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THE DISCURSIVITY OF THE THEORY OF THE *WILĀYAT-I FAQIH* AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE IDEALS OF *ORDER* AND *UNITY* IN THE THEOCRATIC VISION OF POWER IN IRAN*

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LA DISCURSIVIDAD DE LA TEORÍA DE LA *WILĀYAT-I FAQIH* COMO FUNDAMENTO DE LOS IDEALES DE *ORDEN* Y *UNIDAD* EN LA VISIÓN TEOCRÁTICA DEL PODER EN IRÁN

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between order and unity in the theocratic vision of power in Iran. Starting from the analysis of the theory of the *Wilāyat-i faqih*, the role that these terms assume within the political project of the Islamic State is studied through the analysis of the speeches of the Āyatollāh Khāmeneī. This paper argues that Michel Foucault's reportages on the Iranian revolution provide conceptual insights for the understanding of the *Wilāyat-i faqih* as an ideology which stands as an alternative to liberalism and positions itself outside the canons of Western thought. Through highlighting the analogical symmetries between Khāmeneī's theory of the Islamic government and Khomeini's speeches, the *Wilāyat-i faqih* is analyzed as a form of ideology that has emerged from the perception of a lack of order in Islamic society following the 1978 Iranian Revolution.

Keywords

Khāmeneī, Khomeini, power, order, unity.

Resumen

Este artículo examina la relación entre orden y unidad en la visión teocrática del poder en Irán. Partiendo del análisis de la teoría de la *Wilāyat-i faqih*, se estudia el papel que estos términos asumen dentro del proyecto político del Estado Islámico a través del análisis de los discursos del Āyatollāh Khāmeneī. Este artículo argumenta que los reportajes de Michel Foucault sobre la revolución iraní brindan conocimientos conceptuales para la comprensión de la *Wilāyat-i faqih* como una ideología que se erige como una alternativa al liberalismo y se posiciona fuera de los cánones del pensamiento occidental. Al resaltar las simetrías analógicas entre la teoría del gobierno islámico de Khāmeneī y los discursos de Khomeini, el *Wilāyat-i faqih* se analiza como una forma de ideología que surgió de la percepción de falta de orden en la sociedad islámica después de la Revolución iraní de 1978.

Palabras clave

Khāmeneī, Khomeini, poder, orden, unidad.

Introduction

It becomes clear from the prominence that theocratic power exercises on Iranian society that the speech delivered by the Āyatollāh Hoseynī Khāmeneī on the 19th of April 2022¹, along with the one delivered on the 3rd of October 2022² on the occasion of the graduation ceremony of the cadets of Hassan al-Mujtaba University, are the complete declension of the *wilāyat-i faqih*³. Proof of this are the events that followed the September 13 2022 protest, after the arrest and the brief, yet fatal, imprisonment of Masha Amini, accused by the moral police of wearing the *hijab*⁴ incorrectly. From this date onwards other young people have been given the death penalty for being enemies of the regime, yet the words “*No Fear*” and “*Woman, life, freedom*”, have been echoing through the streets of Tehran for months now, from the University to city suburbs. Analysts, observers, journalists, and intellectuals are working towards a reconciliation between ideas and events. The respect of fundamental freedoms, the safeguarding and the defense of human rights and, more specifically, the recognition of women’s rights are at the center of international public debate. Dissident cinematography, with Mohammad Rasoulof’s movie *There Is No Evil*, has also shown the courage to denounce the anthropic moralism of the Iranian government, which does not facilitate the regulation of relations between people, imposes the death penalty on opponents of the regime and denies women’s rights. Nonetheless, from a more in-depth analysis, we can assess that what is now happening in Iran is not new. In fact, in order to understand the current events it is useful to turn to Michel Foucault’s suggestions and comments, drawn from his *reportages* in collaboration with *Corriere della Sera* during the 1978 Iranian revolution. These investigations were conceived by Foucault as “*reportages of ideas*”⁵, almost in defiance of those who, in those years, spoke of the death of ideologies. The nine *réportages* ranging

1 Source and Italian translation from Persian: https://islamshia.org/limam-khamenei-sulla-donna-e-la-famiglia/?doing_wp_cron=1675759991.8750219345092773437500. (Accessed December 15, 2022)

2 Source: <https://en.irna.ir/news/84904837/Full-text-of-Ayatollah-Khamenei-s-speech-on-recent-unrest-in>. (Accessed December 19, 2022)

3 *Wilāyat-e faqih* is the theological-political doctrine theorized by Khomeini and proposed in the collection of his lectures *Hokumat-e-Eslami* (The Islamic Government). According to the doctrine, the *faqih* as *mujtahid* (the one who practices *ijtihad*) has the task of acting as a substitute for the *Imām*, both in religious affairs and in conducting the politics of the Shiite community. (Khomeini, 2006)

4 The term *hijāb* comes from the root *h-j-b* (to make invisible). Translated, it assumes the sense of a “veil”. The passages of the Koran evoked for the precept of the veil are the *āya* 31 of the *sūra* XXIV al-Nūr (The Light), in which the word *khumūr* appears whose root *kh-m-r* means to veil, by translation the word *khimār* means veil; and of *surah* XXXIII al-Ahzāb (The allied factions) in which the quadrilateral root of the term *jalābib* means to wear.

5 It is Michel Foucault himself who indicated in a note in the *Corriere della sera* of November 12, 1978, that a series of reportages for the *Corriere* would begin, dedicated to the Iranian revolution. The permanent team based in Paris (which among others includes the writer Alain Finkielkraut co-author with Pascal Bruckner of the book *Amorous Disorder*) had the objective of dedicating some investigations to the basic themes of current events. (Foucault, 1994, Cavazzini, 2005)

from 28 September 1978 to 26 February 1979 and the Open Letter to Mehadi Bazargan of 14-20 April 1979 were collected and published in 1998 in the *Persian Notebook* (Foucault 1978-1979; 1994). If the contents and the expression of the *réportages* offer starting points for a discussion of the types of ideas which are now to be found hidden in Ayatollah Khāmeneī's speeches, we must take note that the plurality of topics covered by Foucault ignited a lively debate that has lasted over the years (Marengo, 2020, Tesini, 2019 & Marzocca, 2005). In fact, this is the reading grid assumed by the interpreters participating in such debate. The first criticisms emerged on March 8, 1979, when women demonstrated in Teheran with the cry "down with Khomeini". They protested against the obligation to wear the *chador* and against the first executions of the regime's opponents. Foucault was accused of providing support for Khomeini. On March 26, 1979, the French newspaper *Le Matin de Paris* published an article "Michel Foucault and Iran" in which the philosopher dissociated himself from the polemics raised against him by the Broyelle spouses (intellectuals of the left) who "invited him to explain himself", as well as from the exponent of the extreme right, the paedo-psychiatrist Pierre Debray-Ritzen, who also criticized the hot topics of political Islam. Shortly thereafter, Foucault clarified his position by publishing in the *Nouvel Observateur* in April 1979 the *Open Letter* to the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government Mehdi Bazargan in which he made public their conversation they had sometime earlier on human rights, the spiritual dimension of the Iranian people, on the obligations deriving from religion, on the responsibility of governments and on the duty to govern. The controversy reopened in 2005 in the *Corriere della sera* in June 15 with an article by Pierluigi Panza, editor of *Taccuino persiano*, who gave a balanced interpretation of the Iranian events. However, on the same page and with a different tone altogether, the reader can find the intervention of Gianni Vattimo, who accused Foucault of having distanced himself from the left, for having defended Khomeini and for being a structuralist (Cavazzini, 2005, 21). Even more controversial positions are taken by Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, in their 2005 volume *Foucault and Iranian Revolution. Gender and the Seduction of Islamism* (Afary & Anderson, 2005). This study is the first study in English in which Foucault is accused of political short-sightedness, as he is considered responsible for not having adequately dealt with the gender issue. Scanning this essay makes it immediately clear that the texts analyzed by the authors are the pretext for a polemic against the 1978 revolution. Balanced tones appear in Andrea Cavazzini's 2005 article *Foucault in Persia. Before and after the Iranian Reportage*, which frames the Foucaultian question within a spiral that in a certain sense "rehabilitates" the French philosopher, enthusiastic about the revolutionary experience seen as a sort of critical activity exercised towards

the powers and devices of domination operating in Iranian society. The revolutionary experience is seen by the philosopher as a political-historical-philosophical event that “stages, and makes productive at the level of collective action, devices which are foreign to our idea of rationality and to what, until then, was its result politic.” (Cavazzini 2005, 30). What differentiates this revolutionary experience from Western ones is the different regime of truth, peculiar to Iranian *Shi’ism*, an esoteric regime that allowed revolutionaries to correlate political mobilization to an inner, less visible but more spiritual objective. This consideration allows us to understand the meaning of the conversation between Michel Foucault, C. Brière, and P. Blanchet *The spirit of a world without spirit* (Foucault, 1994), in which a fruitful reflection emerges, highlighting on the one hand the ambiguities of the Iranian people, torn between conservation, tradition and modernity and, on the other, the excess of revolutionary subjectification which is a sign of irreducibility typical of the Iranian people. Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi’s 2008 book, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic revolution after the Enlightenment* puts, only in a certain sense, an end to the controversy, placing Foucault’s position within an anti-teleological line of thought which considers the Iranian revolution as an event that does not fit into the interpretative, progressive and normative discourses of Western thought. The author, of Iranian origin, through highlighting the characteristic features of the reportages, underlines that the spiritual dimension, often emphasized by Foucault, finds its support and its channels in the traditional forms of Iranian society which, at that stage, was evaluating whether it had been possible to think of dignity, justice, freedom through a new regulation of the modalities of Islamic law (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2008). Today, years later, in a changed historical context, some questions that Foucault had identified are re-proposed. Concerning the current protests, I wonder if it is a question of a request for emancipation dictated by forms of denial, oppression, and rejection of tradition, or a liturgy of liberation from a form of power which constitutes a sacrificial religion. In the following pages, I will try to answer these questions. In order to answer such queries, it is necessary to analyze the structure and function of the theory of *wilāyat-i faqīh* theorized by the Āyatollah Khomeini, a constant term of comparison in the speeches of Āyatollah Khāmeneī. The research is built on three argumentative levels: the first level analyzes the theoretical model of the *wilāyat-i faqīh*, trying to identify the strengths and weaknesses of this model; the second level investigates the analogical symmetries that this theory has with Khāmeneī’s speeches; the third level, starts from Michel Foucault’s speeches and reports, and it considers the hypothesis that *wilāyat-i faqīh* is a form of ideology that matured from the perception of a lack of order in Islamic society following the 1978 revolution.

The theory of the Wilāyat-i faqīh

The Iranian question, along with the implications it is coming to assume, leads us to a reflection that seeks to trace a grid in which to bring together the reasons for a regime that has remained anchored to tradition. The model of political government theorized by Ayatollah Khomeini in the book *The Islamic government. Or the spiritual authority of the jurisconsult* provides useful tools for a first analysis. From research done at the Cultural Institute of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Rome, it was possible to reconstruct the process of compiling the work. First the use of the Persian language. This attests that the work was designed to be disclosed in Iran above all. The text is the transcript of the oral lessons discussed in the teaching sessions held by Ayatollah Khomeini in the holy city of Najaf during his Iraqi exile. The sources are taken from the religious teachings of the *Holy Book*, from the *Tradition of the Prophet*, and from the dictates of the Imām. The lectures were collected and published in Beirut in 1970, under the title *Al-hukūma al-islāmiyya*. The manuscript was published in Iran in 1977 under the title *Letter of Imām Kāshif al-Ghitā*⁶. An analysis of the text shows that the Persian utilized by Imām Khomeini is that of the direct language, typical of the Persian oral tradition which transforms the public speeches and the lessons and sermons of the Imāms into books; a tradition that dates back to the discursive-scriptural practices of the classical *madrassa* (Muslim boarding school). The theme of the Wilāyat-i faqīh is developed with a hypothetical-deductive method that makes use of: 1) the contribution of the *Hawza* (Shiite theological schools) responsible for the transmission of the Koranic doctrine; 2) an analysis of the divergences between the *Koran* and the texts of *hadīth*, i.e. the six books of historical-legal traditions in importance after the Koran which integrate the *sharīʿa*, and the treatises compiled by the *mujtahids* (experts in law, authorized to exercise *ijtihād*, i.e. the deduction of positive laws starting from the principles of jurisprudence); 3) of the meaning assumed by the *walāya* (a term which in Shiite theology assumes the meaning of authority); 4) of the responsibility that the *wālī-yi amr* (one who has authority to give orders) has in Islamic society. The four axioms constitute the argumentative nucleus around which the theory of Islamic government revolves. The need for this government, says Khomeini, arises from the observation that a corpus of laws alone is not enough to reform society. For the law to be nourishment

⁶ Translations of the book exist in French, Arabic, Turkish, and Urdu. The first English translation was published by the Joint Publication and Research Service (CIA translation office) in 1978, and reissued by Manor Books of New York. Currently, the most reliable translation is the one edited by Hamid Algar in the 1981 anthology *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imām Khomeini*, which is based on the third edition published in Najaf in 1971.

for social reform and human happiness, it is necessary to establish an executive power and an executor who implements the positive Islamic laws with respect for tradition and custom, pillars of the Islamic order (Khomeini, 2006, 25-26). In this notion of order, the political and religious factors are reunited. In essence, the need to continue to execute the positive laws guarantees, since the time of the minor Occultation⁷, the “conditions necessary for the parousia of the hidden Imām”. These conditions are dictated by the *sharī* ‘a which contains the norms that order the different configurations of society. They regulate, for example, patrimonial laws, the conservation of the Islamic system, the defense of territorial integrity conferred on the army and imposed by the Koranic imperative “gather as much as you can of military strength and horses” (Koran, VIII, 60), individual rights and punitive laws whose execution is the prerogative of the State, the only entity that holds the monopoly of coercion. From this first analysis, it emerges that the configuration of the provisions for the conservation of the Islamic State theorized by Āyatollah Khomeini intersects with the assertions and arguments present in the speeches of Āyatollah Khāmeneī, who resorts to a rhetoric symmetrical to that of Khomeini, which favors the ideological in support of the political, cultural and religious unity of the Islamic community and of the Islamic order governed by positive laws. The first speech, *On women and the family* of 19 April 2022, lends itself to analyzing the different configurations necessary for the preservation of the unity of the state. The second speech of October 3, 2022, is a sort of liturgy that exalts national pride and the role of the armed forces as guardians of order. The *tópos* of *unity* is symbiotically linked with that of *order* under the suffrage of the Islamic government and its institutions.

Difference versus inequality. The search for an ideal of unity

The discourse *On women and the family* is an attempt at blurred truth. The various analogies with Khomeini’s theory, as well as the recurring use of specific lexemes, reaffirm the continuity with the theocratic regime established by Khomeini in 1979. The speech, delivered before an audience of only women gathered on the occasion of the anniversary of blessed Fatima Zahra⁸, on Women’s Week and Mother’s Day, at a glance

⁷ In the Imamite tradition, the last Imām, the twelfth, entered Occultation in the year 874 and until 941 spoke to the Islamic people through four *nā’ib* (vicars). After the minor Occultation begins the major one which will last until the end of time when the Muhammad al Mahdi (eschatological figure) will make his appearance. (Khomeini, 29, note 1.)

⁸ Fātima, known as al-zahrā, daughter of Muhammad and wife of ‘ Ali ibn Abī Tālib, the link between the prophetic mission and the imamate, is the object of intense devotion in Shiism as it is placed at the origin of the *sislila* (chain) of the imāms and is considered the mother of the imāms. She is the only female figure who is part of the *pleroma* of the fourteen infallibles alongside the Prophet and the twelve imām. (Khomeini, 2006, 40, note 9)

can be interpreted as the symbolic configuration of a political model that solidifies the identity of Iranian women and their strength manifested in the area of jihādi activities. The morphological characteristics of the words *infallibility*, *martyrdom*, *spirituality*, and *sacrifice* attest to this specificity. If *infallibility* says Khāmeneī is “a characteristic reserved for a select few people”, and among these, there is the Noble Zahra, a Muslim woman, and fighter, the *martyrdom* she suffered represents an exemplary life conduct for all women. The Noble Zahara represents the symbol of spirituality and political infallibility which is specific “of the imamate who must maintain order and change division into unity”⁹. This phrase attributed to the Noble Fatima is taken up by Khāmeneī who, however, makes instrumental use of it. The torture of the martyr is the medium for the common expiation of guilt, and a means of achieving unity within the community. Principle necessary to preserve *order*. It can be said, in the words of Michel Foucault, that “the sense of guilt is inextricably linked to the exaltation of martyrdom for a just cause” (Foucault, 1998, 52). Foucault, in his 19 November 1978 *reportage*, *The revolt of Iran runs on the minicassette tapes*, written on the occasion of the preparations for the Moharram festivals dedicated to the celebration of the death of Imām Hussein, presents an analysis of martyrdom in which the noun is jointly declined with the terms *death* and *sacrifice*. In this way *martyrdom* is seen as an interior experience, the *sacrifice* that leads to death for a just cause, ignites fervor in souls, transforming itself into a sort of community experience. A liturgical process is set in motion which unites the specificities of each in the sign of *unity*. And precisely women, Khāmeneī says in his speech, following the example of the noble Zhara, are dedicated to the sacrifice demonstrated “from the time of the Sacred Defense (in the war against Iraq from 1980 to 1988) until today”. In this way, we are witnessing a process of responsible assimilation of sacrifice which is “the complete manifestation and realization of the identity and personality of the Iranian woman”. But for Khāmeneī the current question of women must be addressed on a threefold level which is different from any Western perspective. He asks himself three questions: 1) “considering that women make up half of the Iranian population how can they healthily benefit from this potential?” 2) “how can the issue of gender – which is one of the most sensitive and delicate in creation – be at the service of the elevation of humanity and not of its ethical decadence? 3) “considering the natural differences between men and women, how can we establish and institute a model of behavior – both in the social and family spheres – to prevent women from being oppressed?” The complexity hidden in these questions opens up various lines of argument which lead, on the

9 Wa tā ‘utuna nizāman li ‘l-milla wa imāmatunā lamman li ‘l furga. (Hāshimi, s. d., vol. I. 483, now in Khomeini, 2006, 35)

one hand, to the question of the *modernization-emancipation* of traditional Iranian society, and on the other, to the question of gender which brings into play the *difference-in-equality* relationship. The theme of modernization refers to a problem that Foucault addresses in the report of 1 October 1978, *The Shah is a hundred years late*. At that moment, however, the philosopher's interest fell on the refusal manifested by the Iranian people against modernization, despotism, and corruption, in a word, against the Shah's regime. In the months of the revolution, the rejection of modernization as a political project and as a principle of social transformation derived from the "Pahlavi corruption" which, in strict analogy with American imperialism, was inherent in the exercise of power. Nowadays there is not a refusal of modernization but a desire for emancipation. Khāmeneī does not seem to disdain this process. In his speech, he focuses on the need to create a supreme super-governmental center in order to discuss the process of women's emancipation and recognize their role within Iranian society. But this process is feasible only under certain conditions. First, Khāmeneī tells the women, "you must clear your minds of Western thinking and reject the authority of such vision as such visions cannot be at all a source of happiness and guidance for human society." Khāmeneī's criticism is aimed at a form of thought ideologically based on an epistemological-materialist and non-divine conception. An argument that reopens the question of those ideas which in Shiite Islam belong to the order of theocratic knowledge linked to a form of knowledge that involves an interpretation of reality wrapped up in a transcendental truth founded on the existence of God, on his presence and authority on Earth. Isn't this the foundation of the *wilāyat-i faqīh*? Related to this is the theme of the Supreme Authority which returns in the discourse strengthened by the Koranic imperatives which reaffirm the transmission of ideas whose regime of truth is that of the effectiveness of rejecting everything that originates from the West. Criticism is also leveled at the mercantilist, profit-making, and economic vision that has created instrumental forms of the woman seen as a means to an end. An argument that refers to the debate on the foundation of political and religious thought of Shiite philosophy as an alternative to the nihilistic imperialism of Western modernity. This western model is opposed by the eschatological conception of prophetic fullness which is synthesis and final completeness which corresponds to primordial fullness. The ideas to which Khāmeneī refers in this speech exhibit verification criteria that envisage an effective, operational, combative dimension that places the question of women's employment in the world of work, in the administration of the State, in sexual equality on specular levels. If justice is a right, equality says Khāmeneī, "sometimes it is right and sometimes it is wrong", since this principle is defined on the basis of "a particular natural-physical-emotional

environment created by the Most High God". On this basis, the equality-difference relationship between men and women is defined. There is no difference between man and woman as human beings, from the point of view of humanity, spiritual stations, and of intellectual talents, but man and woman "have two different molds. Each one is modeled for a function". This is a principle inherent in the natural order of the Shiite Islamic vision which, according to Khāmeneī, is being contaminated by Western thought. The foundation of this principle is in the Islamic sources contemplated in the sacred texts and in the words of the Imām and in Khomeini's theory which analytically elaborates the method of deduction entrusted to the jurisconsults. In this way, the role of the woman within the family is legitimized and considered as the place in which to cultivate talents. A form of discrimination contemplated by the legal system is recognized, based on justice and the preservation of obedience. It is a form of legitimacy that defines the incompatibility of female nature in environments dedicated to men. The theme in question is at the center of today's debate and harkens back to a question that Foucault notes in his 22 October *reportage*, *Return to the Prophet*. The philosopher tries to identify the reasons behind this principle which can be traced in the concept of *conservation of obedience* understood as an ideal that gives depth to the general orientations of social life and, among these, there is the regulation of relations between men and women. For this reason, Foucault writes: "between men and women there is no *inequality* of rights, but a *difference* because there is a *difference in nature*", a principle which is inferred from Islamic sources. And precisely this difference, says Khāmeneī, generates "tranquility and peace within the family". It is this *difference of nature* inferred from the *hadith* that preserves the value and effectiveness of obedience: it is an undisputed truth proper to the Shi'ite current that governs Iran.

Return to the ideal of the Islamic order

The sense of truth, contemplated in the provisions related to the conservation of the Islamic system and the defense of territorial integrity, is at the basis of the speech given by Ayatollah Khāmeneī on October 3, eighteen days after the start of the protest. The speech addressed to the cadets of the academies of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is structured based on the principles deduced from the theory of *Wilāyat-i faqīh*. The phenomenology of language, articulated on the religion-politics correlation, assumes a function aimed at constructing a message of "hope, renewal, and innovation", to be placed as a shield against the spread of the protests. If *renewal* and *innovation* are

positive factors for Khāmeneī, since they contribute to increasing the scientific, economic, and political field, they are placed in antithesis to the conceptual tools imported from the West, as they are responsible for a form of “propaganda” which has weakened the values and sense of responsibility of young Iranians. The alternative to this weakening of values is the practice of contrasting and repressing with force any form of denial of the constitutive principles of the theocratic order. In essence, Khāmeneī hopes for a return to the *Islamic order*. The probative value of this assertion is clarified both in relation to the dominance that the jurisconsult has in Iranian society and in relation to the regulation of the tasks entrusted to the Armed Forces, “pillars” of *order*, and national defense. In the speech, there is an evident intensification of the meaning of both the concept of *strength* and the notion of *faith*, in the sense that their link strengthens the *Islamic order* and national pride. “These factors,” says Khāmeneī, “are important means to strengthen the foundations of the country, therefore, our defensive power must be strengthened”. It is like saying that the means are fit to the end. In the plot of the speech, the lexeme *power* is immediately joined to the concept of *national security* understood as “the foundation of all aspects of life in a society”. Through this assertion, Khāmeneī reiterates the relationship between the political, and religious power and the power of the Armed Forces, more specifically of the army (IRGC), responsible for the conservation of the Islamic system and the defense of territorial integrity. Khāmeneī thus recovers the central nucleus of the paragraph *National defense* (Khomeini, 2006, 33) in which the Koranic imperative “*lahum mā sata tum min quwwatim wa min ribāti*”¹⁰ (Koran, VIII, 60) imposes the preparation of armed defense forces and orders to keep alert against the enemy in times of peace and war. The meaning of this maxim has a double sense which allows Khāmeneī to theorize on the one hand the value of deterrence (deduced from the Koranic verse) and on the other to envisage the symbolic construction of the “inner reality of the enemy” whose purpose is “the conspiracy that creates riots, disrupts the security of the country and excites those who can easily be enthusiastic about taking to the streets”. This symbolic construction of the “inner reality of the enemy” serves to legitimize the action taken by the army in repressing the protest. The responsibility for the events, including for the death of the young Mahasa Amini, Khāmeneī says “does not concern the question of the *hijab*, it is not the death of a young girl” but concerns the independence, resistance, strength, and power of the ‘Islamic Iran to be defended with the use of all forces. The use of force, therefore, legitimizes any action contrary to order, and the army is assigned this task according to the positive laws of Islam. This obsessive centrality given to the power of the army is also at the heart of the 28 September 1978 *reportage*, *The army, when the earth trembles*,

10 “Gather as much military strength and horses as you can”

written by Foucault during the revolutionary days (in particular that of Black Friday on 8 September characterized by the thundering noise of machine guns firing at the crowd), in which the philosopher questions who actually holds power in Iran, focusing on the appeal issued by the Ayātollah Khomeini from his exile in Iraq: “help your brothers, but do nothing through the government, and nothing for it” (Khomeini, 2006, 13-14). Well, based on this appeal, Foucault asks himself the question of whether the reality of power is in the hands of an overthrown government or in the hands of the army. But, first of all, which army, since Iran has four armies? Iran, writes Foucault, “has the traditional army that controls the whole territory, the Shah’s Praetorian Guard, the combat army and a structure resembling the American General Staff” (Foucault, 1998, 15). This is the configuration of an army which, Foucault says, has only half of the power, since it has no ideology, nor a political project, and is pervaded by a form of anti-Marxism that apparently guarantees nationalism. Did the army that fired on the crowd in those months have the same power that the army and the moral police have today? Today the situation is different since it does not manifest itself against the Shah, against the modernization imposed by the West, but against a government that through coercion denies any form of emancipation of women and denies individual rights. Coercion is a tool that the law gives to the army to guarantee internal security and the protection of the Islamic community. In Khomeini’s vision, the concept of community has a fundamental meaning, similar to Khāmeneī’s. This does not escape Foucault who, in his October 22 *reportage*, titled *Return to the Prophet?*, in analyzing the contrast between the Shah (the king who embodies the politician) and the saint (Khomeini the anti-political), constructs the image of a new political subject, the Iranian people, whose sentiment is fueled by an ideal based on the inner community experience that feeds the national sentiment. In essence, as Foucault says in his interview with Claire Brière and Pierre Blanchet, correspondents of *Libération* in Iran:

“national sentiment in 1978 was extremely vigorous: the refusal of submission to the foreigner, the disgust in the face of the plunder of national resources, the rejection of a dependent foreign policy, American interference visible everywhere, were determined so that the Shah was perceived as an agent of the West. But national sentiment has not been, if not one of the components of rejection, by the whole people, not simply of the foreigner, but of everything that had constituted, for years, for centuries, its political system.” (Foucault, 1994, 747).

The national pride that Khāmeneī speaks of is to keep the sense of community alive.

Is the wilāyat-i faqīh an ideology?

In the light of the elements that emerged from the analysis of Ayatollah Khāmeneī's speeches, the hypothesis of evaluating whether the function of the *Wilāyat-i faqīh*, understood as a theological-political doctrine, can be considered as an ideology is proposed. This assertion is justified on the basis of an implicit and constant reference to the *ideal order* deemed by Khāmeneī necessary to guarantee the stability of the Islamic government. If ideology, as Carlo Galli says, seeks order where there is none, we must ask ourselves whether the ongoing project of repression, deemed necessary to guarantee Islamic order, responds to ideological canons bearing an objective truth. In the Western vision, says Galli, ideologies move from the gap opened by philosophy. Ideology is seen as an obstacle to the "unfolding of objective truth". (Galli, 2022, 23). In the Iranian case, we could say that ideology moves from the gap opened by theology and that we are certainly far from a neoliberal apologetics that has claimed to be "the truth that puts an end to every ideology" (Galli, 2022, 131). In Iran, the status of truth is symbolically based on the objective value assumed by the lexeme *wilāyat* derived from the word *wilā* (which means power, authority, or right). In Shiite theology, *wilāyat* is the Authority with which the Prophet and the Ahlul Bayt (as) (descendants of the Prophet Mohammed) have been invested as representatives of God. The term *wilāyat* is declined in a threefold sense: a) *wilāyat-i faqīh* (temporal authority of the doctor of the law), b) *Wilāyat-i i'tibārī* (relative authority), c) *wilāyat-i takwīnī* (absolute authority over the world of becoming). The complete declination of the three modalities of the *wilāyat* defined by Khomeini in his lectures leads to the institution of the government as a tool for the realization of the supreme ends. These ends concern the *order* and *unity* that can be pursued only if the truths of the *wilāya*, which do not generate a difference between the Prophet, Imām, and jurist, indicate the attributions of the three functions described by Khomeini: a) to the worthy individual, endowed with knowledge of the law and righteousness, depositary of the Authority which the Prophet had in the exercise of the administration of the company; b) to jurists who, in the absence of the Imām, have the Authority that the Noble Messenger and his successors had. In this case, *wilāya* means the task of the governmental Authority, the administration of the State, and the exercise of the sacred laws of the *sharī'a*; c) to the Imām who holds political authority and has degrees of spiritual realization that are independent of his political function. Among these, is the divine general vicariate, a supernatural vicariate by which every atom of the sublunar world is subject to the authority of the *walī-yi amr* (he who holds authority). (Khomeini, 2006, 48-58). Thus, the pursuit of supreme ends has a source of

legitimacy that is located in the foundation of a generative truth, which generated those ideas which Foucault had identified by studying the Iranian reality in the months of the revolution. In that phase, Foucault disputes the pertinence “of the localization of ideas presupposed by the discourses on the end of ideologies” (Cavazzini, 2005, 23) by asking himself what “an idea” is, what its function is, and what its effects are. This reflection allows him to direct his research toward the status of truth, outside the traditional places of Western thought, in places where new ideas germinate. It is precisely along the line of this research initiated by Foucault that the structure and function of the *wilāyat-i faqīh* can be identified as an ideology since the principles that define it are the result of ideas from a place where the localization of thought that belongs to a theocratic order whose regime of truth goes beyond the canons of Western thought and stands as an alternative to liberal thought.

Conclusions

Ultimately, what is the specific way of being of Shiite political thought in the Iranian context, in an era in which, despite the crumbling of values, the defense of human rights and the attention to the process of women’s emancipation is still relevant? Surely the West is going through a deep crisis linked mainly to the alienation of the subject as well as to the failed realization of the ideals promised by neoliberalism, but this does not mean that the string that holds together individual rights, respect for diversity and equality of gender has loosened, nor that the guard has been let down when it comes to inequality and social justice. The many contradictions within the liberal order do not undermine the recognition of individuality, and the centrality that the individual has within society, they do not define the natural environments assigned to men or women, and they do not set limits to fundamental freedoms. Conversely, in Iran, this set of prerogatives is in contrast with the work underway, of educating consciences through forms of repression. Khāmeneī, in his speeches, refers to the pathologies of Western democracy, comparing them to a form of propaganda harmful to young Iranians. To this form of propaganda, the leader Massimo contrasts his own propaganda based on educating the youth to respect the devotional and ritual rules, and to practice worship which is always combined with politics and social needs. Aren’t these the precepts theorized by Khomeini in the *Struggle Program for the Constitution of the Islamic Government*? The implementation of this program is bringing out phenomena of re-politicization which aim to neutralize a vision of the West which, in the words of Khāmeneī, mystifies

the truths of Islam. Undisputed truths, that collide with the metaphysical conception which, in preserving the nature of being as an indissoluble unity, are the basis of fundamental rights and freedoms. On these differences and asymmetries, the conception of a theocratic *order* based on the continuity of the *Shi'ite* legal tradition and the truth of the wilāyat is being protected in Iran; a conception which still persists today and is indeed strengthened by the recovery of Khmeinian lexemes that branch out in the speeches of the Āyatollāh Khamenei. It is the contemporary re-edition of a model that needs emancipation, new points of view that cry out to the motto *Sapere aude*. In this aphorism, the meaning of the apothegm *Woman Life Freedom* is concealed.

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