4

Nonviolence, History, and Self-Sacrifice in Iran

Ali Shariati [1933–1977]

> During the past 1,000 years, the history of Islam and Shi'i Islam has never, nor ever will, encounter a more dangerous, dreadful and bolder enemy than Ali Shariati.
>
> [Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAlī Anṣārī-Qomī, quoted in Rahnema, 2014: 271]

Of all the inclusions in this exploration of the varied paths taken by modern Muslims towards a pacifist or nonviolent understanding and expression of their faith, the present subject may be the most surprising. To many who know of him, Dr Ali Shariati is inextricably bound up with the Iranian Revolution which his ideas and his teaching did so much to inspire. Though he died an exile in faraway England's coastal city of Southampton before that upheaval had run its course, his influence was everywhere in evidence during it. An admiring Michel Foucault [1978] reported that only two names were on the lips of the revolutionaries seeking the overthrow of the despotic Shah: *Khomeini* and *Shariati*. This is furthermore an impression supported by later historical scholarship [e.g. Chatterjee, 2011: 2]. It was in Shariati, a Sorbonne-educated intellectual and translator of Louis Massignon and Frantz Fanon whose lectures in Tehran drew mixed and massive crowds, that many identified a new departure. Whereas most others surveyed here see the moral transformation of the self primarily in terms of spiritual virtues, in Shariati one encounters an Islamic nonviolence which fuses the literary with the sociological and the historical with the eschatological. By turns closer to mysticism or to historical materialism, his project remains profoundly class-conscious even as he admonishes his Marxist contemporaries. Moral progress is as central to him as to all others surveyed here, yet the self to be reformed through nonviolent struggle is for him one which transcends itself through martyrdom and sublimates into a universal social ideal. His differences from others discussed in the present text are as fascinating as his similarities to them, and his articulation of the common themes of this study are very much his own.

For thousands of admirers at home and abroad, Muslim and non-Muslim, Shariati promised ‘a new hope [and an alternative to] the monstrosity of industrial capitalism [and] totalitarian communism’ [Afary and Anderson, 2005: 75]. To such observers, he embodied aspirations both for Iran and for the future of progressive politics. His Parisian associate Jean-Paul Sartre is widely reported to have remarked that ‘I have no religion, but if I were to choose one it would be that of Shariati’. He ‘found an organic way to saturate the Enlightenment with Islamic social and moral sensitivities, as well as impregnate Islam with a sense of Marxian class-consciousness’ [Byrd and Miri, 2017 : 2]. His ‘core ideas allow us to conceptualize a perspective of liberative social ethics that opposes and seek to inhibit the authoritarian impulse, and its ideology, through a humanistic social-ethical framework’ [Ken, 2017: 131]. Yet many of Shariati’s most salient ideas – not least his ardent anti-clericalism – were forcefully repudiated by the ensuing Khomeinist regime. Soon after his death he was subject to a barrage of Iranian fatwas prohibiting the purchase, sale, or reading of his works [Rahnema, 2014: 274]. Nevertheless, he retains the somewhat invidious sobriquet ‘The Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution’ [Abrahamian, 1982a and 1988; see also Chatterjee, 2011: 173, Nasr, 2016: 130, and Hunter, 2009]. Some scholars have certainly cast doubt on the nuance with which his ideas were grasped by other revolutionaries [e.g. Rahnema, 2014: XV], and his radical conception of *shahādat* [martyrdom] undoubtedly romanticises the subjects of the most extreme brutality. Yet in terms of both its content and their impact, Shariati’s thought more than justifies his inclusion in any discussion of nonviolence in modern Islam.

The groundbreaking quantitative analysis of nonviolent resistance movements conducted by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan after all concludes in no uncertain terms that ‘[c]ontrary to common perception, the Iranian Revolution is an example of a successful nonviolent campaign’

[Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011: 116]. ‘Earlier attempts to depose Mohammad Reza Shah’s regime through assassinations and guerrilla warfare had failed to achieve what mass protests, strikes, stay-aways, and non-cooperation achieved in less than 100 days’ [Sazegara and Stephan, 2009: 185]. Not only were the nonviolent dimensions of that rebellion more effective but they were also incomparably more popular [Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011: 117]. It is perhaps in this that Shariati’s most important, and certainly his most optimistic, influence might be felt. It is however not the aim here either to assess Shariati’s guilt or innocence of violent paths taken by others after his death – either by the regime or by its opponents such as *Forqan* and the *Mujahideen-e Khalq* who likewise looked to him for inspiration [e.g. Bayat 1990, Chatterjee, 2011: 2, 78]. Still less is it to adjudicate on the ultimate success or failure of a wider historical development which many now regard as lamentable. This is not a history of the Iranian Revolution, nor of its causes, nor of its consequences. Sensing that he might himself be called upon to supply such an account following his own enthusiastic endorsement of the early Iranian uprising, Foucault famously wrote the following:

> ‘We are ready to die by the thousands to make the shah leave,’ Iranians were saying last year. And the Ayatollah now says: ‘Let Iran bleed so that the revolution will be strong.’ There is a strange echo between these phrases which seems to connect them. Does the horror of the second condemn the rapture of the first? … The imaginative contents of the revolt did not dissipate in the broad daylight of the revolution. They were immediately transposed to a political scene that seemed fully prepared to receive them but was actually of a completely different nature. This scene contained a blend of the most important and the most atrocious elements … To be sure, there is no shame in changing one’s opinion; but there is no reason to say one has changed it when today one is against severed hands, having yesterday been against the tortures of the [Shah’s infamous secret police] SAVAK. [Foucault, 1979]

CHANGING CONTEXTS AND TRANSFORMING IDEAS

Rather than rehearsing those discussions, our concern here lies with those elements of Ali Shariati’s thought which might fairly be described as making the case for nonviolent political struggle against structural oppression, injustice, and inequality. It is these which are the focus of what follows. Before they can be explored, however, it behoves one to take stock of Shariati’s background and biography. This is not only justified by the general principle that establishing a context helps us to understand another’s ideas. It is particularly vital because Shariati’s biography intersects with such momentous events – chiefly the Iranian Revolution and contestations over global hegemony – that the latter have in the past obscured and distorted the contours of his memory:

> In the context of the Cold War, these [earlier] scholars misjudged Shariati's concept of the West. Their work misrepresents Shariati by construing him as an ideologue of Islamic Revolution who considered the West and all its traditions as fallacies based on a theological position or confessional form of understanding the 'other'. To put it differently, we have needed for some time to deconstruct the misconceptions that dictate our understanding of Shariati and his work. Today we are faced with many forms of Shariati, which is mainly the result of reading Shariati without interpreting him within the intellectual tradition from which he came. [Byrd and Miri, 2017: 8]

Finally, the need to address Shariati's context arises because – for all his theoretical abstractions and mystical obscurities, and for all his disappointing dearth of concretely practical guidance – Shariati as he understood himself was fundamentally engaged with and responsive to the times in which he lived. '[H]is concept of a *rawshanfikr* or intellectual strongly grounded in the reality of his surrounding world is clearly informed by the *intellectuel engagé*' [Leube, 2017: 157]. This fact alone demands that we consider not only his words and actions but the environments in which they partook.

Ali Shariati [ʿAlī Sharīʿatī Mazīnānī] was born in 1933 in the Iranian province of Khorasan. There he received a broadly secular education culminating in an undergraduate degree in Arabic and French at the University of Mashhad in 1958. Of equal importance to this formal education was his participation in his father Muḥammad-Taqī Sharīʿatī's religio-political activism. Muḥammad-Taqī had after all been the founder of the short-lived Movement of God-Worshipping Socialists [see Rahnema, 2014: 24–34]. This presaged the sorts of synthesis which his son would pursue: Shariati would retain a commitment to Islamic Socialism (or perhaps Socialistic Islam). This he identified in particular with Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī [d. 652; see Abrahamian, 1982b: 143], the Prophet Muḥammad's Companion and close confidant of ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib, even when in later years Shariati would come to critique Marxism. These were the tributaries which fed the currents in which Shariati swam: a combination of religious conviction and socialist idealism, of secular scholarship and religious activism, of Middle Eastern and of European ideas, of the colonised world and of its coloniser. His thought would change and develop over his lifetime, yet this hybridity would remain a constant theme.

No less important for the young Shariati's formation were the broader political contexts of 1950s Iran. He reached his young adulthood while his country faced a critical juncture. The year 1951 had seen the election of Dr Mohammad Mosaddegh to the prime ministership, and with it his move to nationalise the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (latterly renamed British Petroleum or BP). The vast bulk of this corporation's prodigious profits had historically been funnelled overseas, and as such its nationalisation was understandably popular domestically. Equally unsurprisingly, its expropriation inspired alarmed consternation abroad. Both British and the United States' intelligence services were ordered to support attempts at removing Mosaddegh from power by any means necessary. Operations Boot and Ajax were respectively launched by the Secret Intelligence Service [MI6] and Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] to overturn the Mosaddegh government. By 1953, Mosaddegh had been overthrown by a Western-backed coup d'état; the prime minister placed under house arrest; the petrochemicals industry privatised; and the monarchical power of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi considerably augmented. Like many Iranians, Shariati experienced the 1953 coup and its aftermath as a 'colossal disappointment' [Rahnema, 2014: 80]; its attempt to assert Iranian democratic sovereignty in the face of capitalist imperialism a dismal failure. While this moment may well have intensified the mystical religious idealism of his thought, it did not altogether alienate him from the cause of popular agitation. He and his father would soon be among those arrested for distributing pamphlets condemning both the coup and the Western interference in which it was entangled [Rahnema, 2014: 81].

In spite of his political activism, Shariati's outstanding performance as an undergraduate student coupled with his aptitude for languages led to his receiving a scholarship to undertake doctoral study at the Sorbonne in Paris: one of the world's most prestigious centres of learning. Between the years 1959 and 1963 he completed a *Doctorat d'Université* at the Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines under the supervision of Gilbert Lazard. At the same time, he worked as a research assistant to the esteemed Islamicist Louis Massignon. The latter, an ecumenical Catholic fascinated by the Sufi martyr Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj [d. 922] and Mahatma Ghandi (whom he regarded as a saint), was evidently the more profound influence on Shariati than was his nominal supervisor. Massignon would soon become his 'mentor' [Chatterjee, 2011: 84], and Shariati 'developed a sense of quasi-adoration for Massignon' which he compared to the intense relationship between the great medieval mystics Shams Tabrīzī [d. 1248] and Jalāladdīn Rūmī [d. 1273; Rahnema, 2014: 121]. Whatever the esoteric extent of this exchange may have been, Shariati's final thesis itself dealt with somewhat drier philological material. Its subject concerned the translation of a thirteenth-century Persian manuscript (*faḍā'il al-balkh; le Merites de Balkh*) held at the National Library in Paris regarding the local history and biography of notables in an area of present-day Afghanistan.

In spite of so mystical and so medieval an itinerary to his studies, it is remarkable that Shariati's doctorate is frequently misrepresented as having been in the field of sociology [e.g. Nasr, 2016: 127; see Chatterjee, 2011: 77]. Part of the reason for this confusion is likely the widespread underestimation of the central importance of poetics in Shariati's thought – which is a theme in what follows. The degree to which Shariati admired the Jewish ex-communist sociology professor George Gurvitch and 'conscientiously and regularly' [Rahnema, 2014: 124] attended his classes likewise goes some way to explaining the persistence of the myth. Yet another source of this lingering misapprehension is doubtless Shariati's famous association in this period with some of the most notorious mainsprings of modern social critique and political activism. The names which occur most often in connection with Shariati's Parisian experience are less often those of philologists and Orientalists than those of activists, existentialists, and revolutionaries.

Not only did Shariati involve himself in the expatriate Iranian dissident movement (earning himself immediate imprisonment on his eventual return to Iran [Bayat, 1990: 21]), he immersed himself also in the wider *Tiers Mondiste* moment sweeping Paris and the world. His notoriety among Algerian independence activists became such that no less a figure than Houari Boumédienne would later intercede on his behalf during a period of imprisonment by the Shah [Nasr, 2016: 128]. Even more salient is Shariati's appreciative exposure to some of the leading critical minds of Paris in his day and to their ideas – notably what he considered the 'enlightened' [Shariati, 1986] existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and the intimately related anti-colonialism of revolutionary Martiniquais psychologist Frantz Fanon. These connections were certainly formative, even if their precise nature has recently been questioned:

> Subsequent claims by Sharia'ti's adherents of his familiarity with people like Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre seem more to be exaggerations of casual acquaintances than facts, but the impact that the intellectual ambience of Paris in the 1960s had on Shari'ati was undeniable. [Chatterjee, 2011: 77]

Notwithstanding any debate about the depth of friendship between Shariati and the likes of Sartre and Fanon, it is notable that he not only read them but furthermore translated and published them in Persian (as he also did some of Louis Massignon's writing [see Chatterjee, 2011: 77, 85, 107, 139, 150]). Some uncertainly persists around the unattributed co-translators who assisted him in rendering Fanon's seminal *Les Damnés de la Terre* [*The Wretched of the Earth*] into Farsi [e.g. Davari, 2014: 91; Rahnema, 2014: 127]. But just as Sartre provided Fanon's French preface, so Shariati composed the Persian foreword. What is more, the signature intertextual innovation of Fanon's translation into the idioms of Iran clearly bears the imprint of Shariati's religio-political philosophy. It was with Shariati that the tradition began, later to be taken up by Ruhollah Khomeini [Abrahamian, 1993: 47], of translating Fanon's oppressed *damnés* [*de la Terre*] with the unmistakably Quranic *mustaḍafīn* [*-e zamīn / fī al-'arḍ*; cf. Quran 4:97]. In taking this creative editorial liberty, Shariati at once claimed Fanon's ideas for Islam and for himself, while at the same time transformatively politicising the Islamic scripture itself as an inherently anti-colonial manifesto. '[H]e reinvented both Fanon and the Qur'an and made both of them his own' [Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2004: 509]. A parallel licence has been identified in Shariati's other adaptations and fictionalisations of Fanon in the service of his insurrectionist understanding of Islam,

> modifying Fanon's biography [Shariati, 1992] and his books to a remarkable extent and thereby turning him into a mask or *alter ego* which Shariati could use to voice arguments which he believed needed to be received as backed by Fanon's authority by his Iranian audience. This coherence of much of the counterfactual information forms a strong argument against the first impression of the reader that the text is 'full of errors'. [Leube, 2017: 167]

Shariati's engagement with European thought was as much flexibly literary as it was systematically philosophical, and he was drawn to thinkers who combined both approaches. It was during this time that Shariati 'adopted [Albert] Camus' saying: "I revolt and protest, therefore I am" as his motto' [Shariati, *Collected Works*: 16, 180–181; quoted in Rahnema, 2014: xxiii]. His opposition was not only to the tyranny of the Shah in Iran, to the French colonial occupation of Algeria, or indeed to what he saw as the irredeemably imperialist and racist project of Israeli Zionism. Shariati's rebellion was not only in solidarity with various national 'liberation movements' but also critical of the Eurocentric ideological terms in which those movements articulated themselves. He admired many Europeans tremendously but did not wish himself to become a European, nor to succumb to what his contemporary and friend [Rahnema, 2014: 190–192], the anti-colonial novelist Jalāl Āl-e Aḥmad [d. 1969], called the servile mimicry of *gharbzadegī* (translatable as *West-strickennes*, *Occidentosis*, *Westoxication*, or *Euromania* [Āl-e Aḥmad, 1984]). Shariati did not conceive of this as a retreat from unbearable realities, nor as an exclusion from some metropolitan charmed circle, it is important to note. Rather, he saw it as a necessary step towards the realisation of a larger and more authentic truth. While Shariati was avowedly impressed by European Marxism, humanism, and existentialism, he saw all of these as embraced and surpassed by the synthesis of a truly holistic understanding of Islam [Shariati, *Collected Works*, vol. 18: 223, quoted in Rahnema, 2014: xx–xxi]. The Quran, he would later assert, constitutes 'the most profound and advanced expression of humanism' [Shariati, quoted in Chatterjee, 2011: 87]. In terms of both philosophy and of praxis, moreover, it is easy to see why he would see greater opportunities in a return to Iran:

> As long as [Westerners] are, in their words, human [*insān*] and we are natives [*bumi*], any kind of humanist partnership with them is a form of violence against our existence, and we must separate ourselves and stay away from them. Because in this exchange, their relationship with us is one of colonizer and colonized … This is not a relationship. This is enmity [*doshmani*]. [Davari, 2014: 92 quoting Shari'ati's Fanonian *Bāzgasht be Khishtan* (*Return to the Self*), 27–28]

In 1964, Ali Shariati returned to Iran – his journey lengthened by his immediate incarceration (first in Iranian Azerbaijan and then at a prison outside Tehran) on charges of subversion. His professional progress after his release was initially slow. But after three years he was offered a position in the sociology department of the University of Mashhad. He soon published a series of his lectures as *Eslāmshenāsī* [*Islamology*], in which he castigated his intellectual peers for their failure to articulate a dynamic, modern, and democratic vision of Islam and its Prophet which was both free of Eurocentrism and authentic to the faith's egalitarian roots. Arguably more influential than this written text (let alone his contemporaneously written and more historical *ta'rīkh-e tamaddun* and autobiographical *kavir*) would be his preaching on the same subjects during this period at the newly founded Ḥusayniyyah Ershād centre, 'an uncharacteristically modern "mosque"' [Bayat, 1990: 26] in affluent north Tehran.

Shariati delivered his first lecture at Ershād on 25 October 1968 [Rahnema, 2014 : 234]. The eminent historian Ervand Abrahamian has observed that it sometimes appears that 'there is not one Shariati but three separate Shariatis: the sociologist … the devout believer … [and] the public speaker' [Abrahamian, 1982a: 24]. It was at Ershād that the last of these personas would flourish. It was clear that 'Shariati was a natural performer' [Rahnema, 2014: 265]. His lectures were immediately and immensely popular. Chatterjee describes his 'phenomenal popularity as a lecturer at the Mashhad University' burgeoning to the status of 'a veritable demagogue in Tehran' [Chatterjee, 2011: 88]. 'Quite apart from the particularly evocative manner of his speech, the content of what he had to say had a resonance among the youth of urban Iran' [Chatterjee, 2011: 82–83]. Attracting a gamut of attendees from piously bearded men to mini-skirted women (to his conservative detractors' disgust [Rahnema, 2014: 270]), his classes were soon 'overflowing with people, not just the radical Muslims, but also the leftists' [Bayat, 1990: 26]. Recordings were made and distributed via cassette and mimeograph. Though a great many of those who attended did so without formally signing up for his lectures, '[a]t one point, their huge popularity let to the official registration of 3,400 students' [Rahnema, 2014: 281].

> The crowds often became so large that they could not get into Ershad's main lecture hall, and often a congregation of large groups burst out of its spacious courtyard to stand outside the building listening to Shari'ati's voice over loudspeakers. Traffic jams around Ershad and the Old Shemiran road … became a regular feature of Tehran life, especially on Friday afternoons. [Rahnema, 2014: 265]

So prodigiously popular were Shariati's speeches, in fact, that popular religious preachers [*vo'az*] constituted the first wave of the conservative backlash against him – sensing perhaps that he was trespassing on their domain and competing successfully for their audiences. They were followed thereafter by more scholarly clerical voices such as the dramatic condemnation quoted at the epigraph of this chapter. Increasingly, however, his detractors also came from quarters he imagined to be his natural allies – for reasons directly related to his importance to our concern with nonviolence in the present study.

Though Shariati's lectures were scathingly critical of both the autocratic regime of the Shah and the clerical class whom he regarded as complicit with it, he refused to call for violence against either. As we will see, he would openly extoll the nobility of dying for a cause but resisted pleas to exhort his listeners to kill for it. As the political atmosphere of 1970s Iran grew ever more febrile and political violence more common, Shariati faced increasing criticism both from republican Mosaddeghists

[Rahnema, 2014: 276–277] and from revolutionary Islamists. Both sides were frustrated by his nonviolent stance. Each increasingly accused him of secretly supporting the regime by 'keeping his students busy with empty words and distracting them from the path of armed struggle' [Rahnema, 2014: 278]. Shariati was undeterred, however, and horrified at 'the deaths of a number of his activist students' [Davari, 2014: 92] responded by publishing *A Return to Which Self?* This text, 'revolving around the idea of replacing social, political and economic struggle, strife and warfare with cooperation, unity and reconciliation', insisted on the 'inappropriateness of armed struggle … directly attacking the guerrilla movement … [and r]efuting the vanguard responsibility of intellectuals' [Rahnema, 2014: 347]. Change must come from the people by their own volition, not be imposed upon them by force or by blind obedience, Shariati argued. Many of those committed to violence as a political tool saw this as a betrayal by a man they had hoped might become their leader.

Ironically, the regime itself took a very different view. The secret police interrogated Shariati as a dissident, and the government closed the Ershād down altogether in late 1972. It did so precisely on the basis of allegations that its criticism of the regime would inherently incite violence [Rahnema, 2014: 279]. Shariati was once more imprisoned, spending months in solitary confinement before local and international outcry effected his release. He went first into house arrest and then into exile in distant England. There, living as Ali Mazinani in Southampton rented accommodation, he died at the age of forty-three on 18 June 1977, mere weeks after his arrival. Many Iranians immediately suspected his assassination by agents of the Shah, and news of his passing prompted large demonstrations against the regime in Iran [Sazegara and Stephan, 2009: 189]. His remains were buried near the shrine of the Prophet's grand-daughter Zaynab bint ʿAlī, south of Damascus: among the most venerated sites of Shi'a Islam.

For all the ignominy of his final days and all the honour of his burial site, it is clear that Ali Shariati divided opinions both during his lifetime and after it. This fact only underscores the importance of appraising his ideas as he himself understood them – and most particularly as they relate to nonviolence. It has been observed that '[a]t the core of Shariati's political thinking lay the notion of *tauheed* [*tawḥīd*]' [Chatterjee, 2011: 83]. That a believing Muslim's worldview might be defined by monotheism [*tawḥīd*] may initially strike the reader as a somewhat banal observation. It is nonetheless informative when one considers the boldly idiosyncratic terms in which Shariati understood both that concept and its consequences. Shariati himself addresses this matter directly:

> My world-view consists of *tauhid*. *Tauhid*, in the sense of oneness of God, is accepted by all monotheists. But *tauhid* as a world-view in the sense I intend in my theory means regarding the whole universe as a unity, instead of dividing it into this world and the hereafter, the natural and the supernatural, substance and meaning, spirit and body. It means regarding the whole of existence as a single form, a single living and conscious organism, possessing will, intelligence, feeling and purpose. There are many people who believe in *tauhid*, but only as a religious-philosophical theory, meaning nothing but 'God is one, not more than one.' But I take *tauhid* in the sense of a world-view, and I am convinced that Islam also intends it in this sense. [Shariati, 2017: 85]

MONOTHEISM AS NONVIOLENCE

In Shariati's elaboration of *tawḥīd*, one finds encapsulated not only a theological position (the oneness of God) but also a distinct metaphysics: the unity of natural and supernatural existence. The apparent monism of his commitment to metaphysical unity is not, he urges, an undifferentiated pantheism which rejects reason and the perception of multiplicity as mere illusion. It is identified not so much with altered psycho-spiritual states than with deliberate effort. It promises less an immediate and beatific *samadhi* than a demanding – and perhaps endless – struggle:

> Among all the books of religion, science and philosophy, it is only the Qur'an that designates all the objects, accidents and processes of nature as 'signs'. Of course, in Islamic mysticism as well as oriental pantheism, the material world has been depicted as a series of waves or bubbles on the face of the vast, colourless and formless ocean that is God or the true essence of being. Idealism and various religious and ethical philosophies have also regarded material nature as a collection of lowly and worthless objects opposed to both God and man. But the Qur'an assigns positive scientific value to the 'signs'; it does not consider them illusions, or veils over the face of the truth. On the contrary, they are indications pointing to the truth, and it is only by means of contemplating them in a serious and scientific fashion that one can attain the truth, not by ignoring them and thrusting them aside. This manner of regarding the 'signs' or phenomena of the world is closer to the approach of modern science than to that of ancient mysticism. It is not a question of the *wahdat al-wujud* of the Sufis, but a *tauhid-i wujud*, scientific and analytical. [Shariati, 2017: 87– 88]

Readers puzzled by gnomic references to 'oriental pantheism', '*wahdat al-wujud*', or even 'the approach of modern science' may recall that Shariati was not a scholar of science, nor of Sufism, nor of comparative religion. As with his protean reinvention of core elements in the Islamic theological lexicon found throughout this discussion, here too he combines an autodidact's enthusiasm with a reformer's zeal by means of a distinctly literary flexibility. His '*tawhid-i wujud*' might even be seen as a recursive example of his idiosyncratic approach to (re)inventing the wheel: he superimposes his personal interpretation of *tawḥīd* over his particular understanding of *waḥdat al-wujūd* ['the unity of being': itself a contested and controversial concept, usually attributed to the thirteenth-century mystical genius Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī though his Persian student Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnāwī]. Shariati is less opining on the content of medieval mystical philosophy or empirical research methodology than he is employing them as metaphors to illustrate his own expanded understanding of absolute monotheism. He invokes them to make a case for the inescapability of ongoing effort and commitment to the world. Challenges cannot be escaped, that is, and must be faced head-on. This is in a committed effort not so much of being [*budan*] but of becoming [*shudan*].

The necessary element of struggle entailed in Shariati's understanding of the core Islamic principle of *tawḥīd* is not a purely mental affair, moreover. Rather, he sees it as having inescapable practical and political consequences. His *tawḥīd*, in other words, is not only a theology and a metaphysics but also a political philosophy:

> *Tauhid*, then, is to be interpreted in the sense of the unity of nature with meta-nature, of man with nature, of man with man, of God with the world and with man. It depicts all of these as constituting a total, harmonious, living and self-aware system. I have said the very structure of *tauhid* cannot accept contradiction or disharmony in the world. According to the world-view of *tauhid*, therefore, there is no contradiction in all of existence: no contradiction between man and nature, spirit and body, this world and the hereafter, matter and meaning. Nor can *tauhid* accept legal, class, social, political, racial, national, territorial, genetic or even economic contradictions, for it implies a mode of looking upon all being as a unity. [Shariati, 2017: 88]

Shariati, in other words, 'brings religion back to the center of his liberation ideology' [Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2004: 509]. For him, 'secular philosophy, especially that of Marxism, neo-Marxism, and other forms of radical third world liberation philosophy, had to be *determinedly negated*, or sublated, into revolutionary religion', as Byrd observes in the suitably Hegelian terms of *Aufheben* (or what Shariati called *shudan* [*devenir* or *becoming*; see Rahnema, 2014: xxi]), creating 'an Islamic liberation theology' [Byrd, 2017: 122]. Unburdened by conventional usage of Islamic symbols and unconstrained by traditional interpretations of scripture [Al-Saif, 2017: 273], Shariati systematically reframes the most central terms of his faith as expressions of radical egalitarianism. Just as he understands the monotheism of *tawḥīd* in terms of universal human solidarity, he concomitantly redefines its antonym of idolatrous *shirk* [lit. associationism] as the power of social hierarchy:

> *Tauhid* in human society negates the *terrestrial deities* that impose themselves on men, usurping their power and determining their complex *systems of society and social relationship among classes* – in a word, it negates *shirk* on the human plane. [Shariati, 2017: 37–38, emphasis added]

One might draw parallels here not only with Jawdat Said's critique of political violence [see Chapter 6] but also with the *ḥākimiyyah* discourse of 'divine sovereignty' among radical Islamists such as Abū al-Aʿlā al-Mawdūdī and Sayyid Quṭb [d. 1979 and 1966; see for instance Tripp, 2006: 165]. Where Shariati again distinguishes himself – both from these and from the more personal focus of his more existentialist influences – is in his conspicuously Marxian concern for group consciousness and the material means of production. His concern, and the concern of Islam as he understands it, is not only with individual salvation. Still less is it a matter of the rightful leadership (or *imāmah*) of the spiritually elect. Rather, it is the cultural and material improvement and progress of 'the people' [*al-nās;* pointedly preferring the Quranic Arabic to more demotic Persian alternatives such as *mardum*] as a whole:

> It is only *the people as a whole* who are the representatives of God and His 'Family'. The Quran begins in the name of God and ends in the name of the people [Shariati, 2017: 118; *al-nās*, *the people*, is the title of the last of the Quran's chapters – all of which begin with the phrase 'in the name of God'] ... The ideal society of Islam is called the *ummah* ... The infrastructure of the *umma* is the economy, because 'Whosoever has no worldly life has no spiritual life.' Its social system is based on equity and justice and *ownership by the people*, on the revival of the 'system of Abel,' the society of human equality and thus also of brotherhood – the *classless society*. [Shariati, 2017: 121, emphasis added]

So condensed is this summation of Shariati's political views as to require a good deal of explanation. Particularly salient to many readers will be the ostensibly Marxian dimension of this reformulation of 'ummah' as the 'classless society' of common 'ownership by the people'. The Quranic term for a 'community' of human beings or of animals [*ummah*] is thus interpreted as mirroring the utopian goal of communism. The continuity of such religio-political ideals with Shariati's youth among the God-Worshipping Socialists, let alone his experience of Paris in the 1960s, should by now be quite apparent. The boldness of his approach is, however, also worth recognising. Accusations of 'spreading Marxism' were prominent among the Shi'a clergy's accusations against Shariati [e.g. Bayat, 1990: 21]. At that height of the Cold War, such accusations were taken very seriously. It was after all a time at which one found Muslim scholars as senior as al-Azhar's Grand Imam ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd declaring communism tantamount to *kufr* [active infidelity to God] and its supporters therefore unbelievers [Maḥmūd, 1990: 9].

CLASS DIALECTICS WITHOUT MARX

Whatever other distinctions one might draw between the aforementioned Imam of al-Azhar – a Sunni supporter of the authoritarian state in Egypt – and the emancipatory Shi'ism of Shariati, there is more commonality here than one might imagine. Shariati, too, was highly critical of the Marxists whom he encountered [see esp. Shariati, 1980]. While he admired what he called 'philosophical Marxism', he intensely distrusted 'sociological Marxism' [Tripp, 2006: 165]. He certainly agreed with widespread criticism that Marxism inherently harboured a tendency to closed-minded absolutism, dogmatism, and an arrogant disdain for religion:

> Shariati was critical of Marxism for many reasons. Its denial of the transcendent and the sacred and its exposition of life as a force, a process that finds expression solely on the material plane was unacceptable to believers like Shariati. He saw dialectical materialism, the intellectual fulcrum of Marxism, which presents itself as 'the only completely scientific description of reality,' as a dogma with fanatical tendencies, which was elevated to the level of 'the absolute and exclusive truth'. [Muzaffar, 2017: 175]

Perhaps more substantively, Shariati would develop an understanding of the underlying dynamics of human history which he believed cut through Marxist certainties regarding the material structure of society. The nature of those dynamics are crucial to – indeed largely identical with – his argument for Islamic nonviolence. These are explored shortly, but in the interim one might observe the degree of his departure from Marxian fellow-travellers in assertions such as the following:

> At this critical point in history, the exact opposite of Marx's theory applies; it is not ownership that is a factor in the acquisition of power, but the converse. Power and coercion were the factor that first bestowed ownership on the individual. Power brought about private ownership, and then in turn, private ownership bestowed permanence on power and strengthened it by making it something legal and natural. [Shariati, 2017: 102]

Shariati's 'understanding of Marxism was characterised by a doctrinaire position premised upon class conflict … largely ignorant of revisionist tendencies in Marxism' [Chatterjee, 2011: 117]. It has been argued with some justice that Shariati's understanding of Marx was deficient in that Marx himself does not make such dogmatic claims as Shariati rejects. The cultural and symbolic 'superstructure … [being] not so much determined as *conditioned* by the economic base of the mode of production' [Bayat, 1990: 27–28, emphasis added]. Nonetheless, while Marx himself may not have made such starkly reductive claims, a great many Marxists have indeed done so – and not least in the restive atmosphere of Shariati's native Iran. Alternatively, one might read passages such as Shariati's earlier quotation as evidence of 'a Gramscian moment in contemporary Iranian politics … [which] shifted the question of oppression in Iran from domination (i.e. coercion) to leading (i.e. coercion and consent)' [Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2004: 512]. Like the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, Shariati recognised that *hegemonic ideas* can be as obstructive an obstacle to human flourishing as any brute material factor.

One might perhaps conclude that Shariati's quarrel was more truly with 'vulgar' than with 'dialectical' Marxism: this seems broadly what is intended by his own distinction between 'sociological' and 'philosophical' Marxism. While he critiqued some aspects of Marxian thought, he clearly embraced others: notably the virtue of solidarity, an awareness of the cultural effects of production, a preoccupation with class dynamics, and a broadly Hegelian philosophical tendency. Certainly, dialectics of a sort are often to be found in his philosophy, not least in his provocative question: 'Is not Marxism really just the other side of the coin of Western capitalism?' [Shariati, 1980: 43]. If capitalism and communism (or the USA and USSR, NATO and the Warsaw Pact) are to be understood in dialectical terms as *thesis* and *antithesis*, one must then ask whence the synthesis will emerge and whether it will simply continue the Hegelian cycle once faced with its own antithesis. For Shariati, the answer to both questions is obvious. The challenges of the present must prompt a revisiting of the profoundest depths of Islam, which alone offers a way out of endless conflict:

> [Secular philosophy] had to shed its secular garb and offer its most revolutionary semantic and semiotic materials to religion, so that religion may once again come into contact with that which was suppressed within itself: the prophetic and tawhīdic way-of-being … secular liberational philosophy *reawakened* materials *already dwelling within Islam*, and in particular Shiʾi Islam. [Byrd, 2017: 122]

For Shariati, all human experience – political and religious – is characterised by dialectical dynamics. But these dynamics are not the impersonal and perpetual processes of Hegelian theory but rather expressions of the will and nature of a personal God. Like Jawdat Said [Chapter 6], Shariati chooses to adopt the conspicuously Quranic term *sunnah* [custom or habitual action, especially of God or the Prophet] to describe the structure of history [e.g. Shariati, 2017: 57]. As is the case with Said, this unusual lexical choice reflects a desire to see history as ultimately subject to the divine and assert the cosmic status of Islam in the fundaments of reality. Kingshuk Chatterjee has furthermore argued that 'the Zoroastrian/Persian element' [Chatterjee, 2011: 90] of Shariati's ethnicity inclined him to seek escape from the unending dialectic through an ultimate triumph of God (like that of Ahurā Mazdā's final Frashokereti). One might be more justified in recognising that an emancipatory way out of Hegelian contradictions was also sought by the Parisian existentialists who more directly influenced Shariati. Sartre published his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, including its case that cycles of oppression and 'bad faith' might indeed be ended, just as Shariati began his studies at the Sorbonne. Later, when Michel Foucault witnessed banners bearing Shariati's name and likeness, he certainly saw them as reflecting his own hopes that historical cycles were finally being broken ['*faut-il voir une réconciliation, une contradiction ou le seuil d'une nouveauté?*'; Foucault: 1978]. Whatever the truth of the matter, the result is that Shariati joins other Muslim intellectuals discussed here in seeing history in broadly teleological terms [see especially Chapter 5] – however distinguished by their dialectical form:

> History represents an unbroken flow of events that, like man himself, is dominated by a dialectical contradiction, a constant warfare between two hostile and contradictory elements that began with the creation of humanity and has been waged at all places and at all times, and the sum total of which constitutes history ... History is without doubt a reality ... It began at a certain point, and must inevitably end at a certain point. It must have an aim and a direction. [Shariati, 2017: 100]

QURANIC TEXT AND THE SYSTEMS OF CAIN AND ABEL

It is in this dialectical contradiction, which Shariati places at the heart of human history, that his most explicit case for principled nonviolence in Islam is to be found. For him, it is crystallised in a single Quranic episode. 'From the outset, Shari'ati had spoken and written in allegorical terms' [Tripp, 2006: 159] to the point of 'occasionally compromise[ing] the content of his discourse for its poetics' [Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2004: 511]. Even notwithstanding his Muslim faith, it is therefore unsurprising that he should communicate his most crucial ethico-religious insight through recourse to the scriptural narratives. His account of human moral, political, and religious history is encapsulated in his elaboration of the Quranic story of Cain and Abel. These ‘first human beings’ come to stand for mankind as a whole, as well as the promise of the *telos* towards which all events ultimately incline:

> The end of time will come when Cain dies and the ‘System of Abel’ is established anew. That inevitable revolution will mean the end of the history of Cain; equality will be realised throughout the world, and human unity and brotherhood will be established, through equity and justice. This is the inevitable direction of history … the culmination of the dialectical contradiction that began with the battle of Cain and Abel and has continued to exist in all human societies. [Shariati, 2017: 111]

Shariati’s key engagement with scripture comes through his reading of the Quranic depiction in *sūrat al-mā’idah* of the Genesis tale concerning the first sons of Adam and Eve (or rather of *Ādam and Ḥawā’*; Cain and Abel are themselves unnamed in the Quran, their names *hābīl and qābīl* are adopted in later sources such as al-Ṭabari’s [d. 923] *ta’rīkh*). Its outlines will be familiar to many non-Muslims. Each son of Adam follows a different profession. Both offer sacrifices to God. God favours one over the other. Envy and resentment then lead the less favoured son to murder his brother. Whereas in the Biblical account [Genesis 4:1–16] only the fratricidal Cain’s words are recorded (as he tries to deceive first his brother and then God), the Quran gives voice in particular to his victim:

> Recite to them the truth of the story of the two sons of Adam. Behold! they each presented a sacrifice (to Allah): it was accepted from one but not from the other. Said the latter: ‘Be sure I will slay thee.’ ‘Surely’ said the former ‘Allah doth accept of the sacrifice of those who are righteous. If thou dost stretch thy hand against me to slay me it is not for me to stretch my hand against thee to slay thee: for I do fear Allah the Cherisher of the worlds. For me I intend to let thee draw on thyself my sin as well as thine for thou wilt be among the companions of the fire and that is the reward of those who do wrong.’ The (selfish) soul of the other led him to the murder of his brother: he murdered him and became (himself) one of the lost ones. Then Allah sent a raven who scratched the ground to show him how to hide the shame of his brother. ‘Woe is me!’ said he: ‘Was I not even able to be as this raven and to hide the shame of my brother?’ Then he became full of regrets. [Quran 5:27–31, Yusuf Ali version]

The Quranic text differs significantly from its Judeo-Christian cousins in highlighting the agency of Abel rather than that of Cain, and therein presents self-sacrifice and the refusal of violence as positive moral choices.

For Shariati, this becomes the scriptural archetype of all political conflict, and Abel's martyrdom simultaneously the model of nonviolence and the promise of a final escape from the conflicts of historical time.

In all of this, Shariati is most immediately comparable to Jawdat Said [see Chapter 6]: both regard this as the seminal moment in human political history. 'But where does history begin?', asks Shariati, 'What is its point of departure? The struggle between Cain and Abel . . . One killed the other, and the history of humanity began . . . The story of Cain and Abel is therefore the source for our philosophy of history' [Shariati, 2017: 101]. Yet whereas Shariati's reading reaches the same broad ethical conclusion as Said – an absolute imperative to reject violence even in cases of self-defence – it does so by quite different and considerably more Marxian means. Indeed, whereas Said concentrates on a moral reading of the tale, Shariati's aim is 'to refute the idea that it is exclusively ethical in purpose . . . Instead, it treats two wings of human society; two modes of production; it is the story of history' [Shariati, 2017: 110]:

> The Abrahamic religions, especially Islam, depict this story as the first great event that occurs on the threshold of human life in this world. It is not credible that their only purpose in so doing should be the mere condemnation of murder . . . [Rather it] represents a great development, a sudden swerve in the course of history, the most important event to have occurred in all human life. It interprets and explains that event in a most profound fashion – scientifically, sociologically, and with reference to class. [Shariati, 2017: 105–106]

In its 'scientific and sociological' reading of the Quranic story of Cain and Abel, Shariati's interpretation becomes as much an exercise in historical materialism as in moral philosophy. He justifies this method through deductive argument. Rejecting out of hand the notion that any human being is innately and thoroughly evil [Shariati, 2017: 109], Shariati goes on to rule out all explanatory factors other than the material:

> We cannot therefore say that each of the two brothers was subject to the influence of differing religious or educational factors, at least to the extent that they should have grown up as exact opposites . . . The only factor that differentiates the two brothers from each other in the story consists of their differing occupations. These differing occupations set the two brothers in a particular economic and social position; they have contradictory types of work, structures of production, and economic systems. [Shariati, 2017: 105]

While Shariati here recognises that non-material factors (such as religion and education) can have profound effects, he points out that they are not at play in this instance. It is therefore material difference which underlies and gives rise to the real and dramatic moral distinction between Cain and Abel, between perpetrator and victim, violence and nonviolence:

> Cain was not inherently evil. His essence is the same as that of Abel, and nobody is inherently evil, for the essence of everyone is the same as the essence of Adam. What makes Cain evil is an anti-human social system, a class society, a regime of private ownership that cultivates slavery and mastery and turns men into wolves, foxes or sheep . . . a setting where the philosophy of life is founded on plundering, exploitation, enslavement, consuming and abusing, lying and flattering, where life consists of oppression or being oppressed, of selfishness, aristocratic arrogance, hoarding, thievery and ostentation . . . where all things revolve around egoism and the sacrifice of all things to the ego, a vile, crude and avaricious ego. [Shariati, 2017: 109]

Ali Shariati's materialist analysis of the difference between the sons of Adam and Eve and of their tragically divergent fates is not intended narrowly as either a piece of detective work nor as a limited exercise in scriptural hermeneutics. His concern is not so much with the two brothers in and of themselves as it is with the transhistorical message he believes the God and the Quran to be communicating through them. Though subject to the methods of historical analysis, Cain and Abel are not merely historical figures. They are archetypes, their tale is a parable, and they are described through the medium of divine revelation. The task he sets himself is to examine each brother in turn, recognising the dynamics they embody, and then expand these into wider and wider spheres of human social experience to become 'the source for our philosophy of history' [Shariati, 2017: 101]:

> Abel, in my opinion, represents the age of a pasture-based economy, of the primitive socialism that preceded ownership, and Cain represents the system of agriculture, and individual monopoly ownership . . . The agricultural system resulted in a restricting of the sources of production present in nature . . . since arable land, unlike forests and seas, could not be freely at the disposition of all, the need appeared for the first time in human life for men to arrogate part of nature to their own selves and deprive others of it – in a word, private ownership. [Shariati, 2017: 101–102]

Whereas Cain is thus interpreted as the embodiment of violence, selfishness, monopoly, and domination, Abel concomitantly occupies the obverse status as an exemplar of nonviolence, selflessness, socialism, and egalitarianism. He exhibits the virtuous

> spirit and the norms of society, paternal respect, steadfastness in fulfilling moral obligations, absolute and inviolable obedience to the limitations of collective life, innate purity and sincerity of the religious conscience, a pacific spirit of love and

> forbearance – these were among the moral characteristics of that [pastoral] system of production, and we may take Abel as representative of them. [Shariati, 2017: 102]

This binary opposition between 'Abel, the man of faith, peaceable and self-sacrificing, and Cain, the worshipper of passions, the transgressor, the fratricide' [Shariati, 2017: 105] is, again, not primarily intended by Shariati as a judgement on two historical figures. Rather, he means this to be the model for understanding political relations in general terms. Those terms are even broader, what is more, than the juxtaposition of the two specific modes of production which Cain and Abel practised: the pastoral and the agrarian, the shepherd and the farmer. It is worth underlining that despite the distinctly Marxian terms in which Shariati sometimes addresses these figures, his interpretation owes as much to the long-established exegetical traditions of the Abrahamic faiths which share this tale as they do to the great nineteenth-century political economist of Trier. By way of example, one might read in parallel the first-century Jewish scholar Flavius Josephus' commentary on Genesis:

> Adam and Eve had two sons; the elder of them was named Cain; which name, when it is interpreted, *signifies a possession*. The younger was Abel, which signifies sorrow ... Now, the two brethren were pleased with different courses of life, for Abel, the younger, was a lover of righteousness, and, believing that God was present at all his actions, he excelled in virtue; and his employment was that of a shepherd. But Cain was not only very wicked in other respects, but was *wholly intent upon getting*; and he first contrived to plough the ground. [Josephus, 2006: 9–10, emphasis added]

While Shariati's concern for the moral effects of means of production certainly addresses itself to the concerns of modernity, then, one might be mistaken in viewing his reading of the Biblical or Quranic narrative as radically anachronistic. Certainly, he himself did not himself see it as such. On the contrary, it was Shariati's conviction not only that he was remaining faithful to his religious heritage but that this heritage both presaged and fundamentally surpassed the much later theorisations of historical materialism.

Part of Shariati's ultimate rejection of Marxism – or more specifically the dogmatically reductive economism of so-called vulgar Marxism as he encountered it – is his refusal to regard modes of production as exclusively determinative of social relations. Turning the modes of argumentation of the Marxists against themselves once again, he argues that what they regard as the economic 'base' which dictates the cultural 'superstructure' is itself merely the epiphenomenon of a more fundamental process. Whereas Marx might see disjuncture between feudal and capitalist stages of historical development, Shariati sees continuity in the fact of violence, oppression, and monopolisation persisting irrespective of the mechanisms by which it operates. ‘I do not regard slavery, serfdom, bourgeoisie, feudalism and capitalism as constituting social structures’, he writes, as [t]hese are all part of the superstructure of society’ [Shariati, 2017: 113]. ‘It was only the forms, the names, the tools, the forms of labour that changed; all these things relate to the superstructure’ [Shariati, 2017: 117]. This superstructure, for him, is founded on the undergirding model of Cain and Abel, of violence and nonviolence.

We have already seen Shariati make reference to the ‘system’ or ‘pole’ of Abel: his ideal of a nonviolent society embodying ‘the spirit of humanity, conciliatoriness, and compassion’ [Shariati, 2017: 104]. This can now be identified more precisely in light of our exploration of his reading of the Quran’s *sūrat al-mā’idah*:

> For example, within the structure of Abel, it is possible to have economic socialism (i.e. collective ownership); the pastoral and hunting mode of production, and the hunting mode of production (both existed in the primitive commune); the industrial mode of production (in the classless, post-capitalist society); and even the mode of production, the tools and commodities of the period of the urban bourgeoisie; and the artisan and peasant culture of the feudal period within its socialist structure. [Shariati, 2017: 114]

The principle of nonviolence in Shariati’s political theology is ultimately agnostic regarding the precise methods which might articulate it. It is not fixed but may take different forms at different times and places. Shariati’s approach could not be less similar to the grounded pragmatism which characterises the advocacy of a Gene Sharp – nor indeed to the practical case studies in community peace-building which have dominated the scholarly literature on Islamic nonviolence after Mohammed Abu-Nimer. It is no small irony that while no figure discussed in the present study has been instrumental in bringing about more revolutionary political change than Shariati, and none frames individual moral improvement in more class-based terms, none seems less concerned with actually existing institutions and behaviours. It would, however, be a grave error to mistake this agnosticism for quietism or for a neglect of action. On the contrary, it is precisely the near-metaphysical character of Shariati’s approach to the problem of political violence which makes its call for engagement so urgent. It is arguably also this which leaves it most open to abuses such as those which occurred after his passing.

No other feature stands out more starkly in respect of both the urgency and the danger inherent in Shariati’s philosophy than the profoundly divisive binary he establishes between the spiritual and institutional heirs of the sons of Adam. Just as he has presented the 'structure of Abel' as manifesting through a variety of social and historical circumstances, so also does its obverse:

> At the opposing pole, that of the 'structure of Cain,' or economic monopoly and private ownership, various economic systems, forms of class relations, and tools, types and resources of production, may also exist. Slavery, serfdom, feudalism, bourgeoisie, industrial capitalism, and – as its culmination – imperialism, all belong to the structure of Cain. [Shariati, 2017: 114]

Shariati's ideas demand action. Cain and Abel not only represent ideals and antecedents but also archetypes: Cain and Abel are always with us. It is every individual's responsibility to decide which of them they will embody, and no third human category exists outside of these two; '[i]t is possible, then, to divide society in accordance with these two structures, into two poles, the "pole of Cain" and the "pole of Abel"' [Shariati, 2017: 117]. So encompassing is the Manichaean struggle between these two models, according to Shariati, that remaining outside of or aloof from them is unthinkable. 'It is the responsibility of *every individual* in every age to determine his stance in the constant struggle between the two wings we have described, and not to remain a spectator' [Shariati, 2017: 111, emphasis added]. One is either a proponent of Abel's 'spirit of humanity, conciliatoriness, and compassion' [Shariati, 2017: 104] or one is its opponent. This inescapable struggle is not only a matter of class conflict for Shariati, but a contest between the monotheistic worldview [*jahānbayni-ye tawḥīdī*] and idolatry [*shirk*] within the individual soul.

Shariati's archetype of nonviolence, Abel, stands also in his view for those who practice God-consciousness [*taqwah*, *tawḥīd*]. Conversely, Cain as the model of violence represents those who raise worldly idols in His place by seeing either themselves or their desires as of absolute importance:

> On the one hand [Cain's] religion of *shirk*, of assigning partners to God, a religion that furnishes the justification for shirk in society and class discrimination. On the other hand is [Abel's] religion of tauhid, of the oneness of God, which furnishes the justification for the unity of all classes and races. The trans-historical struggle between Abel and Cain is also the struggle between tauhid and shirk, between justice and human unity on the one hand, and social and racial discrimination on the other. [Shariati, 2017: 110–111]

This insistent conflation of what another thinker might regard as separate domains of theory and praxis, of material and cultural, of religious and secular, is characteristic of Shariati's philosophy. His understanding of monotheism and idolatry are, like so many of his appropriations from traditional theological and political lexicons, highly idiosyncratic.

Like the scriptural figures of Cain and Abel, the categories of monotheism and idolatry [*tawḥīd* and *shirk*] in Shariati's philosophy refer less to specific historical events or theological doctrines than to dialectical forces underlying them. He is in this case neither distinguishing Islam from other faiths nor dividing religion from atheism. On the contrary, 'to legitimate greed and deviated instincts and to establish its domination over the people and to abase others *was itself a religion, not disbelief or non-religion*' [Shariati, 2003: 61, emphasis added]. Rather than being an abstractly credal matter of dogma, 'the question of tauhid and shirk becomes, then, one relating to a universal philosophy of sociology, to the ethical structure of society and its legal and conventional systems' [Shariati, 2017: 37].

As with the binary, dichotomising tendency of Shariati's philosophy, his conflation of ostensibly separate ethical, historical, and theological symbols both amplifies the urgency of his project and reasserts his commitment to a holism of theory and praxis, material and ideological, natural and supernatural – an alignment of means, ends, and intentions [*niyyah*]. It also underscores its potential for precisely the conflictual outcomes its valorisation of nonviolence seeks to avoid. All of humanity, each society, and each confessional community is conceived of as a battlefield: a site of contestation between forces identified in the most uncompromising of moral terms. Shariati's criticism of traditional sectarianism might draw comparisons with modern Muslim reformers (such as his fellow Iranian Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afgānī) who called for pan-Islamic solidarity in the face of Western imperialism. But the degree to which he is prepared to anathematise his Muslim political opponents might equally justify a more Quṭbian reading. The 'idolatrous' and violent 'religion' of Cain, and the 'class of Cain' which practices it [*ṭabaqeh-ye qābīl*], is after all identified not only outside of historical Islam but very much within it:

> It is not enough to say we must return to Islam. We must specify which Islam: that of Abu Zarr [Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, Companion of the Prophet and one of the honoured 'Four Companions' of Ali, whom Shariati above calls the 'First Socialist'] or that of Marwan the Ruler. Both are called Islamic, but there is a huge difference between them. One is the Islam of the caliphate, of the palace, and of the rulers. The other is the Islam of the people, of the exploited, and of the poor. Moreover, it is not good enough to say that one should be 'concerned' about the poor. The corrupt caliphs said the same. True Islam is more than 'concerned'. It instructs the believer to fight for justice, equality, and elimination of poverty. [Shariati in Abrahamian, 1988: 295]

Shariati is unstinting in his condemnation of the ‘System of Cain’ and its agents in government, industry, and clergy. These he identifies both with the Quranic figures of tyrannical Pharaoh, plutocratic Croesus, and deceptive Balaam [Shariati, 2017: 117; see also Shariati, 1986: 48], and through the alliterative ‘*Zar–zur–tazvir* [gold–coercion–deception] or *tigh–tala–tasbih* [sword–gold–rosary]’ [Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2004: 511; see also Chatterjee, 2011: 14–106]. His call is for wholesale social, political, and economic revolution against entrenched power and privilege. One may justly ask, especially given the inflammatory potential of such exhortations, how he maintains a commitment to nonviolence. If the established order must be overturned, by what means other than violence might this be achieved? One such tool is that for which Shariati is best known: teaching, writing, and preaching. Certainly, recent scholarship has interpreted his project in Gramscian terms as aimed at producing ‘a counter-hegemonic cultural order in an effort to effect social change’ [Davari, 2014: 87].

Perhaps most dramatic and uncompromising of Shariati’s methods, however, is his valorisation of martyrdom. This he understands as bearing witness to truth and justice even at the cost of one’s own life, and through one’s death transforming the world. This explicit possibility of death – albeit one’s own death rather than that of the adversary – becomes a characteristic feature of Shariati’s understanding of nonviolence in Islam. In the famous words of one of his final lessons at the Ḥusayniyyah Ershād: ‘Die! So that others may live’ [Cited for e.g. in Rahmena, 2014: 294 and Tripp, 2006: 164]. Shariati’s nonviolence is very dramatically the nonviolence of self-sacrifice, of altruism, and of the martyr:

> Sometimes man destroys all his worldly belongings and ambitions for something more exalting. For instance, he may set himself on fire (without anything in return) so that his society can be saved. This is not a logical act. The roots of such an act go to morality. Love is consisted of a power which invites me to go against my profits and well-being and sacrifice myself for others and the ideas that I hold so dear … This is ethics and love. When we love someone in order to be loved, or when we are kind to someone so that we can receive a favour, we are [merely] businessmen. Love consists of giving up everything for the sake of a goal and asking nothing in return. This requires one to make a great choice. What is that choice? To choose oneself to die – or some other objective – so another can live and some ideals be realised. [Shariati, 1981: 60, 62]

REVOLUTIONARY MARTYRDOM AND ALTRUISTIC SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

The concept of martyrdom is crucial to an understanding of Shariati’s philosophy and to its relationship with the question of violence and nonviolence. Both those who see him as a proponent of nonviolence and those who regard him as an instigator of religio-political carnage cannot avoid entanglement with this polysemic term. The Arabic (and by extension broadly Islamicate) word for martyr itself, *shahīd*, occurs often in the Quran. There, it is almost invariably in the sense of 'witness', though the text elsewhere repeats that rewards do await those who lose their lives doing God's work [*fī sabīl allāh*; Quran 2:154; 3:157; 3:169; 4:74; 9:111; 47:4–6]. Only in one verse, 3:140 revealed after the Battle of Uḥud in 625, is '*shahīd*' reasonably interpretable as meaning martyr in the more modern sense's implication of violent death for a cause. That latter sense of *shahīd al-maʿrakah* or 'battlefield martyr', however, is well attested from early in Muslim history. Martyrdom [*shahādah*] as a noble death for a virtuous cause is a long-established notion in Islam as it is in other faiths – and evidently also in what Robert Bellah famously identified as secular 'civic religion', particularly in the public veneration of fallen soldiers. 'Battlefield martyrdom has captured the imagination of Muslims throughout the ages' [Kohlberg, 2012]. Martyrdom furthermore enjoys a special centrality in the Shi'a branches of Islam, which ritually mourn the untimely deaths of several of the Prophet's pious descendants. This is most particularly the case with respect to the Third Imām Ḥusayn bin ʿAlī [d. 680]. Ḥusayn, also known as 'the martyred Imam' [*al-imām al-shahīd*] met his end at Karbalā' in what is now Iraq, in an event commemorated every year in the major Shi'a festival of ʿAshūrah. While the Shiite Shariati regards Abel as the archetypical martyr, he naturally folds the Imām Ḥusayn into his religio-political discourse in a similarly paradigmatic fashion. He understands Ḥusayn as willingly accepting his death as an alternative to combat and universalises his exemplary status through the famous maxim that 'everywhere is Karbalā, every day is ʿAshūrah' (the place and time of Ḥusayn's death).

Here again the drama and the moral urgency of Shariati's rhetoric runs the risk of inciting actions which either do not fully reflect the subtleties of his worldview or indeed run directly counter to it. This is not only a hazard for impatient or ignorant activists; even serious scholarly literature has reached the conclusion that Shariati in fact 'used the passion of Hussein to create an understanding of martyrdom no longer related to nonviolent resistance but rather legitimising violence against oppressors [as] the only possibility for active resistance in a situation in which there was no possibility of direct military confrontation' [Palaver, 2013: 202–203]. This description may well be both contradictory and at odds with Shariati's writing explored in the present text. Yet it seems nonetheless more than a simple misunderstanding. The temptation to read Shariati as calling not for nonviolence but for its opposite has roots not only in negative perceptions of the Iranian Revolution but also in Shariati's ideas and the idiosyncratic fashion in which he communicates them. As with other major concepts in Islamic tradition discussed earlier (such as *tawḥīd* and *shirk*), Shariati refracts 'martyrdom' through the lens of his subversive philosophical perspective. 'In Shari'ati's hands, it came to signal a disposition toward revolutionary social change. His intellectual project is predicated on the redefinition and elaboration of terms like this one' [Davari, 2014: 88]. How then might we bring his evidently crucial concept of 'martyrdom' into clearer focus?

Comparisons may perhaps be drawn with Franz Fanon, whom Shariati much admired and famously translated, in that both saw violence and suffering as part of a unity of means and ends; '[f]or both thinkers [Fanon and Shariati], insurrectionary violence is simultaneously means and end' [Davari, 2014: 96; see also Conclusion]. Where Shariati and Fanon distinguish themselves from one another most dramatically is with respect to whom they imagine to be the subject of this violence, and in what attitude that subject is to take to it. As with figures throughout this study, the harmony of means and ends is incomplete without the inclusion of intentional disposition [*niyyah*]. It is not only the case that 'Shari'ati's *shahīd* [martyr] chooses to die where Fanon's colonised definitively does not' [Davari, 2014: 89]. It is more importantly that the potential for transformative and liberative violence as explored by Fanon is action taken by the revolutionary against the coloniser, whereas in Shariati it occurs in an action taken against the revolutionary. Both conceive of violence as an inescapable element of the escape from violence – but in terms of who must suffer it they are polar opposites. In Chandra Muzaffar's reading of Shariati:

> Suffering thus becomes an indispensable component of Shariati's idea of politics ... Justice and dignity were noble goals that could only be achieved if we employed noble means. It is because means shaped ends in politics that Shariati emphasized the liberation the self from its ego. It is only through such liberation that the human being, determined to fulfil God's trust, would succeed in delivering justice, unsullied by personal ambition, and glory to the people. [Muzaffar, 2017: 173]

It is of fundamental importance to recognise that Shariati's embrace of martyrdom as an ideal is not limited to its strategic or tactical usefulness in any specific political contestation. The dearth of concretely practical prescriptions in his work has already been observed, of course. While

Shariati does sometimes appear to believe martyrdom to offer such direct utility, it is also notable that his archetypical model, the Quranic Abel, very pointedly does not. No social revolution is brought about by Abel's refusal to fight back against his murderous brother. On the contrary, Shariati insists that following Abel's death 'religion, life, economy, government and the fate of men were all in the hands of Cain' [Shariati, 2017: 106]. Conversely, we have seen him locate the 'System of Abel' in eschatological terms as arising only at 'the end of time … [as] the culmination of the dialectical contradiction that began with the battle of Cain and Abel and has continued to exist in all human societies' [Shariati, 2017: 111].

Similarly, the passage quoted earlier from Shariati's lecture 'Modern Man and His Prisons', with its evocation of the self-immolation of the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức in 1963, is at pains to distance action from direct reward. This is not only an indication that Shariati views nonviolence as an absolute moral virtue, nor only because, like the Quranic Abel, he has faith in the final judgement of God. Rather, it also relates to Shariati's idiosyncratic understanding of martyrdom. This is an understanding which extends the concept beyond the acts of bearing witness or losing one's life and cements it within the duality of violence and nonviolence which runs throughout his philosophy. For Shariati, as we have seen, violence is inextricably linked with idolatrous egotism whereas nonviolence is an expression of selfless monotheism. 'Curbing selfishness and becoming self-less is expected of all Muslims', in other words, and '[t]his is what *tawḥīdic* politics is all about' [Muzaffar, 2017: 178]. Just as selfless altruism is the psychological and spiritual centre of Shariati's conception of nonviolent Islamic monotheism, so the martyr becomes its absolute expression. It is ultimately neither as a victim of fatal violence nor as one of the honoured dead that Shariati builds his image of the martyr. Rather, it is as an embodied expression of a righteous and liberating moral ideal. As Teo Lee Ken has argued:

> Lastly, after human consciousness and human autonomy, liberative ethics [for Shariati] has its basis and social origins in the idea of *self-sacrifice*. That liberative social ethics exist and uphold the belief in human equality, the affirmation of freedom, and struggle for social transformation stems from this fundamental and most crucial idea. It refers to the understanding of *selflessness*. It is the willingness to give everything up in the pursuit and realization of moral and humanitarian values. It removes any sentiment of self-interest, even when confronting death. It is philosophically a negation of the self for the well-being of others (altruism). [Ken, 2017: 140]

One would therefore be mistaken to regard Shariati's valorisation of martyrdom as a simple exhortation to combat in a lost cause, as for instance it has been by Palaver. Nor should it be seen in strictly tactical terms. Rather, the psychological – even soteriological – element of Shariati's case for nonviolence is indivisible from his vision of the martyr who embodies it. Selflessness is not only a predicate of action, of making a choice which benefits another rather than oneself. It is also a characteristic of personality, a fundamental disposition. While Shariati is sometimes critical or dismissive of Sufism (as we saw earlier), his embrace of death has so overt a spiritual dimension that it recalls less the battlefield of Karbalā' than the execution of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, with writing on whom Shariati's mentor in Paris, Louis Massignon, has become nearly synonymous.

Massignon [d. 1962] was the pre-eminent scholar on al-Ḥallāj [d. 922]. The latter was a Sufi mystic renowned for his ego-transcending transports and the sometimes bizarre and seemingly blasphemous ecstatic utterances [*shaṭaḥāt*]. These indeed ultimately contributed to the case for his execution. With the ʿAīn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī [d. 1131] and Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī [d. 1191], al-Ḥallāj undoubtedly counts as the most famous of 'Sufi martyrs'. Massignon's magnum opus [Massignon, 1994] was after all entitled *The Passion of Al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*. In it, he records the following verse among the last reported words of al-Ḥallāj as he was led to his crucifixion:

> Kill me, O my faithful friends (Uqtuluni, ya thiqati),
> For to kill me is to make me live;
> My life is my death, and my death is in my life. [Massignon, 1994: 285]

It does not tax the imagination to conceive of Shariati discussing such themes with his old mentor at the Sorbonne, nor indeed of his agreeing with them. More broadly still, Shariati's understanding of the martyr's death in fundamentally symbolic and psychological rather than purely biological terms recalls the Sufi commonplace 'die before you die' [see e.g. Kugle, 2006]. This maxim expresses belief in ego-'annihilation in God' [*fanā' fī allāh*] as a necessary step to enlightenment. If violence is a product of the ego distracted from God, both Shariati and the Sufi might agree, then the way to nonviolence must be through selfless contemplation of the divine. Where the Sufi's 'death' is most often figurative, however, Shariati's very much includes the physical.

In the course of this reflection on the life and thought of Ali Shariati, and the place of Islamic nonviolence within it, we have been repeatedly obliged to recognise ambiguity, idiosyncrasy, and controversy. While much of this has been resolved or problematised, a final point of contention remains. Even when Shariati's valorisation of martyrdom is understood as having meaning outside and beyond physical conflict, it is far from the case that it rules it out. Violence or the invitation of violence against the self – be it the figurative force of ego-destruction or the literal force of the state's bullets and batons – is not only part of his theory. It is also its praxis as enacted by his students and followers. While many others discussed in this book suffered brutality in the course of their peaceful campaigning, by contrast with Shariati they never so deliberately sought it out [cf. in particular Chapter 2]. The reader may well balk at the intimate entanglement of violence and nonviolence in Shariati's thought, even if considered apart from the divisive politics which threaten to eclipse it. They may reasonably object that while his call for nonviolence is expansive in its outward aspect – directly tackling not only interpersonal violence but economic, structural, and cultural violence – its romanticising of violence against the self is a bridge too far. Certainly, the case can be made for an understanding of nonviolence which demands avoidance of harm not only to (human and non-human) others but also to oneself. Such a conception would be quite different from that of Shariati.

Contrary to these objections, however, one may note that accepting and even encouraging violence against oneself is far from uncommon either in the practice of nonviolent campaigns or in their scholarly discussion. Johan Galtung's seminal typology of 'nonviolent techniques and influence', for instance, identifies what he calls 'Alter-inflicted suffering' (that is, deliberately provoking one's opponent into inflicting harm upon one) as a form of '*Negative Amplification*' and a classical form of nonviolent action [Galtung, 1976: 372]. Galtung gives the example of the hunger strike [a practice also explored in relation to Islamic nonviolence by Walaa' Quisay in a forthcoming article]. The same principle applies to marching against the Shah of Iran in the knowledge that his army and police are likely to open fire on the crowd. Both such steps, what is more, were taken by history's most famous proponent of nonviolent protest. Mahatma Gandhi not only undertook hunger strikes but explained his celebrated *Satyāgraha* ['truth-force', his preferred coinage for 'nonviolence'] in terms of a willingness not only to endure violence against oneself but even *to die for the cause*: '[w]e shall never convert the whole of India to our creed unless we are prepared to die for it' [Harijan, 14 October 1939]. Indeed, this has been seen as a persistent element of his famously nonviolent approach from its earliest period:

> [I]n a letter to his nephew on January 29, 1909, he wrote: 'I may have to meet death in South Africa at the hands of my countrymen … If that happens you should rejoice. It will unite the Hindus and Mussalmans [Muslims] … The enemies of the community are constantly making efforts against such a unity. In such a great endeavour, someone will have to sacrifice his life' … George Woodcock says, 'the idea of perishing for a cause, for other men, for a village even, occurs more frequently in Gandhi's writings as time goes on. He had always held that *satyagraha* implied the willingness to accept not only suffering but also death for the sake of a principle'. [Jahanbegloo, 2019]

In drawing historical parallels with the most celebrated scholars and practitioners of nonviolence, one finds perhaps a distinction in the degree of centrality which Shariati gives to what he terms 'martyrdom'. But this does not obviously imply a difference in kind. Likewise, his articulation of nonviolence as entailing personal moral improvement and transformation is certainly distinct from his peers in this text in the mystical extremity of its class-consciousness. Yet the theme of harmonising one's very character with the project of peace by peaceful means remains in concert with theirs. The nature of his place in reflections on Islamic nonviolence is certainly debatable – but that he deserves such a place is not.