Critical Theory and the Islamic Encounter with Modernity

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In his assessment of the global state of sociology, Immanuel Wallerstein has recently noted the predominant concern of sociologists from the Middle East with the place of Arab-Islamic civilization in the modern world (Wallerstein 1998, 325). In fact it would not be an exaggeration to claim that the question of modernity currently constitutes the central issue in many Middle Eastern and Islamic societies—be it its appropriation, its rejection, its transformation along more palatable lines—at the theoretical as well as the practical level. On the other hand, the studies of the Middle East and Islam in the West have been predominantly conducted by juxtaposition and opposition to western modernity. Contemporary scholarship on the Middle East and modernity is at a critical juncture. There is some spirited interest in this issue, and some important work is being done in this area (e.g., Boronjerdi 1996; Karimi-Hakkak 1995; Khuri 1998, Salvatore 1997; Lee 1997; Martin 1989; Rejali 1994), as these efforts attempt to discuss some aspects of the relationship between the Middle East, Islam, and modernity. Yet, an elaborate discussion of the phenomenon and a theory of modernity remain wanting. There are no comprehensive attempts to address the question of modernity and its various dimensions with respect to the Middle East. Moreover, the traditional "western" analysis of the region and its cultural modalities in terms of modernity is based on a notion of modernity, which suffers from an overly unilinear and unidimensional interpretation and conceptualization of the modern world.

One of the most complex and nuanced analyses of modernity is to be found in the body of thought known as Critical Theory. It is not only a profound source for a critical analysis of modernity, it also offers valuable insight enabling us to assess the normative content of modernity and its discontents. What I would like to propose is that studies of the contemporary Middle East and its relation to modernity would vastly benefit by drawing on the insights derived from Critical Theory. In Critical Theory, from its Kantian and Hegelian foundations, to the Frankfurt School theorists and
now to Jürgen Habermas, the issues associated with modernity have always constituted a central theme. Even so, very few attempts have been made to address the encounter of the civilizations of the Middle East with modernity from the perspective of Critical Theory. At least until recently, it has often been assumed that the process of development in Third World countries is primarily an economic issue, or alternatively a problem of political economy, and as such has traditionally been addressed from these perspectives first and foremost. As a result, cultural perspectives have lagged behind. Critical Theory itself has not been greatly interested in these issues and as a whole has refrained from any interest in Third World countries. This is more curious since the body of thought designated as Critical Theory has historically taken shape in response to the development of modernity in the West and the challenges involved in this process, which has had ineluctable global implications. Many of these Third World countries have been plunged into the modern situation and one way or another need to contend with it. Critical Theory has developed in response to similar processes in the West. Therefore, it has valuable lessons and insights for the countries that are now confronted by a similar process and face similar struggles and challenges. One of these insights, which has been stressed by more recent theorists of Critical Theory, is how close the interaction is between cultural development, economic development, and political democracy. This consciousness about the inseparability of these spheres is, in fact, an essential condition for the development of sociopolitical democracy in the context of the Middle East.

For critical theorists, the category of subjectivity has always been seen as constituting a key feature of modernity. Habermas has invoked Hegel to interpret the normative content of modernity principally in terms of subjectivity: "The principle of the modern world is freedom of subjectivity, the principle that all the essential factors present in the intellectual whole are now coming into their right in the course of their development" (Hegel 1967, 286; cited in Habermas 1990, 16). In *Philosophy of Right* (e.g., para. 124) and elsewhere, in his discussion of subjectivity, Hegel seems to be emphasizing not only human autonomy but also its beneficiary, the individual. In Hegelian thought subjectivity is considered the ontological foundation of the right-bearing individual. As a pillar of modernity, subjectivity in this sense can be viewed as the *property characterizing the autonomous, self-willing, self-defining, and self-conscious individual agent* (see Habermas 1990, 338). Subjectivity, very much rooted in
the humanist tradition, tends to view the individual as the determinant of her or his own life processes and is closely related to notions such as human freedom, volition, consciousness, reason, individuality, etc.; but it is not reducible to any single one of these. An important aspect to keep in mind about subjectivity is that it is simultaneously the repository of emancipation as well as domination. While the Cartesian cogito as the modern detached subject is the source of liberation (e.g., the philosophical foundations of the rights of citizenship), it is also responsible for the objectification of nature, the Other, such as the colonized and women, as well as of the subject itself.

From Hegel to Habermas many social thinkers and philosophers have attempted to reconcile this subject of modernity and its "other." Hegel conceptualized this synthesis primarily in terms of universality. As such, universality, a somewhat more elusive category to analyze, may be perceived as the mutual recognition among the plurality of subjects of each other's subjectivity. Expressed differently and in its bourgeois historical and political context, universality refers to elimination of restrictions based on privilege, status, and/or other essential considerations. In a more restricted sense, universality could be considered as bourgeois formal equality before the law. Hegel interpreted the two concepts of subjectivity and universality as epitomized in the notion of civil society, which according to him is comprised of "[a]n association of members as self-sufficient individuals in a universality, which because of their self-sufficiency is only formal" (Hegel 1967, 110). In this passage Hegel expresses a concern about the "diremption" and the moral "chaos" that are the result of the process of subjectification and radical human autonomy associated with human subjectivity, which the principle of universality in civil society in the Kantian formulation is supposed to heal but that Hegel finds wanting because of the "vacuity" and formality of the bourgeois understanding of universality as mere equality before the law. In fact, Hegel was one of the first and most prominent to attempt to address and resolve the contradictions and the close affinity between subjectivity and universality in a substantive (as opposed to formal) synthesis of the two principles.

Thus, the principle of subjectivity has given rise to freedom and the notion of individual and collective autonomy in modernity. But the unbridled subjectivity of modernity has also been responsible for the moral and political chaos and various types of the domination of the "others." And for this reason, much of the intellectual and political thought since Hegel has in one way or another attempted to address the abstract
and monadic conception of the subject in modernity and has striven to embed it in a larger context. The latest and most comprehensive effort at the synthesis between subjectivity and universality is elaborated in the works of Jürgen Habermas and his attempt at shifting the ontological foundation of modernity from mere subjectivity to that of intersubjectivity in his theory of communicative action. Habermas, following Hegel, is aware of the problems associated with "unchecked" subjectivity of the modern age and the associated problems of domination. Like Hegel, he sees the diremptions resulting from the expansion of the principle of modern subjectivity and attempts to "reconcile" those diremptions through a theory of intersubjectivity as opposed to mere subjectivity. But he criticizes Hegel for attempting to develop this intersubjectivity based on the principle of modern subjectivity itself and eventually failing to ground it in a communicative action theory (Habermas 1990, 30-31). Thus, Habermas seeks to continue the project of overcoming the problem of modernity, this time in its proper direction, which Hegel had failed to achieve, through the mediation of language: "Membership in the ideal communicative community is, in Hegelian terms, constitutive of both the I as universal and the I as individual" (Habermas 1984, 97).

THE EMERGENCE OF HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY AND ALLAH'S WILL

At first glance it might seem that the principle of human subjectivity is diametrically opposed to monotheistic religions in general and to Islamic culture in particular. Indeed, Bassam Tibi, one of the most erudite scholars of Islam and modernity, has maintained just such a position. For Tibi, modernity as a cultural project, which has ushered in an anthropocentric view of the universe and the attendant knowing-agent engaged in changing the social and natural environment is contrary to Islam since, "the concept of ...[knowing agent] runs counter to the Islamic belief that God is the Creator (al-Khaliq) and man is the makhluq (creature) unrestrictedly submitting to Allah's will and directed by it as it is revealed in the Koran" (Tibi 1995, 8). However, such a partial view distorts the reality of the emerging and current Islamic discourses, which in their diversity have addressed this issue in many subtle fashions. In many contemporary Islamic discourses, the theomorphic ontological foundations of modern subjectivity are being broached. The Islamic mystical tradition and philosophy are two sources for the
construction of such notions of subjectivity with considerable potentials. The mystical/philosophical notion of the Perfect Human (*Insan Kamil*) according to which humans are viewed as individual microcosms incorporating the body, the spirit, and the synthesis between these, exhibiting certain attributes of God and having access to some of His knowledge, are being thematized (Khuri 1998, 195). The Islamic philosopher, Ibn 'Aarbi (1165-1240) is one of the founders of this Neoplatonic tradition in the Islamic world whose thought is being interpreted in the construction of modern subjectivity in some contemporary Islamic discourses.

As a soteriological religion, Islam also places much emphasis on the responsibility of the individual in his or her salvation, thereby containing the germ of individual subjectivity. Rooted in the Occidental Axial Civilization, the Islamic tradition of personal salvation is a crucial element in the long-term process of subjectification (Salvatore 1997, 28). The notion of faith (*iman*) and its carrier, the individual, is taken as the precursor of Kantian moral autonomy as the foundation of individual subjectivity (Salvatore, 1997, 21). Such a course of subjectification would involve the transformation of religious faith into the notion that the individual as the member of a community is God's creature and therefore is naturally free and derives authority from Him, and His agent by virtue of submitting to His authority—a process parallel to the Calvinist path to modern subjectivity (Salvatore 1997, 27). This unfolding of human subjectivity involves a recognition that sovereignty belongs to the Divine Subject and it is only as a result of this recognition and submission to the Divine authority and no other authority, that the individual gains an in indirect subjectivity vis-à-vis other profane entities. Such a view is characteristic of some of the most influential Islamic discourse such as Sayyid Qutb's (1906-1966) in Egypt and some of his followers in the contemporary Arab Islamist movements (Salvatore 1997, 192-93).

The Quranic text itself provides another significant dimension of this vicarious subjectivity. The Quranic concept of the human as God's vice regent on earth (*Khalifat o'llah fi al-arz*), which explicitly informed the discourses of the architects of Islamic Revolution in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s, Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Motahhari (Ayatollah Khomeini does not seem to have referred to it explicitly), also constitutes an important path to modern subjectivity. In this discourse we encounter a simultaneous affirmation and negation of human subjectivity—and often individuality—in the metaphysical foundations of the thought of these vastly influential Iranian thinkers. The
Islamic discourse that developed in intellectual, political, and social contexts of the post-1953 coup d'état in Iran, which overthrew the democratically elected government of Mossadeq and reinstituted the Pahlavi autocracy, was indeed variegated and nuanced. And the discourses of Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Ayatollah Motahhari reflect this opalescence. However, the most basic element that connected the discourses of these three men was the phenomenon that may be designated as "mediated subjectivity." By mediated subjectivity I refer to the notion of human subjectivity projected onto the attributes of a monotheistic deity—attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, and volition—and then partially re-appropriated by humans. In this scheme, human subjectivity is contingent on God's subjectivity. Thus while human subjectivity is not denied, it is never independent of God's subjectivity and in this sense it is "mediated." This situation is usually conducive to a great conflict between the Divine Subjectivity and human subjectivity, which gives rise to various other forms of conflict. One of the sharpest conflicts that results is the constant and schizophrenic shifting of ground between a confirmation and negation of human subjectivity in general, as well as a constant oscillation between individual and collectivity, but not their total denial.

The mechanism that Shariati, as well as Khomeini and Motahhari, utilized to arrive at this indirect and tentative human subjectivity, was an interpretation of the metaphysics of monotheism, which viewed human existence in terms of a theomorphic and transcendental "journey" or "movement," which started at the level of "matter" and would carry and elevate humans to the level of God's spirit. However, the destination of this journey is never a modern individual subject as we know it, but nevertheless something close to it, especially in Motahhari's discourse. Hence the constant vacillation of the three figures between positing and negating subjectivity, each in their own way. In Shariati’s discourse the tendency toward what theomorphic approach to subjectivity was at times quite explicit. He writes, "[i]n the language of religion, man is a divine essence, an essence superior to matter and dominant over nature. He originates from God's Spirit, which means he possesses God's attributes. But since the Fall unto earth, nature and society, man has forgotten his 'primal self-divinity' [khud khodai nukhustin] and merely allows his material and animal inclinations to develop. As a result, the sublime values invested in him die out and he considers himself merely as the highest life in the evolution of animals. He forgets that he is a spark from the divine realm, that his mission is to 'divinize' the world and that his being is God-like" (Shariati 1977,19).
Shariati very explicitly uses God's attributes to proffer subjectivity to humans and to make them dominant over nature. In fact, he devoted a considerable portion of his rather vast corpus to the idea of human subjectivity, but as it is the nature of mediated subjectivity, almost in all instances, as soon as he affirms human subjectivity he immediately negates it.

This simultaneous duality is reflected not only in the sociopolitical aspects and notions of citizenship in the discourses of these three figures of the Islamic Revolution, but to a large extent it also reverberates in the constitution and institutions of the Islamic Republic. However, it is evident that the contradictions inherent in the discourse of mediated subjectivity render it a transitory but dynamic discourse with a large potential for transformation of itself and society because it, unlike "secular" discourses of modernity, which have had a limited and relatively shallow impact on the popular masses in the Middle East, has affected the majority of the Iranian population profoundly. The Islamic discourse, owing to the contradictory nature of mediated subjectivity, could also accommodate and even promote a type of public engagement, especially in the political sphere, necessitated by mass mobilization and political participation. In his speeches and addresses during the Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini often praised the participants in the demonstrations against the Pahlavi regime and encouraged them to remain "in the scene." He argued that if there were only one benefit deriving from the establishment of the Islamic Republic, it would be the presence of the people in social and political scenes, which was "tantamount to a miracle not realized elsewhere" (Khomeini 1985, 79). He even extrapolated the right of participation to women without whom, he admitted, the revolution would not have succeeded (Khomeini 1985, 99). At times he sounded as if the people by participating in the revolution have earned the rights to participate in the affairs of their own country.

In the Arab context too, the later writings of Sayyid Qutb on this element of subjectification found expression in an Islamic justification of citizenship (Salvatore 1997, 60). This type of public engagement assuming an Islamic mantle, can in the long run, be conducive to a form of universal subjectivity and ultimately a narrative of general citizenship and public discussion and deliberation (Salvatore 1997, 55).
From the very beginning of the encounter of many of the Middle Eastern societies with the modern world in the nineteenth century, we can see a dual approach to modernity by secularists and Islamic reformists alike. On the one hand, there was a strong interest in the appropriation of modern western "technique" in general and bureaucracy and military knowledge in particular. On the other hand, there was some desire and curiosity for new ideas and institutions of civil society, albeit to a lesser extent and stunted in magnitude. To be sure, this duality in the appropriation of modernity in this part of the world reflected the very same duality that modernity had exhibited in its European birthplace. Therefore, in the Middle East as well, we observe a positivist interpretation of subjectivity side by side with what can be designated as a "universalizable subjectivity."

The notion of progress, for example, is of pivotal importance in both European and Middle Eastern contexts. But, in the positivist interpretation within the Middle East, progress is codified as the mere development of science and technology and their application to the social sphere, whereas in the trend that may be conceived in terms of universalizable subjectivity, the notion of progress refers more to the possibility of democratic change and transformation of the oppressive institutions where the concept of critique plays a central role. The same duality is expressed in the notion of law. According to the positivist interpretation, law is viewed primarily as order, regulation, and codification. In contrast, "positive law" manifests the universalizability of freedom and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and the notion of government by consent and consensus. At the institutional level, the same dichotomy is displayed in the difference between the interest in merely an efficient bureaucracy such as the creation of Majlis Tanzimat (Organization Assembly) on the one hand, and the setting up of parliamentary constitution and representative assembly on the other. Both of those tendencies inherent in the dual appropriation of modernity in the nineteenth-century Middle East had also adopted the idea of the modern nation-state and nationalism from the West. But while the positivist tendencies placed more emphasis on a notion of nationalism based on ethnic and historical identity (in this case of Iran, for example, the purported Aryan and pre-Islamic identity of the country as opposed to the "Semitic Arabs"), the universalizable approach leaned more toward a notion of nationalism based upon popular sovereignty within the confines of a nation-state. It is very important to bear in mind that both interpretations of modernity were simultaneously expressed in the discourses.
promulgated by Middle Eastern secular and Islamic reformist thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In contemporary Middle Eastern discourses on modernity we encounter a very close parallel dualism, where in reality there is a triumph of positivist subjectivity and the more emancipatory and universalizable moment of subjectivity has been eclipsed. The sentiment of humiliation as a result of the conflict with Israel, and recently more directly with the United States, has disposed the Arabs and Muslims more toward a technological and positivist appropriation of modernity. As Khuri has observed, "in the contemporary Arab Muslim world, modernity itself is seen in mechanistic terms; for rather than grasp its rational and scientific components in their variety and richness, not to mention the moral values underlying it, urgency and haste reduce modernity to its most visible aspects: technological and economic advancement and democracy, themselves . . . reduced to mechanism" (Khuri 1998, 18-19). Moreover, because of its perceived cultural neutrality, the instrumental rationality of modernity, and what I have designated as positivist subjectivity, have been much more readily accepted by the religious forces and secular "modernizing" state elites in their encounter with modernity (Khuri 1998, 21-22).

AN EARLY ISLAMIC ENCOUNTER WITH MODERNITY: THE CASE OF JAMAL AL-DIN AFGHANI

The contemporary Islamic discourses and their relation to modernity have been much influenced by one nineteenth-century individual activist and thinker, namely, Jamal Al-din Asadabadi, better known as Afghani (1838-1897). For this reason an analysis of his thought in some detail is instructive in coming to terms with contemporary issues. In Afghani's discourse, the dual encounter with modernity takes a slightly different form. In reality, he created two discourses, one for what he considered to be the enlightened elite in Islamic societies, according to the principles of which individual subjectivity was affirmed in such concepts as critical thought. He also developed a parallel discourse, which appealed more to the "masses" motivated by his anti-imperialist goals, and which in many ways was in sharp contrast to his first critical discourse.

Underlying Afghani's discourse there is a strong assumption that the modern world necessitates a view of human agency expressed in, "activism, the freer use of human reason and political and military strength" (Keddie 1968, 3). It is interesting that
in Afghani’s case the critical component in his approach to modernity was weightier than the positivist component, which makes sense in the view of his commitment to the unorthodox "Islamic" philosophy. “If someone looks deeply into the question,” he wrote, “he will see that science rules the world. There was, is and will be no rule in the world but science” (Afghani 19683, 102). But a few pages later in the same essay he qualified his statement by saying that,

A science is needed to be the comprehensive soul for all the sciences, so that it can preserve their existence, apply each of them in its proper place, and become the cause of progress of each one of those sciences. The science that has the position of a comprehensive soul and the rank of a preserving force is the science of falsafa or philosophy, because its subject is universal. It is philosophy that shows man human prerequisites. It shows the sciences what is necessary. It employs each of the sciences in its proper place. If a community did not have philosophy, and all the individuals of that community were learned in the sciences with particular subjects, those sciences could not last in that community for a century . . . that community without the spirit of philosophy could not deduce conclusions from these sciences. The Ottoman government and the Khedive of Egypt have opened up schools for the teaching of the new sciences for a period of sixty years and until now they have not received any benefits from those sciences (Afghani a, 104).

What is of crucial importance is that Afghani grounded his conceptualization of philosophy in the idea of reasoning and critical argumentation since "the father and mother of knowledge [elm] is reasoning [borhan] and reasoning is neither Aristotle nor Galileo. The truth is where there is reasoning . . ." (Afghani I968a, 107; translation slightly modified). In another essay entitled *Fawaid Falsafa (The Benefits of Philosophy)* Afghani took his argument one step further by contending that philosophy was even prior to revelation and the latter is but a preparatory stage for the achievement of philosophy. In other words, he argued that revelation was a base that would lead the way to a subjectivist epistemology based on philosophy. He first argued in favor of the centrality of critical faculties of thought:

philosophy is the escape from the narrowness of animal sense impression into the wide area of human perception. It is the removal of darkness of bestial illusions with the light of natural intelligence; the transformation of blindness and lack of insight into clear-sightedness and insight (Afghani 1968b, 110). He then discusses the role of Islam and the Quran in preparing the pre-Islamic "savage" Arabs to embrace the philosophical traditions developed by more civilized nations,
In sum, in that Precious Book [The Quran] with solid verse, He planted the roots of philosophical sciences into purified souls, and opened the road for man to become man. When the Arab people came to believe in that Precious Book they were transferred from the sphere of ignorance to knowledge, from blindness to vision, from savagery to civilization, and from nomadism to settlement. They understood their needs for intellectual and spiritual accomplishment and for gaining a living (Afghani 1968b, 114; emphasis added).

These ideas later developed, Afghani argued, and Arabs realized that they could not develop further without the help of other nations. Therefore, notwithstanding the splendor and greatness of Islam and Muslims, in order to exact and elevate knowledge, the Arabs showed humility before the lowest of their subjects, i.e., the Christians, Jews, and Persians, until with their help, they translated the philosophical sciences from Persian, Syriac, and Greek into Arabic. "Hence it became clear that their Precious Book was the first teacher of philosophy to the Muslims" (Afghani 1968b, 114).

In the same essay, Afghani presented a view of human action that may seem very much to correspond to a Faustian view of subjectivity. He recognized the necessity of satisfaction of human material needs such as agriculture and animal husbandry, procurement of water, construction of shelter, preservation of health achieved through sciences and technology (Afghani 1968b, 110; Afghani 1958, 118). Yet, he considered critical philosophy to be the foundation of these sciences and technologies: "It [philosophy] is the foremost cause of the production of knowledge, the creation of sciences, the invention of industries and the initiation of crafts" (Afghani 1968b, 110; Afghani 1958, 118).

Afghani's most explicit statement of his critical thinking was given in an article published on May 18, 1883, in *journal des Debats* in response to Ernest Renan's uncritical attack on Islam as being inherently against modern civilization. In this essay, Afghani demonstrated the baselessness of Renan's racist attitudes toward Arabs and yet praised the superiority of critical thought, i.e., "scientific" and philosophical thought, over revelation (Afghani 1968c, 81-87). 10

Afghani's "second discourse" is most sharply expressed in a famous essay entitled "The Truth about the Neicheri Sect and Explanation of the Neicheris," written in 1881, even before he wrote the essays belonging to his critical discourse discussed above. In this essay, Afghani depicts a picture of an anti-imperialist collective subject, possessing political and military power incarnated in an Islamic nation that could stand up to western
hegemony. He identified the concept of "social solidarity" as the linchpin of this collective subject, which the West through its "agents" such as Sir Ahmad Khan was trying to subvert. Apparently drawing on Ibn Khaldun's parallel concept of asabiyah (solidarity), Afghani's concept of social solidarity explained the longevity of civilizations and nations in terms of sets of beliefs which bonded the members of a society together and protected that society from external invasion and internal disintegration.

The Neicheris or "materialists," as Afghani in his "second discourse" lumped together the unorthodox and critical thinkers, the socialists, communists, and nihilists, were in his view bent on destroying the social solidarity of nations, Islamic or otherwise, throughout history (Afghani 1968d, 140). What made social solidarity possible, in his analysis, was religious faith and specifically faith in a Transcendental Deity who would in the next world mete out reward and punishment as recompense to individual believers' deeds while living on earth (Afghani 1968d, 167). Afghani elaborated on components of religious faith that undergird the social order and social solidarity in society. These, which he termed as "Religion's Three Beliefs," consisted of: (1) the belief that "there is a terrestrial angel [human], and that he is the noblest of creatures"; (2) the certainty that one's community "is the noblest one, and that all outside ... [one's] community are in error and deception"; and (3) the belief that, "man has come into the world in order to acquire accomplishments worthy of transferring him to a world more excellent, higher, vaster, and more perfect than this narrow and dark world" (Afghani 1968d, 141). As to the first and second components of the religious faith necessary for social solidarity and social order, Afghani reasoned that they were necessary for a sense of collective subjectivity vis-à-vis nature and other social collectivities (Afghani 1968d, 142). It was the third belief, however, which was, as Afghani put it:

the best impulse towards civilization, whose foundations are true knowledge and refined morals. It is the best requisite for the stability of the social order, which is founded on each individual's knowledge of his proper rights, and his following the straight path of justice.... It is the best basis for the peace and calm of the classes of humanity, because peace is the fruit of love and justice and love and justice result from admirable qualities and habits. It is the only belief that restrains man from all evils, saves him from vales of adversity and misfortune, and seats him in the virtuous city on the throne of happiness (Afghani 1968d, 144).

In contrast to this collectivist notion of agency, Afghani argued, the most effective means by which the Neicheris and unorthodox attempted to undermine social solidarity
was by the introduction of individual subjectivity rendered by Afghani as "egoism," which denies the beliefs in reward and punishment in the afterlife, And since, because of these corrupt opinions, each of them [people corrupted by disbelief] believed that there is no life but this one, the quality of egoism [in French transliteration] overcame them. The quality of egoism consists of self-love to the point that if a personal profit requires a man having that quality to let the whole world be harmed, he would not renounce that profit but would consent to the harm of everyone in the world (Afghani 1968d, 151).

The dual nature of Afghani’s discourse is but an indication of the roots of the contemporary discourses of modernity in the Middle East and the Islamic world. Thus, while the element of individual subjectivity and its potential universalization exist in this part of the world, the collectivist interpretation of subjectivity and the notion of Islam as a historical subject is a close parallel to a positivist subjectivity that can impede the development of univerealizable subjectivity and the development of democratic citizenship in the region.\(^\text{12}\) The history of the twentieth century has shown how the notions of collectivist subjectivity and the historicism of an abstract subjectivity embodied in the idea of an ethnic group and a social class, or now a religious tradition, may lead to totalitarian ends. On the other hand, the work of Critical Theory has explained the reification and discontents associated with unsituated subjectivity.\(^\text{13}\) The effort to sublate and reinsert the subject of modernity, whether in its atomistic incarnation in liberalism, or as the collectivist and historicist configuration, in a larger universality, is the task of contemporary critical theorists. Keeping this in mind, the relevance of Critical Theory to the current conditions of the Middle East and the Islamic world in general, where a notion of subjectivity in its various and complex dimensions is emerging, becomes clear—notwithstanding the misgivings of critical theorists themselves and other skeptics. In a similar vein, the power that Critical Theory possesses to expose the ideologies undergirding various types of domination based on class, gender, and religious affiliation, among others, which have been reinforced as a result of privileging the appropriation of dominative aspects of modernity in the Middle East, can potentially lend support to efforts in the creation of civil society and more democratic polities in the region.

NOTES
1. The thrust of Horkheimer and Adorno's argument in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was that modern subjectivity in order to enthrone itself has in the process objectified itself and thus annulled its own subjectivity: "Man's domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost always the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken . . .," 54.

2. On the dialectical relations between the two categories of subjectivity and universality and Hegel's attempt at a substantive synthesis between them see Taylor (1979). Also see Cahoone (1987); Kolb (1986); and Dallmayr (1993).

3. For a discussion of the contemporary debates regarding the efforts to embed the unbridled subject of modernity without compromising the freedom of subjectivity, see Benhabib (1986 and 1992).

4. For discussions of the Axial Civilization, see Shmuel Eisenstadt, ed. (1986).

5. For the notion of "mediated subjectivity" and discourse of the main architects of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, see Vahdat (2002).

6. In the case of Khomeini and Motahhari, this vacillation is discussed in terms of the problem of theodicy in which they struggle with the notions of Divine Justice, Will, and Sovereignty as opposed to notions of human volition, action, and sovereignty. The way they propose out of this aporia is a conceptualization of human subjectivity and sovereignty *subsumed* under Divine Subjectivity, notwithstanding the contradictions of such formulation.

7. Much in conformity with the characteristics of mediated subjectivity, i.e., contradiction, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic only allows "half-rights" for individuals as citizens, but never denies them in toto. Sovereignty does not belong to people even though they are assumed to be in charge of their own destiny (Articles 2 and 6). The right to legislate also exclusively belongs to God, while there are the provisions for a parliament whose members are the elected representatives of the people and legislation is approved by this body (Articles 2 and 58). In this constitution, the antidemocratic notion of the "Governance of the Jurist" is institutionalized. According to Article 107, the highest Jurist in the land is appointed as the Supreme Leader of the country. But the people elect an "Assembly of Experts," which in turn will *select* a jurist among the qualified jurists to be the Supreme Leader. Once the Supreme Leader is appointed he is only responsible to God, yet he could be dismissed by the same Assembly of Experts if
he no longer fits the criteria for qualification. Moreover, while the Supreme Leader has vast powers under his command, there is a President who is elected by popular vote and responsible to the people (Article 24). Article 4 gives the power to run the affairs of the country to the Guardian Council, which consists of a body of twelve men appointed by the Supreme Leader and the head of the Judiciary who is himself appointed by the Supreme Leader. At the same time Article 6 recognizes people's rights to participate in the affairs of the country. Freedom of the press, publication, and unarmed gathering are guaranteed in this Constitution, provided they are not "detrimental to fundamental principles of Islam" (Articles 24 and 27).

8. The unfolding of the internal dynamism of mediated subjectivity in the revolutionary Islamic discourse has given rise to two mostly opposing discourses in the post-revolutionary Iran. The current intellectual milieu can be characterized as a bifurcation of the ambivalence associated with mediated subjectivity, resulting in a bipolar view of subjectivity and of citizenship in the post-revolutionary period. As it seems now, these two tendencies have adopted the opposite poles that were simultaneously present in the revolutionary Islamic discourse of 1970s and early 1980s and have brought them to their logical conclusions. The trend primarily articulated by Abdolkarim Sorush, drawing heavily on Karl Popper, represents the affirmative moment of mediated subjectivity and strives to posit human subjectivity—and eventually intersubjectivity and its political embodiment as universal citizenship—even though it takes a detour from the path pursued by its intellectual predecessors. The opposite trend, represented by Davari Ardakani, and influenced primarily by an antimodern interpretation of Heidegger, has elaborated on the negative side of the Islamic revolutionary discourse and attempted to eliminate the humanist element in contemporary Iran, while upholding the antidemocratic doctrine and the related institution of the "Governance of the Jurist." Of course, neither of these trends is confined to the theoretical level and both have engendered sociopolitical discourses of their own, taking truly opposite positions regarding the process of sociopolitical democratization in the post-revolutionary Iran. For a discussion of these post-revolutionary developments, see Boroujerdi (1994 and 1996).

9. In his private life and his interests in "Islamic" learning, Afghani engaged in some quite unorthodox behavior, which caused much friction with the established religious figures. See Keddie (1968) for Afghani's biography and his interests in philosophy, which was frowned upon by the Islamic doctors.
10. Interestingly enough this essay has never been translated into Persian or other Islamic languages, thus veiling the heterodox and antireligious thoughts of Afghani from his Muslim audiences,

11. Neicheris were the followers of Sir Ahmad Khan (1817—1897) of India and the term "Neicheri" was derived from the English word "nature," which Afghani used as a generic term representing unorthodox views and atheism. See Keddie (1968) for more details.

12. For an analysis of Islam as a historical subject in the contemporary discourse of Islamists, or the so-called Islamic Fundamentalists, see Aziz Al-Azmeh (1993), chapters 1 and 2.


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