward a new democratic model. They supported neither democracy nor absolute guardianship, but a hybrid model of elected, conditional guardianship.[133] The Velayet-e Entekhabi-e Mutlaqeh is elected by and accountable to the people, allows for freedom of criticism, and the person who rules as the guardian can be removed from office through elections instead of absolute mandate.[134]

Kadivar explains that the field of Shi'a political theory has long been neglected; it was only in the twentieth century that it found an opportunity to expand. He says that the issue of government was not handled by Shi'a clergy until 1829. It was in that year that the cleric Ahmad Naraqi[135] handled the issue in his book *Awa'id al Ayyam,* in which he argued that "kings rule over the masses, and the clergy rules over the kings."[136] For the first time in modern Iran's history, Islamic government and the role of Islamic clergy was taken into consideration. In the first half of the nineteenth century Naraqi gave the clergy an undeniably important role in the hierarchy of government.

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131 Ibid.

132 Mohsen Kadivar, "Wilayat-al Faqih and Democracy," 13 November 2011, http://en.kadivar.com/2011/11/13/wilayat-al-faqih-and-democracy/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

133 Ibid.

134 Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 168.

135 Mohsen Kadivar, "Theories of Government in Shi'i Fiqh," 26 May 2008, http://en.kadivar.com/2008/05/26/theories-of-government-in-shii-fiqh/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

136 Hamid Dabashi, *SHI'ISM A Religion of Protest,* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 171.

As Kadivar suggests, after Naraqi's publications, the topic started to be discussed more among the Islamic clergy.[137] Kadivar explains that between 1906 and 1908 (the period of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran) a change erupted in the minds of the Islamic clergy. Until that time, the traditional view was that clergy should not intervene in political affairs.[138] However, during that period, Islamic clergy encountered with ideas of constitutionalism and legitimacy (*mehsruteh* and *mashruah*).[139] Kadivar then points to the importance of Khomeini in the field of the Islamic theory of government. He says Khomeini was the first faqih to form the first detailed theory of Islamic government in the 1960s.[140] According to his idea, Islam provided Islamic clergy a special mission to form and run the government. His theory was embodied as the Velayet-e Faqih according to which the Vali-ye Fiqh is the prerogative of God on earth.[141] The right to govern was first given to Prophet, passed to Ali, and after his death to twelve Imams and then the *Mehdi* (redeemer). This is the brief explanation of Islamic Shi'a belief. However, in the absence of the redeemer Khomeini said that the right to govern belongs only to the Islamic fuqaha (jurists and clergy),[142] because it takes its power directly from God. Kadivar notes that the power of the Velayet is indivisible and centralized.[143] However, to be appointed as Velayet-e Faqih, the fundamental requirements are knowledge of the fiqh and justice.[144] He argues that these conditions should be met for accession to the office of the Velayet.

According to Kadivar, although there are important differences between absolute Velayet and limited Velayet, both take their legitimacy from divine source. However, Kadivar adds that there are two sources of legitimacy in

137 Mohsen Kadivar, "Theories of Government in Shi'i Fiqh," 26 May 2008, http://en.kadivar.com/2008/05/26/theories-of-government-in-shii-fiqh/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

138 Ibid.

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid.

Shi'a political theories of government: one is divine legitimacy and the other is legitimacy from the people.[145] Here he claims that the limited Velayet in fact takes its power from people, even though it is coupled with the observance of divine rules and gives Islamic jurists the right to adjudicate divine rules.[146]

For a long time Kadivar supported the basic demands of the Velayet-e Entesabi-e Muqayyidah, but has focused on the separation of the state and religion in the second part of the 2000s. As a result of this change, he started to criticize both absolute and limited guardianship models of Islamic government. He argued that post-revolutionary, religious intellectuals in Iran stood against both. Instead, post-revolutionary religious intellectuals including him that the institution of the Velayet, whether absolute or limited, is incompatible with democracy.[147]

According to post-revolutionary, religious intellectuals, the institution of the Velayet is a kind of religious dictatorship.[148] For them, the third way is a democratic government and democratic society in which people can have their faith, and practice it freely under democratic institutions.[149] Kadivar argues that the institution of the Velayet cannot be reformed because Islamic democracy contradicts reality. However he argues that Islamic society can be managed by democratic institutions and norms.[150] He says that to try to reform the Velayet institution in a secular world will not solve the problems of a modern society.[151] On the other hand, he proclaims that democracy is a bottom-up process, while the Velayet is a top-down approach. In his mind, democracy means proper, fair distribution of power throughout society and

145 Mohsen Kadivar, "Theories of Government in Shi'i Fiqh," 26 May 2008, http://en.kadivar.com/2008/05/26/theories-of-government-in-shii-fiqh/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

146 Ibid.

147 Mohsen Kadivar, "Wilayat-al Faqih and Democracy," 13 November 2011, http://en.kadivar.com/2011/11/13/wilayat-al-faqih-and-democracy/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid.

151 Ibid.

public monitoring of decision-making process. He says these are the cornerstones of a democracy.[152] When he talks about democracy, he has fair distribution of power in mind in opposition to a hierarchy in which the supreme leader keeps powers in his own hands and keeps the accountability of the officials within the state. He claims that "will of the people is the first pillar of democracy."[153] In that respect, he says that democracy is one of the best political tools in the world.[154]

## § 5.3 Political Struggle against the *Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih*

Kadivar's intellectual probe of the concept of the Velayet shaped his political struggle against the Islamic regime in Iran. Kadivar says that although one of the major goals of the Islamic revolution was to establish a free society, it did not succeed.[155] Kadivar claims that the 1979 constitution did not contain the institution of the Velayet.[156] However, the embassy raid of the United States and abrogation of the liberal Islamist Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan prepared the way for radicals to put forward the institution of the Velayet, resulting in a republic of clerics. Kadivar defines the decision of the Assembly of Experts to amend the Constitution adding the Velayet at the end of 1979 as a coup.[157] To him, the elimination of liberal and moderate views from the Islamic Republic's political sphere and domination of hardliners resulted in the loss of hope for republican virtues of the Islamic Republic. He argues that

152 Mohsen Kadivar, "Wilayat-al Faqih and Democracy," 13 November 2011, http://en.kadivar.com/2011/11/13/wilayat-al-faqih-and-democracy/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

153 "People's Consents, Interview with Mohsen Kadivar," 4 August 2010, http://en.kadivar.com/2010/08/04/peoples-consent/, (accessed 27 February 2016).

154 Ibid.

155 Mohsen Kadivar, "Routinizing the Iranian Revolution," 22 November 2013 http://en.kadivar.com/2013/11/22/routinizing-the-iranian-revolution/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

156 Ibid.

157 Mohsen Kadivar, "Routinizing the Iranian Revolution," 22 November 2013 http://en.kadivar.com/2013/11/22/routinizing-the-iranian-revolution/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

Bazargan, from the beginning of the revolution insisted on the name of Islamic Democratic Republic of Iran; however hardliner Khomeini's proposal to name it the Islamic Republic of Iran dominated the diverging view.[158] Kadivar points to the political struggle between hardliners and liberals. He also believes that liberal values including political freedom, and the right of criticism were sacrificed at the beginning of the post-revolutionary process. He said in post-revolutionary Iran clerics behaved as a political party and helped radicalize the country by oppressing the demands for political freedom and equality.[159]

All these events should have forced Kadivar to say that in 1979 a kingdom was replaced with an Islamic kingdom.[160] Thus, he argued that there are important similarities between the post-revolutionary situation of Iran and Hobbesian society; the *Velayet* institution and clerical fraternity of post-revolutionary Iran started to dominate every part of social life just like the Hobbesian Leviathan state.[161] Kadivar argued that the charismatic Khomeini injected revolutionary political theology into the modern state.[162] In the early post-revolutionary process, the state was dominated by a comprehensive doctrine. The state and religion fused. As do Abdolkarim Soroush and Akbar Ganji, in recent years Kadivar demands the separation of state and religion to put an end to this fusion.[163]

Mohsen Kadivar, like Ayatollah Montazeri, tried to delegitimize Ali Khamenei's Supreme Leadership pointing to his lack of expertise in Islamic

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid.

160 Paul Hughes, "Democratic Iraq May Encourage Change in Iran-Cleric," 2 February 2005, http://en.kadivar.com/2005/02/02/democratic-iraq-may-encourage-change-in-iran-cleric/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

161 Mohsen Kadivar, "Routinizing the Iranian Revolution," 22 November 2013 http://en.kadivar.com/2013/11/22/routinizing-the-iranian-revolution/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

162 Ibid.

163 Mohsen Kadivar "The Trivialization of Shi'i Marja'iyyat Impeaching Iran's Supreme Leader on His Marja'iyyat," 25 March 2014, http://en.kadivar.com/2014/03/25/the-trivialization-of-shii-marjaiyyat-impeaching-irans-supreme-leader-on-his-marjaiyyat/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

fiqh. Montazeri and Kadivar, citing the relevant articles of constitution, argued against the leadership of Ali Khamenei, who was appointed by the Assembly of Experts as the Vali-e Fiqh after the death of Khomeini in 1989. Further information about the 1989 amendments demonstrates its influence in shaping the absolute Velayet.

Kadivar claimed that although he himself accepted the 1980 constitution, he did not accept the amendments to the constitution in 1989;[164] because the article 107 that defines the requirements of the Supreme Leadership was changed and the condition of religious expertise was decreased.[165] Instead, the "political" tone of the article was emphasized by the regime in the name of "expediency of the regime."[166] Instead of a religious expert with a deep knowledge in religious issues, Ali Khamenei, who was not a Marja, was chosen by the Assembly of Experts as the supreme leader in 1989. As mentioned above, these discussions had begun before 1989 with the Ayatollah Montazeri's demands for political freedom and freedom for political prisoners in the second part of the 1980s. That is important because Ayatollah Montazeri was apparent heir to Khomeini, but before his death Khomeini underscored the "principle of expediency" of the regime in 1988.[167] Khomeini thus tried to guarantee the continuation and consolidation of the Islamic state. Most researchers defined 1989 amendments as the domination of politics over religion.[168] In that sense, Ali Khamenei's Supreme Leadership has always been controversial among Islamic clergy, especially among reformist clergy. Khamenei's Supreme Leadership has become a symbol of Islamic regime's following political concerns and interests rather than religious, Islamic ones.

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164 Ibid.

165 Olivier Roy, "The Crisis of Religious Legitimacy in Iran," *Middle East Journal,* Vol:53, No:2, p. 205.

166 Ibid.

167 Yasuyuki Matsunaga, "The Secularization of a Faqih-Headed Revolutionary Islamic State of Iran: Its Mechanisms, Processes, and Prospects," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 29:3, p. 473.

168 Olivier Roy, "The Crisis of Religious Legitimacy in Iran," *Middle East Journal,* Vol:53, No:2, p. 202.

Mohsen Kadivar believed in constitutionalism and argued that Islamic regime could be reformed by constitutional means. Kadivar stated that 1989 amendments were already violations of Articles 5, 107 and 109 of the Iranian constitution.[169] Article 109 states that a Supreme Leader should have:

> 1.Scholarship, as required for performing the functions of muftiin different fields of fiqh, 2. Justice and piety, as required for the leadership of the Islamic Ummah, and 3. Right political and social perspicacity, prudence, courage, administrative facilities and adequate capability for leadership.[170]

This article is the latest version after the amendments. The Article 109 not only says that leader should have religious knowledge, but he should also have adequate capability for leadership. This political sentence was used by the Islamic regime to stop Montazeri and clergy like him, who were demanding political freedom and making criticisms about the regime. Thus, Kadivar argued that followers of Khomeini prioritized politics over knowledge of the fiqh.[171] After the amendments, Kadivar said that the perpetrators of the Islamic regime announced that the Velayet institution and believing Islam are inseparable.[172] Thus, we see that Islamic regime in Iran combined Islamic government and Islamic faith, making them mutually binding. Without one,

169 Mohsen Kadivar "The Trivialization of Shi'i Marja'iyyat Impeaching Iran's Supreme Leader on His Marja'iyyat," 25 March 2014, http://en.kadivar.com/2014/03/25/the-trivialization-of-shii-marjaiyyat-impeaching-irans-supreme-leader-on-his-marjaiyyat/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

170 "Iran (Islamic Republic of)'s Constitution of 1979 with Amendments through 1989," https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf?lang=en, (accessed 20 February 2016).

171 Mohsen Kadivar "The Trivialization of Shi'i Marja'iyyat Impeaching Iran's Supreme Leader on His Marja'iyyat," 25 March 2014, http://en.kadivar.com/2014/03/25/the-trivialization-of-shii-marjaiyyat-impeaching-irans-supreme-leader-on-his-marjaiyyat/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

172 Mohsen Kadivar "The Trivialization of Shi'i Marja'iyyat Impeaching Iran's Supreme Leader on His Marja'iyyat," 25 March 2014, http://en.kadivar.com/2014/03/25/the-trivialization-of-shii-marjaiyyat-impeaching-irans-supreme-leader-on-his-marjaiyyat/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

the other collapses. That is why proponents of the Islamic regime in Iran react harshly, when reformist intellectuals attack the Islamic foundations of the Velayet institution and doctrine.

Kadivar struggled to demonstrate Khamenei's lack of knowledge in the Islamic fiqh. However, Ali Khamenei was elevated to the level of Marja in 1994. Kadivar, citing the conversations between him and Montazeri, proclaims that Khamenei received *Marjaiyyat* through bribery and threats.[173] In the same year, Khamenei proclaimed it was wrong to have more than one Marja (source of emulation who can issue fatwas thus holds political and social power). Instead there should be only one Marja.[174] Thus in 1997, he became the unique Marja to hold the power of emulation in his hands.[175] Kadivar cites Montazeri, who says that Khamenei as an absolute leader also tried to become an absolute Marja.[176] The monopolization of political power was implemented in the religious field, as well. All these decisions and actions were aimed at capturing the power and channeling it into the Supreme Leadership, thus reducing the impacts of opposition. In the same year, Ali Khamenei became the unique Marja, he also issued a fatwa (religious declaration) that prohibited public criticism of officials[177] de facto banning the criticisms of the Velayet institution and Ali Khamenei himself.

The eighteen months prison sentence for Kadivar from the Special Court for Clergy in 1999 was a direct consequence of Kadivar's criticism of the Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih and thus, Ali Khamenei.[178] Kadivar believed that the absolute power of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei made Iran a religious dictatorship.[179] Kadivar explained that Khamenei re-established the absolute

173 Ibid.

174 Ibid.

175 Ibid.

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid.

178 "The Chronicle, The Independent Daily at Duke University, A Scholar and a Dissident," 2 December 2016, http://en.kadivar.com/2011/12/02/a-scholar-and-a-dissident/, (accessed 20 February 2016).

179 Robin Wright, "Keeping Faith in Reform, and in Islam, in Iran," 15 December 2004, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A64808-2004Dec14.html, (accessed 20 February 2016).

monarchy, but this time he covered it with an Islamic appearance.[180] Kadivar believes that before revolution Iran had a secular dictator, namely shah regime, but now they have a religious dictator.[181] Furthermore, Kadivar blamed Khamenei of enfeebling Islam by politicizing religion and establishing despotic rule in Iran.[182]

Especially after Iran's Green Movement took place in 2009, Kadivar argued that religious dictatorship leads to a military dictatorship, which made him believe that the Iranian form of theocracy had already failed.[183] Instead of a theocratic regime, he increasingly emphasized the need for a "moderate secularism." In one of his interviews, made in 2012, he demands secularism, which he defines as the separation of religion and state[184] in which the state respects human dignity, accepts women's rights. It would be a state in which people can freely elect their politicians, be they secular or religious.[185]

180 Mohsen Kadivar "The Trivialization of Shi'i Marja'iyyat Impeaching Iran's Supreme Leader on His Marja'iyyat," 25 March 2014, http://en.kadivar.com/2014/03/25/the-trivialization-of-shii-marjaiyyat-impeaching-irans-supreme-leader-on-his-marjaiyyat/, (accessed 19 February 2016).

181 Margarita A. Mooney, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue: My Conversation with Islamic Scholar Mohsen Kadivar," 1 February 2012, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/blackwhiteandgray/2012/02/christian-muslim-dialogue-my-conversation-with-islamic-scholar-mohsen-kadivar/?repeat=w3tc, (accessed 20 February 2016).

182 Ibid.

183 "Iranian Regime Critic Mohsen Kadivar: 'This Iranian Form of Theocracy Has Failed'," 1 July 2009, http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/iranian-regime-critic-mohsen-kadivar-this-iranian-form-of-theocracy-has-failed-a-633517.html, (accessed 20 February 2016).

184 Margarita A. Mooney, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue: My Conversation with Islamic Scholar Mohsen Kadivar," 1 February 2012, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/blackwhiteandgray/2012/02/christian-muslim-dialogue-my-conversation-with-islamic-scholar-mohsen-kadivar/?repeat=w3tc, (accessed 20 February 2016).

185 "Iranian Regime Critic Mohsen Kadivar: 'This Iranian Form of Theocracy Has Failed'," 1 July 2009, http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/iranian-regime-critic-mohsen-kadivar-this-iranian-form-of-theocracy-has-failed-a-633517.html, (accessed 20 February 2016).

## § 5.4 Islamic Argumentation and Re-Interpretation of Religious Texts in Line with Modern Times

As mentioned above, Kadivar uses a fiqh-based argumentation and gives references to Islamic texts while discussing political and social problems. However, throughout his intellectual struggle he has emphasized the importance of rereading Islamic texts in compliance with the needs of a modern, democratic world. One of the basic questions that Iranian intellectuals faced with before and after 1979 revolution concerns the compatibility between modernity and tradition. Before the revolution as Ali Mirsepassi noted, the concept of "authenticity," which says Iran should return to its roots rather than following the alien, western culture - dominated the discursive field.[186] After the revolution, post-revolutionary intellectuals continued to struggle with questions of the compatibility between modernity and tradition, but this time it was between modernity and Islam.

Mohsen Kadivar claimed there is a possibility of compatibility between modernity and Islam, but to realize it Muslim people need more than the official reading of Islam perpetuated by Islamic clergy.[187] For an alternative reading of Islamic texts, first of all it should be accepted that there are three perspectives that claim to solve the tension between tradition and modernity.[188]

First is rereading Islamic verses in historical context, thus attributing to the verses according to their space and time. Kadivar argues that Islamic verses can be divided into two: constant and variable.[189] To him, constant

186 Ali Mirsepassi, "Islam as a Modernizing Ideology: Al-e Ahmad and Shari'ati," in *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization Negotiating Modernity in Iran,* 96-128. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 96.

187 Mohsen Kadivar, "The Principles of Compatibility of Islam and Modernity," 7 October 2004, http://en.kadivar.com/2004/10/08/the-principles-of-compatibility-of-islam-and-modernity-2/, (accessed 20 February 2016).

188 Mohsen Kadivar, "From Traditional Islam to Islam as an End in Itself," 11 December 2011, http://en.kadivar.com/2011/12/11/from-traditional-islam-to-islam-as-an-end-in-itself-2/, (accessed 20 February 2016).

189 Ibid.

verses are eternal and unchangeable. However, the second type of verses can change through time and space in compliance with socio-political transformations in the world.[190] Kadivar believes that representatives of people for the perfection of humanity can change these temporary verses.[191] Kadivar argues that Islamic clergy in Iran accept all precepts as unchangeable law,[192] but he defines this situation as untenable since religious intellectualism requires that all Islamic verses be aimed at the goal of human dignity.[193] Kadivar claims that religious goals like the perfection of man and human dignity are eternal and constant, but religious tools like precepts can differ through time depending on the historical conditions.[194] For example, he refers to the Islamic precepts that discriminate against women and non-Muslims. To Kadivar, these precepts are among the variable, changeable verses since the conditions of the modern world do not permit such inequality among its citizens.

Kadivar argues that the second way to solve the tension between modernity and Islamic tradition is the Velayet-e Faqih system that claims all problems - be they traditional or modern - can be solved by extracting information from the Islamic fiqh. According to it, the Islamic truth is the only truth and Islamic jurisprudence can be applied to every part of society. This is the perspective sounded by the Islamic clergy and conservatives in Iran.

Lastly, Kadivar claims that the third perspective is to perceive Islam as an end in itself,[195] an idea that through the 1990s and 2000s, he developed. Kadivar believes that Islam as a spiritual goal should not be dominated by the politics.[196] In that respect, Kadivar purports that Islam's scope of influ-

190 Ibid.

191 Ibid.

192 Ibid.

193 Mohsen Kadivar, "The Principles of Compatibility of Islam and Modernity," 7 October 2004, http://en.kadivar.com/2004/10/08/the-principles-of-compatibility-of-islam-and-modernity-2/, (accessed 20 February 2016).

194 Ibid.

195 Mohsen Kadivar, "From Traditional Islam to Islam as an End in Itself," 11 December 2011, http://en.kadivar.com/2011/12/11/from-traditional-islam-to-islam-as-an-end-in-itself-2/, (accessed 20 February 2016).

196 Ibid.

ence would be smaller but deeper.[197] Religious intellectuals mainly focus on this issue and advocate a spiritual Islam instead of an Islam overshadowed by political concerns.[198] In between the lines, one can find the view that sees religion is a private matter.

## § 5.5 Kadivar on the Public-Private Division

In "An Introduction to the Public and Private Debate in Islam," Mohsen Kadivar discusses the concepts of public and private in Islam.[199] Kadivar questions the extent of privacy in Islam and argues that neither the concepts of public nor private do have an Islamic origin.[200] Before taking Islamic perception of privacy into consideration, he defines private and public. To him, private means "personal to the individual, protected from others, exclusive control and authority of the individual in a domain."[201] On the other hand, he argues that in the public sphere, nothing can be hidden from members of that public sphere: it is a common area belonging to all members who form it.[202]

However, Kadivar explains that in Islam and Sharia law, all is private so nothing can be public.[203] This is different from how Islam should be in Kadivar's mind. Kadivar puts forward that the famous Islamic precept "commanding good and forbidding evil" in society denies the public sphere and very notion of public because every problem, phenomenon, event, and agent

197 Ibid.

198 Mohsen Kadivar, "Human Rights and Intellectual Islam," 15 May 2009, http://en.kadivar.com/2009/05/15/human-rights-and-intellectual-islam/, (accessed 20 February 2016).

199 Mohsen Kadivar, "An Introduction to the Public and Private Debate in Islam," 5 December 2002, http://en.kadivar.com/2002/12/05/an-introduction-to-the-public-and-private-debate-in-islam/, (accessed 21 February 2016).

200 Ibid.

201 Ibid.

202 Mohsen Kadivar, "An Introduction to the Public and Private Debate in Islam," 5 December 2002, http://en.kadivar.com/2002/12/05/an-introduction-to-the-public-and-private-debate-in-islam/, (accessed 21 February 2016).

203 Ibid.

in the social sphere is seen related to Islamic faith.[204] For Kadivar, Islamic faith aims to dominate every part of social life, thus destroying the ground for a public sphere. Islamic faith shapes its followers' private and public lives in absolute compliance with the principles and commandments of Islam.[205] This is also one of the indicators that show Islam does not have perception of public and public sphere.

Kadivar claims that in an Islamic society that governed by Islamic state, there is no place for both public and private spheres. Every part of social life is dominated by Islamic doctrines and divine rules. Kadivar accepts this perception of public and private creates totalitarian rule in religious societies.[206] Against the Islamic reading that does not acknowledge the public-private division, he suggests an alternative reading that paves the way for public-private division in which basic rights and legal equality are accepted, and supported by the citizens.[207] For him, a notion of the public sphere can arise in Islamic societies only with rereading Islamic texts apart from the official reading o Islam by Shi'a clergy.

## § 5.6 Kadivar on Basic Rights

Mohsen Kadivar thinks one of the most important components of democratic societies is their rights-based system. He argues that the principle of our age is fundamental rights and fundamental equality among people. He says this became the motto of modern world after the French revolution.[208] Kadivar asserts that the French revolution was followed by the dissemination of ideas including fundamental equality in the form of equal treatment and legal equality.[209]

204 Ibid.

205 Ibid.

206 Ibid.

207 Ibid.

208 Mohsen Kadivar, "Revisiting Women's Rights in Islam," 24 May 2013, http://en.kadivar.com/2013/05/24/revisiting-womena-rights-in-islam/, (accessed 21 February 2016).

209 Ibid.

On the other hand, Kadivar explains that the Islamic notion of equality and justice was different from the eighteenth century phenomenon of fundamental equality. He says in Islam there is "deserts-based" notion of justice, namely "proportional equality" that evaluates and gives rights to people according to their gender, race, status, and abilities.[210] Kadivar says that Ayatollah Montazeri subscribed to such Islamic traditionalist thinking.[211] Kadivar explains that this kind of thinking comes from the Aristotelian notion of justice that claims that everything has its own place[212] in nature and should always be in its natural order.

However, Kadivar thinks that the "deserts-based" notion of justice damages Islamic faith and makes it unfair.[213] He argues that in historical Islam man is not the center of discussion, but God. All Islamic texts in historical Islam were based on religion and divine duties.[214] Kadivar further explains that historical Islam accepted the human mind as immature and impotent, in need of supervision of the Islamic faith to have justice on the earth.[215] In this case, the word of God and divine rule excludes man-made laws and notions of fundamental equality and human rights because of men's incapacity to make their own laws. On the other hand, Kadivar argues that one of the main tenets of modernity is critical reason, followed by man-made laws and human rights,[216] which are indivisible, basic, and inherited at birth. Kadivar asserts that human rights do not take people's faiths into consideration; that meaning they apply to everybody in the public sphere, regardless of individuals' differences.[217] He says that religious faiths should not change the func-

210 Ibid.

211 Ibid.

212 Ibid.

213 Ibid.

214 Mohsen Kadivar, "Human Rights and Intellectual Islam," 15 May 2009, http://en.kadivar.com/2009/05/15/human-rights-and-intellectual-islam/, (accessed 20 February 2016).

215 Mohsen Kadivar, "Human Rights and Intellectual Islam," 15 May 2009, http://en.kadivar.com/2009/05/15/human-rights-and-intellectual-islam/, (accessed 20 February 2016).

216 Ibid.

217 Ibid.

tion of human rights in the public sphere.[218] Thus, as Kadivar puts it, a problem erupts between historical Islam and modernity, including the notion of justice and equality.[219]

Kadivar claims that Islam has six controversial, problematic areas in this regard. He posits that these areas of discrimination are between Muslims and non-Muslims, men and women, Muslims and slaves, Islamic faqihs and laymen, freedoms of opinion and religion, and lastly, the application of extrajudicial judgments like Islamic penal codes in modern times.[220] Kadivar believes that human rights are more rational and acceptable, in comparison with discriminations and legal implementations of Islam.[221] Kadivar says that human rights should be supported, not because they have a Western origin, but they are more prone to fairness and justice.[222] He also accepts human rights as a necessary requirement for a democratic world.[223] Moreover, Kadivar believes that justice is the spirit of the age has no gender or racial meaning.[224]

Kadivar puts forward that the "deserts-based" notion of justice is a rejection of human rights; however, a democratic society should establish legal equality as the basis, leading to human dignity.[225] He says that human rights and legal justice are the perfection of humanity; the deserts-based notion of justice brings imperfection since it results in social problems and turmoil.[226] He argues that the deserts-based notion of justice can be seen in the articles

218 Ibid.

219 Ibid.

220 Ibid.

221 Ibid.

222 Ibid.

223 Mohsen Kadivar, "Human Rights and Intellectual Islam," 15 May 2009, http://en.kadivar.com/2009/05/15/human-rights-and-intellectual-islam/, (accessed 20 February 2016).

224 Mohsen Kadivar, "Revisiting Women's Rights in Islam," 24 May 2013, http://en.kadivar.com/2013/05/24/revisiting-womena-rights-in-islam/, (accessed 21 February 2016).

225 Ibid.

226 Ibid.

of Iranian constitution and penal code.[227] He prefers to the Articles 12, 13, 14, 20, and 21 of the Iranian constitution to prove that there is inequality between male and female, Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, the Article 12 of the constitution establishes Islam and Twelver *Ja'fari* School as the official religion of Iran.[228] Furthermore, the spirit of the constitution is contingent on the notion of the superiority of the believers in Shi'a Islam, as distinct from non-Shi'a believers.

However, Kadivar again uses fiqh-based argumentation to claim that although Islamic texts have precepts and commandments related to a "deserts based" notion of justice and discrimination, there are also precepts based on non-discrimination.[229] Kadivar says that the Qur'an has an egalitarian spirit.[230] For example, the precept of "commanding good and forbidding evil," does not make gender or racial distinctions. In that sense, Kadivar demands that the discriminatory precepts should be reread in an egalitarian light, in compliance with the notion of legal equality in our age.[231]

## § 5.7 Kadivar on Freedom of Speech

Lastly, Mohsen Kadivar's intellectual discourse on freedom of speech and belief will be taken into consideration. Mohsen Kadivar again asserts that there are two approaches to the freedom of belief and speech in Islamic texts.

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227 Mohsen Kadivar, "Human Rights and Intellectual Islam," 15 May 2009, http://en.kadivar.com/2009/05/15/human-rights-and-intellectual-islam/, (accessed 20 February 2016).

228 "Iran (Islamic Republic of)'s Constitution of 1979 with Amendments through 1989," https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf?lang=en, (accessed 20 February 2016).

229 Mohsen Kadivar, "Revisiting Women's Rights in Islam," 24 May 2013, http://en.kadivar.com/2013/05/24/revisiting-womena-rights-in-islam/, (accessed 21 February 2016).

229 Ibid.

230 Mohsen Kadivar, "Revisiting Women's Rights in Islam," 24 May 2013, http://en.kadivar.com/2013/05/24/revisiting-womena-rights-in-islam/, (accessed 21 February 2016).

231 Ibid.

He explains that the Sharia laws advocate the execution of apostates, however Qur'an says no one can be made to convert.[232] He says that Qur'an even prohibits insulting atheism.[233] Kadivar argues that the execution of apostates should be annulled, but insulting religion should be accepted as hate speech.[234] These comments came after the terrorist attack on the office of Charlie Hebdo in France by fundamentalists, which resulted in eleven deaths. After that event, Kadivar and other Iranian intellectuals, including Hasan Yousefi Askhevari and Abdolali Bazargan issued a manifesto, declaring the attack on Charlie Hebdo as terrorism.[235] They said the best response to an offensive caricature is more caricatures.[236] However, although they underscored the need for freedom of expression as a foundation for the perfection of society, they emphasized that insulting a religion is different from freedom of criticism.[237]

Ultimately, Kadivar believes that freedom of thought should be taken as a principle that must be protected by the state. According to Kadivar, the lack of freedom of thought leads to hypocrisy and deceit, which have the potential to destroy faith.[238] Moreover, he believes that the freedom of criticism is important because a mature, democratic society can be established only with respect to differences and freedom of speech.[239] Furthermore, during the tu-

232 Mohsen Kadivar, "Islam between Free Speech and Hate Speech," 12 March 2012, http://freespeechdebate.com/en/discuss/islam-between-free-speech-and-hate-speech/, (accessed 21 February 2016).

233 Ibid.

234 Ibid.

235 "Defending the Compassionate Prophet by a Criminal Act!" 16 January 2015, http://www.nedayeazadi.net/en/2015/01/2652, (accessed 21 February 2016).

236 Ibid.

237 "Defending the Compassionate Prophet by a Criminal Act!" 16 January 2015, http://www.nedayeazadi.net/en/2015/01/2652, (accessed 21 February 2016).

238 Mohsen Kadivar, "The Freedom of Thought and Religion in Islam," 29 September 2006, http://en.kadivar.com/2006/09/29/the-freedom-of-thought-and-religion-in-islam-2/, (accessed 21 February 2016).

239 Mohsen Kadivar, "Islam between Free Speech and Hate Speech," 12 March 2012, http://freespeechdebate.com/en/discuss/islam-between-free-speech-and-hate-speech/, (accessed 21 February 2016).

multuous events of the Green Movement, Kadivar directed his criticisms at the Islamic regime and argued that no regime or political structure can survive without freedom of speech, press, free demonstrations and the right to protest.[240]

To sum up, Mohsen Kadivar has become a prominent figure among religious intellectuals and he has an important influence over them. While Kadivar insisted on a religious democratic state till the second part of the 2000s, after then, he started to defend "moderate secularism," namely the separation of state and religion. The Green Movement events urged him to increase his calls for this kind of secularism. In relation to that, intellectual and political struggle of Mohsen Kadivar has struggled against the Velayet institution and the perpetrators of the Islamic regime by rereading the Islamic texts in compliance with democratic norms and human rights. In that sense, he has become one of the most influential voices among post-revolutionary intellectuals.

240 Mohsen Kadivar, "A Narrative of the Iranian Green Movement: The Green Call," http://en.kadivar.com/2014/11/07/the-green-call/, (accessed 10 February 2016).

# 6

## Conclusion

At the end, it is clear that that post-revolutionary Iranian intellectuals - and more specifically reformist, religious intellectuals showed an inclination towards political secularism. That inclination can be seen in the works of Akbar Ganji, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Mohsen Kadivar. However, as claimed in this thesis, political secularism is different from the mainstream perception of secularism that excludes some part of the society. Furthermore, political secularism requires the separation of state and comprehensive doctrines. In their works, secularism emerges as a political principle that maintains the unity of different identities, views, and individuals as equal members of a free society.

To do that, they first require the separation of state and religion. What's more, as seen in Ganji's works, he argues against any fusion of state and comprehensive doctrine, which means exclusion of any comprehensive and ultimate ideals from state. Thus, political secularism, in their thinking becomes a political principle that rejects any kind of fundamentalism that would limit the scope of democratic politics.

In that sense, they repudiate both the religious and the secular fundamentalism, which Iranian society experienced in the last century. Instead, they argued for an inclusionary, democratic state and society. The demands for political participation, political accountability, separation of state and religion, abolishment of the uniformist and absolute Velayet-e Mutlaq-e Faqih

system, basic rights, and rights-based legal system are advanced in their works.

Although they are not full-fledged secularist intellectuals, they showed an inclination towards political secularism in the second part of the 2000s. Thus, I argue that the recent content of reformist, religious intellectualism has been shaped by political secularism more so than by the concept of religious democracy.

However, we need more research about their works and thoughts about secularism. I believe the political conception of secularism, as handled in this thesis, is an important concept among Iranian intellectuals. Further study of it will expand and deepen literature on secularism, as well. For that reason, although Iran is ruled by a theocratic regime, Iranian intellectuals form a powerful element within the Iranian society and the democratization. Their discourses form the vocabulary of social movements in Iran that demands democratization.

Furthermore, I am optimistic about secularism discussions. First, secularism can be a political tool to escape from ultra-nationalist, conservative, and racist policies. As explained, political conception of secularism provides a principle to live together without exclusion and domination. This principle struggles against comprehensive doctrines and ultimate ideals that define what is value in social life. Today's world increasingly witness that such comprehensive and ultimate doctrines intervenes to people's lives and limit their life-styles. If these comprehensive doctrines fuse with political power, even if does not want to dominate the state, it will do it one way or another in the process. Because comprehensive doctrines set a hiearachy between themselves and the others: the fusion of political power and comprehensive doctrines may be a social catastrophe for other identities. Today, increasing ultra-conservatism and ultra-nationalism defends a fusion of political power and majority's comprehensive doctrine in many places. In that respect, rethinking secularism can be a recipe to escape from this ultra-nationalist and ultra-conservative atmosphere. The world need this term but this time it should be handled with democracy. Because the way to struggle against fundamentalisms does not pass through adopting old-fashion secularism but secularism that corresponds to the socio-political circumstances of today's

world. Although a modern society consists of various differences, why it should be represented by a single comprehensive ideal?

Second, a modern society needs a common good that can bind the differences it contains. The social trust and harmony collapses where political power and comprehensive doctrines are fused. The bond among the citizens should be more than just legal bond of citizenship. The situation of being a citizen like others in the same society does not provide the way for peaceful, equal and free social life. The differences should respect each other because they share something very common in deep. The values of virtue, right, tolerance, equality, and freedom can provide this common good. These values are also the constitutive values of secularism. In that respect, secularism should be remembered once more for today's world because it is about common good and rights.

Third, the content of secularism should be filled with notion of equality and freedom. I believe equality in political participation, economic well-being, legal issues; and socio-political freedoms will make secularism more substantial than the notion of justice. Justice is a very vague concept and without equality and freedoms, it can lead to catastrophic socio-politic situations like in post-revolutionary Iran. Pre-revolutionary Iranian intellectuals exaggerated the use of justice concept. They put it above the equality and freedoms. When the day came and the Islamic clergy grasped the power after revolution, the concept of justice was used by clergy for their own interests in the name of Islamic justice and destroyed the foundations of equality and freedom. They argued that justice dictates that Islamic values should be applied in every part of the social and political life. For that reason, when we rethink secularism, the notion of equality and freedom should be the basic marks that should fill the content of secularism.

Fourth, rethinking secularism and providing an alternative conception of secularism can not be taken into consideration without democracy. When we talk about democracy, it includes equality and freedom. Political participation of people should be guaranteed, basic rights should be guaranteed, the economic inequality among the people should be the aim of democracy, new secularism should have a position about economic inequalities and argue for equality. Political accountability, freedom of speech, and right to pro-

test are among these freedoms and principles. Without these values and freedoms, rethinking secularism is a futile occupation.

Post-revolutionary, reformist, religious intellectuals provide a suitable case for democratic secularism. Although they are not full-fledged secular democrats, their discourses pave the way for secular democratic discourses. Their discourses provide a suitable case for democratic secularism because they see secularism as a tool to abolish pyramidal political structure of Iran, which does not contain the notion of equality and freedom. In that respect, secularism and democracy is balanced in their discourses. That is why Iranian intellectuals carry a potential to enrich the idea of rethinking secularism in today's world.

The fusion of political power and comprehensive doctrines in Middle East countries led to a humanitarian crisis in modern times. Recently, the increase of religious fundamentalism – ISIS mainly in Syria and Iraq – ultra conservatism and ultra-nationalist policies and discourses in Turkey, the existing political Islam in Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Pakistan indicate that the political power in these countries is directed by single-identity domination and all of them depend on the exclusion of others. These political understanding does not recognize any chance for others. It also does not care about the notion of equality and freedom. That is why the increasingly secularist discourses of Iranian intellectuals, and a new alternative understanding of secularism is so crucial for Middle East region. The whole region needs a new principle and this can be secular democracy: a new tool to rearrange the bond among people and bond between politics and people.

Recent developments points to the increasing importance of secularism in Middle East. The increasing use of secularism in the discourses of Iranian intellectuals is already an example to that. Moreover, Tunisian Islamic party *Ennahda* declared in its tenth congress that it will separate the religious and political activities of the party. There are similar declarations from Muslim Brotherhood as well. Moreover, American newspapers wrote that the United States government desires a secular regime after Bachar Al-Assad and they agreed on that issue with the Russian government. This indicates to increasing importance of secularism. However, without democratic norms and values, secularism does not mean much. In that respect, the recent declarations about secularism by political Islamist figures and the big powers should be

doubted. Without a commitment to concrete democratic values and criterions, secular tendency is futile and does not solve the problems of Middle East countries. In that respect, there is a strong need for more study on secularism. Furthermore, the contradictions of these political and intellectual agencies should be clarified not to repeat the same historical mistakes about secularism.

In Iranian case, post-revolutionary, reformist, religious intellectuals have strong inconsistencies. Although they are increasingly becoming political secularist, they have still their own inconsistencies and contradictions. For example, while they argue for political secularism and separation of power and state, they do not support the separation of religion and politics. Especially Mohsen Kadivar insists on it. While defending the separation of state and religion due to the socio-political suffer of Iranian society as a consequence of post-revolutionary fusion of state and religion, it is absurd for him to support use of religious arguments in political sphere. Because nobody can guarantee that religious use of reason in politics will be used for only naive reasons and agencies. As mentioned, Soroush is one of the founding fathers of the idea of religious democracy. He was also heavily criticized for "religious democracy" term because people argued that religion and democracy cannot stand side by side. I also agree with this position because a religious doctrine is ultimately a true, an option among many and it sets a hiearchy. If it fuses with politics, it becomes a phenomenon that threatens the other trues and identities either by exclusion or domination. Moreover, while Soroush argues for critical reason, critical thought, he could also argue for religious democracy. These are clear contradictions in their thoughts. It has many reasons. I already explained some of them. Oppressive political circumstances of the post-revolutionary Iran compelled them to mix Islamic ideals with republican, egalitarian and democratic values.

I believe Akbar Ganji is the one who have least contradictions among the intellectual figures I focused on. For that end, I argue that influence of Akbar Ganji in the second part of the 2000s is important because he helps the others – Soroush and Kadivar – purify and clarify their arguments and make them more concrete. Ganji's explicit demand of secular democracy influenced the other figures of religious intellectualism. I believe Soroush, Kadivar and other reformist religious intellectuals will continue their contradic-

tory statements and ideals. This originates from their situations of being an early post-revolutionary intellectual. It means that the next generation of religious intellectualism will likely be more concrete and consistent in their arguments.

Although they have contradictions in their arguments, I argue that their main discourse changed towards political secularism in recent years. This made them more concrete and clear in comparison to the 1990s during which they claimed for religious democracy. I argue that the reason for explicit arguments for political secularism may be they are not in Iran anymore. They are in exile and they can argue more explicity without a pressure from the regime. I also argue that although they are popular among Iranian people, their popularity was harmed with their abandonment. Although the physical connection is lost between these intellectuals and Iran due to their exile, their discourses are still effective among youth. Moreover, their intellectual search for social harmony and democracy in Iran opens up new ways for more concrete secular-discourse and secular intellectuals. Their influence will be seen in the next generation of Iranian intellectuals.

They have also lacks in their political struggle such as ignoring ethnic movements in Iran. As mentioned, Iran have a diversity of ethnicities and some of them – Kurds, for example – struggles against the Islamic regime and demands democratic rights like reformist, religious intellectuals. However, reformist, religious intellectuals do not contact with these ethnic movements or refer to them. This is a contradiction in their political struggle. Theoretically, they recognize and defend the rights of differences and pluralism. In reality, they do not ally with these groups in political sphere. In relation to it, reformist, religious intellectuals should give women more place in their discourses. Though, they show differences in this issue. Akbar Ganji, for example, gives an important place to inequality between women and men in Iran and he questions the sources of it. Mohsen Kadivar also claims for fundamental equality between men and women and provided important articles on that issue. However, Soroush does no have much to say about it. He nearly ignores that issue. This is a problem that should be handled by them separately. If they handle these issues carefully, I believe their impacts in Iran will significantly increase and their discourses will be heard and maybe supported by more people.

Ultimately, the discourses of reformist, religious intellectuals show that there is a strong intellectual search for a democratic country in Iran. In the 1990s, their intellectual search depended on the idea of religious democracy to make Iran a democratic government although it was also religious. However, in recent years, they increasingly put forward the idea of political secularism as a principle. This intellectual search should be appreaciated and supported with more study of their discourses and effects among Iranian people. Moreover, a contact should be established with these intellectuals to expand and deepen the notions of secularism and democracy. Rethinking secularism as a requirement for democracy depends not only intellectual knowledge production, but also exchange of ideas especially through transnational references and contacts.

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