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Mussolini in Tehran

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Abstract: The title of this essay owes it to Slavoj Žižek. In 2009 Žižek published an essay in *London Review of Books* titled: 'Berlusconi in Tehran'. It was an ingenious title. He wrote his provocative essay shortly after the 'Green movement' in Iran which protested against the rigged election which secured a second term of 'presidency' for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Žižek aptly called him "a corrupt Islamofascist populist, a kind of Iranian Berlusconi". At that time, millions of protesters poured onto the streets of Tehran, marching in silence, holding up placards with noticeable words that read 'where is my vote?' Only fifteen years later, that silence has turned into a loud and courageous voice: '*We do not want the Islamic republic*'. It is on the occasion of this radical political motto that I have emulated Žižek's title but going beyond it by bringing it to date and calling the entirety of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a 'fascist theocracy'. In this essay, I attempt to analyze the Islamic fascism in the structure of the Islamic Republic by tracing its roots to the historical fascism in Europe.

1 'Fascism Has a Future'

The prominent Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg in an interview conducted in 2022 was asked what he thought about the recent victory of the *Fratelli d'Italia* Party that is headed by Giorgia Meloni, often referred to as neo-fascist, and how he would place it in the history of fascism. His answer was “Yes, I am worried and afraid”, followed by a declaration: “*fascism has a future*”¹ [my emphasis]. Ginzburg confessed that he always avoided using the word ‘fascism’ but “watching American election campaigning in 2016 and hearing Trump’s speech” he felt an irresistible urge to use the word. “Again”, he explained, “it’s not literally fascism, but there are undeniably fascist elements with either Trump or Meloni, and even if the former doesn’t explicitly allude to the fascist legacy as the latter does, fascism has a future”.²

The specters of fascism cannot be conjured away. One has to agree with Ginzburg that fascism *does* indeed have a future. And the reasons run deeper than the recent takeover of the government in Italy by a diehard sympathizer of Mussolini. In a broader historical context, fascism was rooted where Enlightenment, reason, bourgeoisie, political liberalism, and democracy, remained weak—and they have remained weak. Jeffrey Herf, examining the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Third Reich under the categories of ‘modernity’ and ‘technology’, classified these weak elements under the term ‘Reactionary Modernism’. In his words, “The reactionary modernists were *irrationalists*”.³ I will come back to this ‘irrationalism’.

There is a sense of *temporality* in Ginzburg’s “fascism has a future”. As a historian Ginzburg knows well what Jacques Lacan once said: “History is not the past. History is the past in so far as it is historicized in the present. Historicized in the present because it was lived in the past”.⁴ Departing from this insight I want to put Ginzburg’s phrase in a linguistic structure of ‘retroaction’ and ‘anticipation’ in which a *past* has a claim on the ‘future’ and that the *present* is not, in Walter Benjamin’s terms, a ‘homogeneous empty time’. This can be conjugated in the grammatical mode of *futur antérieur* (a ‘future

perfect' as in 'I shall have been') or what in Freudian psychoanalytical terminology is known as '*deferred action*'. What comes later retroactively redefines what came earlier. I employ this linguistic structure to bring out the same *temporality* in a political system that must be named *Islamic fascism*. This system can be materialized only at the level of the State and its apparatuses. At present, this State shows itself in the *theocratic* regime in Iran. It has a well-known genealogy. It goes back to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and comes to Ali Khamenei, the current 'supreme leader'. The underlying assumption is this: When the terms of 'nation' and 'nationalism' in the classical fascism are changed to the term 'religion', a form of fascism comes into being that must be understood in the temporality of the 'deferred action'. The *present*, with the rise of fascism, or in Enzo Traverso's term *postfascism*, must be 'historicized'.⁵ It is in this sense that we must understand the *temporality* in Ginzburg that 'fascism has a future'. In this determination, there *must* absolutely be no *ambivalence*, as I contend, in deploying *Islamic fascism* in characterizing the *theocratic* regime in Iran, as will be discussed later in this essay.

There is yet more confirmation in the argument as to why we are *not* done with fascism and the utility of its term for the analysis of certain political State apparatuses, in this case the theocratic State apparatuses in Iran. Almost twenty seven years ago, Ginzburg's compatriot Umberto Eco published a seminal essay in *The New York Review of Books* titled 'Ur-Fascism', with the subtitle 'Freedom and liberation are an unending task'. Starting with an autobiographical note in which he recalls growing up in the fascist environment in Italy, Eco then invokes Ludwig Wittgenstein to remark that "The notion of fascism is not unlike Wittgenstein's notion of a game".⁶ Wittgenstein's 'game', Eco informs us, can be illustrated in the sequence of '1234', in series 'abc, bcd, cde, def'. He attempts to transpose this notion to 'political groups' aiming at a multi-level definition of the term 'fascism' for which he gives a novel exposition. It goes as follows:

Suppose there is a series of political groups in which group one is characterized by the features *abc*, group two by the features *bcd*, and so on. Group two

is similar to group one since they have two features in common; for the same reasons three is similar to two and four is similar to three. Notice that three is also similar to one (they have in common the feature c). The most curious case is presented by four, obviously similar to three and two, but with no feature in common with one. However, owing to the uninterrupted series of decreasing similarities between one and four, there remains, by a sort of illusory transitivity, a family resemblance between four and one. Fascism became an all-purpose term because one can eliminate from a fascist regime one or more features, and it will still be recognizable as fascist. Take away imperialism from fascism and you still have Franco and Salazar. Take away colonialism and you still have the Balkan fascism of the Ustashes. Add to the Italian fascism a radical anti-capitalism (which never much fascinated Mussolini) and you have Ezra Pound. Add a cult of Celtic mythology and the Grail mysticism (completely alien to official fascism) and you have one of the most respected fascist gurus, Julius Evola.⁷

Eco further notes:

But in spite of this fuzziness, I think it is possible to outline a list of features that are typical of what I would like to call Ur-Fascism, or Eternal Fascism. These features cannot be organized into a system; many of them contradict each other, and are also typical of other kinds of despotism or fanaticism. But it is enough that one of them be present to allow fascism to coagulate around it.⁸

In the rest of his essay Eco singles out fourteen elements constitutive of 'Ur-Fascism' and attends to their definitions. Notable among them are '*cult of tradition*' and '*rejection of modernism*'. "Traditionalism", he writes, "is of course much older than fascism. Not only was it typical of counter-revolutionary Catholic thought after the French Revolution, but it was born in the late Hellenistic era, as a reaction to classical Greek rationalism".⁹ Consequently there can be no "advancement of learning", and since the truth has been said once and for all, we can only interpret its "obscure meaning". Hamed Abdel-Samad, who

brings up Eco's essay, comments that the same cult of tradition is "a part of Islamic thought, where the Qur'an, in its inviolability, is said to contain all there is to know. Political Islam considers its mission divine, a call to be answered in every time and place, regardless of reality. Salafists and jihadists alike demonize those who interpret Islamic texts in keeping with times, the word of God not being humanity's to reconstrue".¹⁰ He goes on to relate the 'teaching' of Ruhollah Khamenei to those Salafists and jihadists to whom we will return later.

"Traditionalism implies the *rejection of modernism*", Eco writes. He further asserts that "The rejection of the modern world" is also the rejection of Enlightenment and the age of Reason and spirit of 1789. It is also a "rebuttal of the capitalistic way of life" and a "depravity of life". It is in this sense, Eco says, that "Ur-Fascism can be defined as *irrationalism*".¹¹ This takes us to Herf's term above, 'Reactionary Modernity', and his argument on *irrationality*. As he explains, reactionary modernists "simply despised reason and denigrated its role in political and social affairs. Their reinjection of reason went far beyond the thoughtful criticism of positivism in philosophy and social science for which German sociology has become famous".¹² Herf further points out that reactionary modernists spoke in the language that Theodor Adorno labeled the "Jargon of authenticity", in which "certain absolutes such as blood, race, and soul were placed beyond rational justification".¹³

If fascism has a future and comes in all sorts of 'combinatory' permutations, as Eco tells us, it is then necessary to ask: *how* and *where* must this future be confronted? It is here that we come to *Islamic fascism* as the 'deferred action' of a classical fascism, and in one place where it was incorporated into the State Ideological Apparatuses—in Iran. This State has demonstrated almost all the variations Eco enumerated in his essay. It has been almost six months, at the time of writing, that courageous women and men in Iran are struggling to put an end to it. Here I want to argue that at the present conjuncture if fascism has a future, any possible attempt to thwart this 'future' must necessarily pass through the destruction of the *neofascist theocracy* in Iran. The revolutionary uprising in Iran against the

theocratic regime of the Islamic Republic after more than forty years of its dictatorial rule is struggling to put a stop to its projection into the future. This uprising put a momentary halt on the regime when young Mahsa (Jina) Amini was brutally killed on September 16, 2022, in Tehran. As we will see, if classical fascism comes with an exact date of birth and an exact place for its 'invention', in the same manner, an exact date and place can also be identified for the birth of 'Islamic fascism'.

Before I proceed, I should say a word about the title of this essay. In 2009 Slavoj Žižek published an essay in *London Review of Books* titled: 'Berlusconi in Tehran'. It was a provocative and ingenious title. He wrote it shortly after the 'Green movement' in Iran against the rigged election which secured a second term of 'presidency' for Ahmadinejad. Žižek aptly called him "a corrupt Islamofascist populist, a kind of Iranian Berlusconi".¹⁴ At that time, millions of protesters poured onto the streets of Tehran, marching in silence, holding up placards with noticeable words that read 'where is my vote?' Only fifteen years later, that silence has turned into a loud and courageous voice: '*We do not want the Islamic republic*'. It is on the occasion of this radical political motto that I have emulated Žižek's title by upgrading it! But I am not calling the current 'president' of Iran, Mr. Ibrahim Raisi—who is by far a more superior 'Islamofascist' figure than Ahmadinejad—an Iranian male version of Ms. Meloni in Italy. Rather, I trace back the source in the early twentieth century to conjure up the 'inventor' of what she adheres to. In this relation, I would like to recall Žižek's humorous invocation of the famous saying by the Marx Brothers that he often cites in his work. It is well-known: 'This man may look like a corrupt idiot and act like a corrupt idiot, but do not let that deceive you—he *is* a corrupt idiot.' Paraphrasing this saying for my purpose it will read like this: 'This man looks like a corrupt fascist, and acts like a corrupt fascist, but don't let that deceive you—he *is* a corrupt fascist.' We do not let that deceive us! This 'corrupt fascist' is none other than Ali Khamenei, the 'supreme leader', a faithful successor of Ayatollah Rohullah Khomeini, whose doppelgänger is Mussolini. Mussolini, retroactively, showed up in Tehran! But, make no mistake, there is a world of difference between the two, Mussolini and Khamenei. Whereas the former was authentic and a competent fascist, the

latter is *inauthentic* and an *incompetent* copycat. Before I trace the genealogy of this 'corrupt fascist man' here, a brief history of classical Fascism is in order.

2 Classical Fascism

To be exact, Fascism was born in Milan on the Sunday morning of March 23, 1919. First it was a *movement*, before it became a *regime*. Benito Mussolini is the inventor of this fascist movement. He coined the term *fascismo* (from the Italian *fascio*, meaning 'bundle' or 'sheaf', derived from the Latin *fascēs*, a bundle of rods with an encased axe). It will be recalled that *fascio* was carried in procession to 'signify the authority and unity of the state'.¹⁵ As Robert Paxton in his *The Anatomy of Fascism* informs us, "At the end of World War I, Mussolini coined the term *fascism* to describe the mood of the little band of nationalist ex-soldiers and pro-war syndicalist revolutionaries that he was gathering around himself. Even then, he had no monopoly on the word *fascio*, which remained in general use for activist groups of various political hues."¹⁶ Mussolini declared his movement a "war against socialism ... because it has opposed nationalism".¹⁷ With the 'March on Rome', Mussolini was appointed as prime minister on October 31, 1922, and ruled as a fascist dictator until July 25, 1943. He was executed along with his mistress in 1945.

Italian Fascism entered history with violence against socialism, liberalism, and bourgeois legality. Although fascism received its name from Italy, similar movements were emerging in postwar Europe, exhibiting the same "mixture of nationalism, anti-capitalism, voluntarism, and active violence against bourgeois and socialist enemies".¹⁸ As Paxton accurately voices his concern, the term *fascism* must be rescued from its sloppy usage and be retained as an indispensable political term relevant to our time. We must therefore be mindful of what the term as a "general phenomenon, indeed the most important novelty of the twentieth century" means. Paxton offers a concise and accurate definition: "a popular movement against the Left and against liberal individualism".¹⁹ He further remarks that "Contemplating fascism, we see most clearly how the twentieth century contrasted with the nineteenth, and what the twentieth-first century must avoid."²⁰ Paxton correctly argues, the

fact of the 'diversity' in different fascisms is not a reason to abandon the term, as we do not discard the term *liberalism* or, for that matter, the term *communism* for the profound differences of forms they come to take in different places and times.²¹ An 'ideal type' definition of fascism would go as Roger Griffin puts it: 'Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism'.²² Marxists were the first victims of fascist violence. In their definition, fascism is "the instrument of the big bourgeoisie for fighting the proletariat when the legal means available to the state proved insufficient to subdue them. It is the extra-legal arm of the big bourgeoisie for establishing and consolidating its dictatorship".²³ And further: "Fascism is the open, terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist element of finance capital".²⁴

We must note that fascism has two principal partners in coalition against the Left and Marxists: liberals and conservatives. These partners must be defined clearly in their original sense. Paxton remarks that "European liberals of the early twentieth century were clinging to what had been progressive a century earlier, when the dust was still settling from the French Revolution. Unlike conservatives, they accepted the revolution's goals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, but they applied them in ways suitable for an educated middle class."²⁵ Paxton usefully defines *liberalism* in its original context:

Classical liberals interpreted liberty as individual personal freedom, preferring limited constitutional government and a laissez-faire economy to any kind of state intervention, whether mercantilist, as in the early nineteenth century, or socialist, as later on. Equality they understood as opportunity made accessible to talent by education; they accepted inequality of achievement and hence power and wealth. Fraternity they considered the normal condition of free men (and they tended to regard public affairs as men's business), and therefore in no need of artificial reinforcement, since economic interests were naturally harmonious and the truth would out in a free marketplace of ideas.²⁶

He goes on to define conservatism, in turn, as those who “wanted order, calm, and the inherited hierarchies of wealth and birth. They shrank both from fascist mass enthusiasm and from the sort of total power fascists grasped for. They wanted obedience and deference, not dangerous popular mobilization, and they wanted to limit the state to the functions of a ‘night watchman’ who would keep order while traditional elites ruled through property, churches, armies, and inherited social influence”.²⁷ “More generally”, he further writes, “conservatives in Europe still rejected in 1930 the main tenets of the French Revolution, preferring authority to liberty, hierarchy to equality, and deference to fraternity”.²⁸ Significantly, this is what Mussolini said: “The fascist state is not a night watchman ... [It] is a spiritual and moral entity whose purpose is that of securing the political, juridical, and economic organization of the nation ... transcending the individual brief existence, the state stands for the immanent conscience of the nation”.²⁹ Noteworthy is the fact that unlike conservatives and liberals, Mussolini, and for that matter, fascists in general, never wanted to keep the masses out of politics. I recall here how Walter Benjamin qualified this fascist approach toward the ‘masses’ in his much debated ‘Epilogue’ of the *Artwork Essay*. He wrote:

Fascism attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property relations which they strive to abolish. It sees its salvation in granting expression to the masses—but on no account granting them rights. The masses have a right to change property relations; fascism seeks to give them an *expression* while keeping these relations unchanged. *The logical outcome of fascism is an aestheticizing of political life*. The violation of the masses, whom fascism, with its Fuhrer cult, forces to its knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into serving the production of ritual values.³⁰

To put fascism in its total environment and not in isolation it can be defined as the following: “Fascism in power is a compound, a powerful amalgam of different but

marriageable conservative, national-socialist and radical Right ingredients, bonded together by common enemies of common passions for a regenerated, energized, and purified nation at whatever cost to free institutions and rule of law”.³¹ And Enzo Traverso summarizes the real *essence* of the historical-classical fascism cogently. He writes:

In fact, anti-communism characterized fascism from the beginning to the end of its historical trajectory. It was a militant, radical, aggressive anti-communism that transformed the nationalist ‘civil religion’ into a ‘crusade’ against the enemy. Regarded as a form of anti-Bolshevism, fascism does not appear as revolutionary but as a typically *counterrevolutionary* phenomenon arising from the atmosphere of civil war into which Europe plunged after the Russian Revolution of 1917. [...] In such a context, fascist ‘revolution’ could define itself only as a movement radically opposed to the communist revolution.³²

In short: Not only does fascism oppose modernity, Enlightenment, liberalism, and Jews, upholding militarism and martyrdom as a ‘political religion’, but more importantly it “could not have existed without anti-communism”.³³

This brief examination of classical fascism should be adequate to serve as a background for examining the birthplace of Islamic fascism when it becomes the ideology of the State in the case of Iran. We come to confront Mussolini in Tehran. In this itinerary, we therefore leave classical ‘Fascist revolution’—as *counter-revolution*—in Europe of the 1930s to arrive at an equally dangerous counter-revolution, that is the ‘Islamic revolution’ in Iran. Below I attempt to examine the latter’s pedigree.

3 Islamic Fascism and the State

Enzo Traverso properly brings out the term ‘Islamic fascism’ and points out that “Since the new radical right portrays itself precisely as a bastion opposed to this ‘Islamic fascism’, the word ‘fascism’ appears more like an obstacle to our understanding

than a useful category of interpretation".³⁴ This term, therefore, must be rescued from its appropriation by the far right. We must examine its pedigree and submit it to scrutiny. To begin with, we should first recognize Iran as the *birthplace* of Islamic fascism where it was theoretically formulated as the State ideology even before the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979. Towards the end of his *The Anatomy of Fascism* Paxton comes "to the difficult issue of whether religion may serve as the functional equivalent of fascism to regenerate and unite a humiliated and vengeful people" and follows up with this question: "Was Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini a fascist regime?"³⁵ His answer is instructive and revealing:

Mussolini and Hitler were both nurtured in somewhat different anticlerical traditions: in Mussolini's case revolutionary syndicalism, in Hitler's case anti-Habsburg pan-Germanism. This historical peculiarity of the original fascisms does not mean that future integrist movements could not build upon a religion in place of nation, or as the expression of national identity [...] Religion may be as powerful an engine of identity as the nation. Indeed, in some cultures, religious identity may be far more powerful than national identity. In integrist fundamentalisms, the violent promotion of the unity and dynamism of the faith may function very much like the violent promotion of the unity and dynamism of the nation.³⁶

The substitution of 'nation' by 'religion' is in the core of Islamic fascism. Paxton points out that "Fundamentalist Muslims offer little loyalty to the various Islamic states, whether presidential or monarchical. *Islam is their nation*"³⁷ [emphasis mine]. A religious-based fascism, as he notes, is conceivable. In the case of Iran it is not just 'conceivable'. It happened and has been *real*. Paxton incisively remarks that "if one accepts an interpretation of fascism that is not limited to European fin de siècle culture, the possibilities for a non-European fascism are not less great than in the 1930s, and indeed probably greater because of the great increase since 1945 of failed experiments with democracy and representative government".³⁸ Iran is the most notorious *failed* case in this regard.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the place where Islamic fascism is a *State* doctrine distributed in various institutions. It is the place where *neofascist theocracy* is established. As we saw, an exact date was identified for the rise of classical Fascism in Italy. More or less, an approximate date can be also determined for the creation of the *idea* of the Islamic State which later became the foundation of the Islamic Republic in Iran. It goes back to 1970. In this year Ayatollah Rohullah Khomeini (*ayatollah* can be translated as 'sign from God') gave a series of lectures to his followers while in exile in Iraq.³⁹ But much earlier, in 1943, Khomeini had already published a short document, an anonymous manifesto titled *Kashf-al-Asrar*, meaning 'The Discovery of Secrets' that he had completed in 1942, and which is an outright attack on secularism.⁴⁰ As Baqer Moin in his informative book on Khomeini tells us, in this document Khomeini put forward his idea about the constitution of an Islamic state. "Government" he argued, "can only be legitimate when it accepts the rule of God, and the Rule of God means the implementation of the *shari'a*. All laws that are contrary to the *shari'a* must be dropped, because 'only the law of God will always stay valid and immutable in the face of changing times'".⁴¹ In one lecture on January-February 1970, Khomeini said the followings:

It is our duty to work towards the establishment of an Islamic government. The first activity we must undertake in this respect is the propagation of our cause; that is how we must begin ... We must propagate our cause to the people, instruct them in it, and convince them of its validity. We must generate a wave of intellectual awakening, to emerge as a current throughout society, and gradually, to take shape as an organized Islamic government made up of the awakened, committed, and religious masses who will rise up and establish an Islamic government.⁴²

This manifesto is the cornerstone of what came to be known as *velayet-e fagih* or 'The Guardianship of the Jurists'. This doctrine has a pedigree which goes back to Wahhabis and Salafis, which cannot be discussed here. Here I should mention that

Khomeini had delivered a fiery speech in the holy city of Qom calling on Iranians to revolt against Shah's rule, from a reactionary position, it must be said, for which he was arrested and sent into exile, first to Turkey and then to Iraq. Armed with the doctrine of *velayet-fagih*, Khomeini returned to Iran on February 1, 1979, two weeks after the Shah had left Iran, and promised 'freedom for every Iranian'. Unlike Mussolini's 'March on Rome', Khomeini did not March on Tehran. Instead, he flew from Paris to Tehran on board a comfortable chartered Air France Boeing 747, accompanied by his supporters and 120 international journalists to guarantee the safety of the plane. In April of the same year he called on Iranians to vote for a 'Islamic Republic', and the majority had no choice but to vote for it without, in all certainty, having read Khomeini's *Hokumat-e Eslami*, or even knowing about its existence.⁴³ The Islamic Republic was a return to despotism and brutal dictatorship, later to become a full-fledged police state. This is important because it directly relates to the question of fascism and the ambivalence about it among the Iranian intellectuals especially on the Left. In this respect, one case stands out in the twentieth century that I would like to bring up.

In 1973 the writer Donné Raffat conducted a series of interviews with one of the most prominent Iranian novelists in the twentieth century, Bozorg Alavi. Raffat later published those interviews with his extensive personal memories and commentaries in a fine book entitled *The Persian Papers of Bozorg Alavi*.⁴⁴ I should mention here that Alavi, as is well known, was a founding member of the Tudeh Party, the Communist Party, of Iran (Tudeh mean 'masses'), who was imprisoned during the Shah's regime and left Iran upon his release to go back to Germany where he had originally got his early education in the early twentieth century—the country where he spent most of his life in voluntary exile, mainly in East Berlin until his death in 1997. Alavi, it should be mentioned, was a close friend of one of the greatest Iranian novelists of the twentieth century Sadeq Hedayat who committed suicide in Paris and was buried in the famous cemetery Père Lachaise. Towards the end of his book, Raffat writes about the disillusionment of liberal and leftists with the passage of the new constitution, seeing that the revolution, far from being progressive as many had hoped, had turned out to be reactionary. There were increasing references to

velayat-e fagih in the opposition press abroad, as he mentions, calling the Religious Guardian a 'dictator' and his clerical support 'fascist mullahs'. I cite here a key passage in Raffat's book:

The new constitution, in short, gave the Religious Guardian even greater power than that which had been bestowed on the shah. Politically, the *faghih* had taken over the mantle of the 'King of Kings', and gone even further in sanctioning his position of supreme authority as an "imam." There was no challenging the state without challenging its religion. All opponents of the *faghih*'s absolute rule were not only politically deviant but spiritually corrupt. Now a political prisoner could legally be tried by a panel of clerical judges, then shot not in the name of king and country, but, in all clear conscience, in the name of God. In less than a year after the fall of the shah—nine months, actually, after the formal dissolution of monarchy—the country had "voted," albeit under blatantly coercive conditions, to maintain and solidify an authoritarian system of government. The revolution in Iran, far from being progressive, as many had hoped, had turned out to be reactionary.⁴⁵

In this context, Raffat recalls that in one of his conversations with Alavi back in 1973 he asked him "whether he thought that fascism had any 'roots' in Iran". Raffat reports that Alavi "did not think that it did, because, in order to be a fascist, one had to believe, in his words, 'in the fascist idea'; and he did not think that such a 'faith' existed among Iranians, either then or at the time of his imprisonment".⁴⁶ Raffat further narrates what Alavi told him:

A German fascist believed that Hitler—fascism—was the salvation of his country. He had faith. I don't think that this kind of faith existed in an Iranian prison guard. It didn't exist among the Iranian leadership either. The difference is this. The former really performed his duty: out of his belief, out his conviction, from the depth of his heart. But the other one, no ... The Iranian didn't. He didn't even have the conviction

that what he was doing was right.⁴⁷

This is admittedly a narrow view of fascism. Had Alavi known about Khamenei's manifesto of *The Islamic State* written back in 1970, one might wonder if he would have still said what he said in 1973. This is not the place to enter into any broader discussion of the Tudeh Party's misconception about Ayatollah Khomeini during the first three years of the Islamic Republic which led to the terrible repression and eventual brutal executions of its prominent members by the regime.⁴⁸ Suffice to say that Raffat is on the mark when, after citing Alavi's remarks, he comments that "Certainly, such a 'faith' was in evidence now. From the 'leadership' right down to the 'prison guard', a person was chosen for a post precisely for his devotion to the state creed."⁴⁹ I can now come to trace the origin of Khomeini's manifesto and examine its sources.

In conclusion: In the light of the above, we must agree that when the edicts of the Islamic Shari'a law are elevated to the ideology of the State the result is an *Islamic fascism*. The Islamic Republic of Iran is its incarnation and its most brutal instrument. Returning to Carlo Ginzburg and the question of the openness of fascism to the future, we must be mindful of the fact that once the *Islamic fascism* is defeated in Iran and when its State apparatus is dismantled, it is by no means the end of the story. It will be still the task of the Left, I insist, to confront *secular* fascism. As Dylan Riley in his well-argued *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe* states, "The key task of the left is to lead a democratic revolution while avoiding the technocratic project of 'defending existing institutions', which are to a large degree antidemocratic".⁵⁰ He also states, correctly I think, that fascist regimes must be best understood as 'authoritarian democracies'. This is, of course, not the case with 'undemocratic fascism' of *theocracy* in Iran.⁵¹

It is indeed hard to conjure Mussolini's specters away. Secular fascism has a future as long as 'liberal democracy' with its inherent contradiction between 'freedom' and 'equality', which has its origins in the so-called 'Athenian democracy', persists and continues

to be manipulated by the far right. We must be aware that from Bonapartism of the Second Empire to 'parliamentary democracy' in the twentieth century, and the mutation of the latter into '*democratic fascism*' (Alain Badiou's term), ruled by the '*gangster capitalism*' (also Alain Badiou's term), the *weak* Enlightenment and *irrationalism* will continue to be a fertile ground for fascism to raise its ugly head in the foreseeable future. As Kojin Karatani has said, fascism is not 'obsolete', it is 'omnipresent'.

¹ ‘Fascism Has a Future’: Carlo Ginzburg interviewed by Joseph Confavreux, Verso Blog, posted November 4, 2022.

² Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Fascism Has a Future’, no pagination.

³ See Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 13.

⁴ See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 1, Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953–1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. with notes John Forrester (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1988), 12.

⁵ Enzo Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism, Populism and the Far Right* (London and New York: Verso, 2019).

⁶ Umberto Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’, in *The New York Review of Books*, June issue, 1995, no pagination.

⁷ Umberto Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’, no pagination. Giulio Cesare Andrea ‘Julius’ Evola was an Italian poet and philosopher and a radical-right Ideologue. A thinker in Italian fascism, he also had ties with Nazi Germany. For a brief history of this reactionary figure see Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Evola.

⁸ Umberto Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’.

⁹ Umberto Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’.

¹⁰ See Hamed Abdel-Samad, *Islamic Fascism* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2016), 16.

¹¹ Umberto Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’, no pagination.

¹² Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, 13.

¹³ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, 13.

¹⁴ See Slavoj Žižek, ‘Berlusconi in Tehran’ in *London Review of Books*, vol. 31, No. 14 (July 2009).

¹⁵ See Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 4. As Paxton mentions, “Fasces are prominently displayed on Christopher Wren’s Sheldonian Theatre (1664–1969) at Oxford University. They appear on the Lincoln memorial in Washington (1922) and on the United States quarter minted in 1932”, 4.

¹⁶ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 4–5.

¹⁷ As Paxton explains, in the morning of March 23, 1919, “more than a hundred persons, including war veterans, syndicalists who had supported the war, and Futurist intellectuals, plus some reporters and the merely curious, gathered in the meeting room of the Milan Industrial and Commercial Alliance, overlooking the Piazza San Sepolcro”, to “declare war against socialism ... because it has opposed nationalism”. Now Mussolini called his movement the Fasci di Combattimento, which means, very approximately, ‘fraternities of combat’, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 5.

¹⁸ See Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 7.

¹⁹ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 21.

²⁰ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 21.

²¹ In this respect, Paxton explains that “liberal politics took dissimilar forms in free-trading, Bible-reading Victorian Britain, in the protectionist, anticlerical France of the Third Republic, or in Bismarck’s aggressively united German Reich. Indeed ‘liberalism’ would be an even better candidate for abolition than ‘fascism’, now that Americans consider ‘liberals’ the far Left, while Europeans call ‘liberals’ advocates of a hands-off laissez-faire free market such as Margaret Thatcher, Roland Reagan, and George W. Bush. Even fascism isn’t as confusing as that”; Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 21.

²² Quoted in Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 21. Also see Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 26.

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²⁴ ‘Resolution on Fascism, *Fifth Comintern Congress*, quoted in *Marxists in the Race of Fascism: Writings by Marxists from the Inter-War Period*, ed. David Beetham (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1984), 152. Also see Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 8.

Quoted in Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 8. Also see Roger Griffin, ed. *Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 262.

²⁵ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 22.

²⁶ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 22.

²⁷ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 22.

²⁸ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 22.

²⁹ Quoted in Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, n. 88, 259.

³⁰ See Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility”, Third Version, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Others, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 269.

³¹ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 207.

³² Enzo Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism*, 117.

³³ Enzo Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism*, 118. Traverso further remarks that “Unlike the communist revolutions, which radically changed the social forms of property and production, ‘fascist revolutions’ everywhere integrated the old ruling class into their system of power. In other words, the birth of fascism always implies a certain osmosis between fascism, authoritarianism, and conservatism”, 119.

³⁴ Enzo Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism*, 6.

³⁵ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 203.

³⁶ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 204.

³⁷ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 204.

³⁸ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 205.

³⁹ See the translation of Khomeini’s lectures in *Imam Khomeini, Islam and Revelations: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981).

⁴⁰ See Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1999), 60. Also see Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism, Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁴¹ Baqer Moin, *Khomeini, Life of the Ayatollah*, 63. Moin writes that “On a rather chilling note, he expected the government of Islam to ‘follow religious rules and regulations and ban publications which are against the law and religion and hang those who write such nonsense in the presence of religious believers’. The ‘mischief-makers who are corrupters of the earth (*mofsed fi’l-arz*) should, he said, ‘be uprooted so that others would avoid betraying religious sanctity”, 63.

⁴² Quoted in Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 30; also see Ruhollah Khomeini, ‘Islamic Government’, in *Imam Khomeini, Islam and Revelations*, 126-127.

⁴³ I must make a confession here that, as a member of the Confederation of Iranian Student in the States active against the Shah of Iran, I never read Khomeini’s declaration on the ‘Islamic State’ and in all certainty almost nobody in that organization was aware of its existence. It was never brought to our attention.

⁴⁴ See Donn  Raffat, *The Persian Papers of Bozorg Alavi: A Literary Odyssey* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985). The book includes the translation by Raffat of Alavi’s five short stories under the title ‘Scrap Papers from Prison’. Homa Katouzian in his *Iran: Politics, History, and Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013) devotes only a short paragraph to Alavi to introduce him which is useful to cite here: “Bozorg Alavi was a friend and contemporary of both Hedayat and Jamalzadeh. He began to publish in the 1930s and virtually wrote no fiction from the early 1950s, when he went into voluntary exile in East Germany. His early short stories were typically influenced by European psychological fiction of the first quarter of the twentieth century, for example the short stories *Sarbaz-e Sorbi* (Tin Soldier) and *Arus-e Hezar Damad* (Bride of a Thousand Grooms). After becoming a Marxist and joining the Tudeh Party in the 1940s, most of his stories had a political and ideological purpose and content. The best of the latter were his novella *Cheshmhayash* (Her Eyes) and the short story *Gileh Mard* (The Man from Gilan)”, 199. For a more detailed account of Alavi’s life story and his writings see Raffat above.

⁴⁵ Donn  Raffat, *The Persian Papers of Bozorg Alavi*, 241.

⁴⁶ See Donn  Raffat, *The Persian Papers of Bozorg Alavi*, 241.

⁴⁷ Donn  Raffat, *The Persian Papers of Bozorg Alavi*, 241.

⁴⁸ See Shiva Farahmand Rad’s informative short report titled *Following Disastrous Steps to the Tragedy, In the Suppression Process of the Tudeh Part of Iran 1980-1983*, in Persian, First Edition: 1989, Germany; Second Edition: 2017, Sweden.

⁴⁹ Donn  Raffat, *The Persian Papers of Bozorg Alavi*, 241–253. Raffat continues with his remarks in pointing out that “perhaps more to the point than the ‘fascist’ label is that, as time wore on, the two regimes—past and present, monarchical and clerical—began to look alike, which underscored a basic fixedness in the national political character. The government was still functioning, essentially, along a one-party system, the Shah’s Resurgence Party having been replaced by the Islamic Republican Party. The imperial guards, as the ultimate protectors of the State, had been replaced by the revolutionary Guards. Qasr Prison, commonly known under two generations of Pahlavi rule as ‘the house of remorse’, had given way to Evin Prison, an equally dreaded abode of misery, torture, and execution. And just as deplorable, the hated SAVAK had given way to the hated SAVAMA and, horrendous to hear, even employed some of the same criminal staff. Censorship continued as before and even worsened: not only were books and newspapers outlawed, but entire libraries were eliminated, their contents recycled for the manufacture of cardboard cartoons. No publication was allowed without the seal of approval of the Ministry of Guidance...”, 242.

⁵⁰ See Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe* (London and New York: Verso, 2019), xxxi.

⁵¹ In this regard see my ‘Post-Fascism and Islamic Republic of Iran’, in *Philosophical Salon*, posted October 24, 2022.