

# Shariati, Anti-Capitalism, and the Promise of the “Third World”

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay engages with Ali Shariati’s lecture “Some of the Vanguard of the Return to Self in the Third World” to explore his conception of the “Third World” as a cultural, psychic, and politico-economic project of which Iran would be an integral part, and his relationship to the intellectual contributions of Frantz Fanon, whose translation and critical reception proved to be of considerable importance to the ideological development of a popular-nationalist and avowedly religious section of Iran’s anti-Pahlavi opposition during the 1960s and 1970s. The essay explores several elements of Shariati’s anti-capitalism in the context of his advocacy of a Third World politico-economic bloc and some of the potential difficulties, tensions, and contradictions this vision would, and ultimately, did encounter. Finally, the essay concludes by examining how Shariati’s prescriptions for breaking the chains of “dependency” might have been further developed and complicated, given the immense obstacles the promise of Third World solidarity has historically faced.

**KEYWORDS:** Shariati, Iran, Third World, Fanon, anti-capitalism

In “Some of the Vanguard of the Return to Self in the Third World” (henceforth *Vanguard*), a speech Ali Shariati delivered in Mashhad in 1969–1970 (1348), the activist-orator outlines his thoughts and engagement with several Third World anticolonial activists, statesmen, and intellectuals, whom he regards as pioneers of what he famously called “the return to self.” These include the Tanzanian President, Julius Nyerere (1922–1999), the Kenyan anti-colonial activist

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and President, Jomo Kenyatta (1897–1978), the Martinican poet and statesman, Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), the Algerian novelist and playwright, Kateb Yacine (1929–1989), the Iranian intellectual and dissident Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–1969), and the Martinican-Algerian revolutionary, Frantz Fanon (1925–1961). In this lecture Shariati boldly proclaims that “we must come to know the intellectuals of Asia and Africa and have contact with their thought, not like Sartre or others who don’t at all understand what we have to say . . . because the condition of their society is not like the condition of our society” (Shariati forthcoming). *Vanguard* provides a fascinating window into Shariati’s evolving and highly variegated political and intellectual lifeworld, which has for the most part tended to focus on either European existentialist and phenomenological influences or the formative impact of Shi‘i traditions, archetypes, and mythologies upon his thought. For Shariati, the likes of Nyerere, Kenyatta, and Fanon, constitute a veritable vanguard, stewarding into existence an Afro-Asian intercontinental consciousness set against the colonial condition and ever real threat of re-colonization. He brings to life for his audience the emerging forms of transnational solidarity within what is known today as the Global South and engages with the challenges of postcolonial state-building. These aspects have often been understated or neglected in the analysis of Shariati’s intellectual influences, even as they play a notable role in understanding how he envisioned the “Third World” as a global cultural, social, and politico-economic project.

In this short intervention, I will argue not only for the considerable thematic symmetry between Shariati’s vision of post-colonial self-determination and that of fellow anti-colonial nationalists, but that his proposed solution, an intercontinental Third World populism and corresponding anti-capitalist industrialization and economic union, face many of the same challenges and pitfalls as those of his African, Asian and Latin American counterparts (Getachew 2019). In other words, even as Shariati’s diagnosis remains powerful, his program for breaking the chains of dependency remain woefully underdeveloped or even liable to create new forms of domination and exploitation in their wake. According to his reading, anti-colonial revolutions emerged from a “return to self,” which would in dialectical fashion form the basis of an intercontinental antagonistic frontier against the imperial center, but how an intercontinental solidarity predicated upon the negation of the colonial would sustain its vibrancy and continue to inoculate itself from the ever-present risk of reincorporation into relations of dependency is left undeveloped. This lack of specificity and analytical rigor, as well as the subsumption of class struggle under the category of the “people,” are enabling conditions of solidarity, positive and negative,

but also provide vital clues relating to the project's eventual unravelling in the aftermath of political decolonization and formal independence.

*Vanguard* begins with an analysis of the post-colonial emergence of Tanzania and Shariati's unabashed admiration for President Julius Nyerere and his achievements following independence. Despite occasionally playing fast and loose with names, facts, and the historical sequence of events, Shariati draws on Nyerere's promotion of Swahili to stress the importance of language, not only to the end of knowing and preserving one's own cultural identity, but one's political independence. Shariati clearly holds there to be a powerful relationship between cultural, linguistic, and political self-determination, a conclusion echoed in the writings of Césaire (Césaire 2010), Fanon (Fanon 1965, 1967, 2004), Amílcar Cabral (Cabral 1973), and Jalal Al-e Ahmad (Āl-e Ahmad 1385/2006; Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2020).

Shariati's analysis of what transpired in Tanzania tends to oversimplify an intricate nexus of socio-economic and political formations and processes, but nevertheless clarifies for his audience the issues which he held to be of essential importance. Though Swahili was widely understood and historically used for purposes of trade, it was not the "indigenous" or "native" language of Tanzania, and represented a second language for many, including Nyerere himself, alongside dozens of other local and regional tongues. It was, however, consciously enshrined by Nyerere as an official language of the country alongside English, to foster national unity and consciousness, an overarching sense of belonging, and feeling that the new country was indeed a fully-fledged post-colonial nation. It would thus palpably demonstrate that it was more than just a continuation of an administration that had come about as the result of sheer colonial imposition. In this respect, it sought to institute a discontinuity with what had come before and thereby disrupt the dominant relations of coloniality that had prevailed hitherto. The thrust of Shariati's insight is, however, primarily concerned with the importance of a living relationship to one's language and cultural practices and how the erasure of such plays a pivotal role, if not *the* pivotal role, in processes of alienation, colonization, and the perpetuation of colonial domination. In *Vanguard* he goes so far as to contend, "First, we must strike at the cultural side of colonialism so that later we can destroy the other aspects, namely, the economic and even the political. If we can preserve the cultural aspects of our society, we can achieve anything" (Shariati forthcoming). This relationship is further reiterated by Shariati when he paraphrases Kenyatta, who famously struck upon the intimate relationship of Christian missionaries, colonization, and the material and territorial dispossession of indigenous peoples on the African continent (Rodney [1972] 2018; Loc 4982).<sup>1</sup>

Shariati is introducing his audience, which varied in age and educational attainment, to a genre of anti-colonial thought and the ways in which colonialism had been understood and fought in recent decades on the African continent. He was conveying to his audience not only a flurry of names they probably had not encountered, but also glimpses of what they had said and how they had both analyzed and striven to overturn their colonial condition. He patiently explains terms such as “psychiatry” with which his audience might not have been familiar. In looking to Algeria, Kenya, Tanzania, and elsewhere, he insists, Iranians can attain a better understanding of their own circumstances and the obstacles to cultural, economic, political, and psychic liberation they face. This perspective is one that would directly fly in the face of the Persian chauvinism of the Pahlavi state, which sought to cast Iran as an “Asian Aryan power” whose real kin lay in Europe. In this sense, the lecture should not be read as a studious and precise piece of exegesis, breaking down and weighing up the pros and cons of each anti-colonial revolutionary’s thought and praxis, but a homily broadly reflecting upon how anti-colonial struggles have been waged and realized.

Like so much of Shariati’s *oeuvre*, *Vanguard* possesses an overtly performative dimension, both illocutionary and perlocutionary, harboring the will to engender and encourage the formation of an intercontinental Afro-Asian consciousness, as well as a desire to see it taken up in the world, re-enacted, and lived by his audience. It also sought to close the apparent distance separating Iranians from struggles on another continent, by gathering them together with their Algerian, Kenyan, and Tanzanian counterparts, on a shared and synchronous imaginative plane. Shariati was countering the refrain commonly repeated by Iranian nationalists of various stripes that “Iran had never been colonized,” as a misplaced false pride that sought to distinguish them from those implicitly “lesser” peoples who had been “really colonized.” It also belied the myriad ways Iranians continued to be dominated in their neo-colonial capitalist present. Shariati saw colonialism’s denial as little more than ideological obfuscation and a convenient ruse to overlook its continued hold on cultural self-understanding and political and economic life in Pahlavi Iran. His interjection is therefore not only a matter of description and analysis, but an endeavor to illustrate vividly that another world was possible and achievable. He thus sought to expand the imaginations of his audience and denaturalize both the inevitability and unquestioned hegemony of Cold War bipolarity. The Third World was not a mere abstraction. For millions it was becoming both a real and an imagined community. Elsewhere, in *Bāzgasht (Return)*, he declares in the course of his analysis of Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution that “the

new nationalism is not an abstract self-existent reality, it is a rational reaction, it is a protest (*e' terāz*)" (Shariati 1384/2005, 161).

In *Vanguard*, Shariati reflected upon several themes scholars preoccupied with the prospects and possibilities of decolonial knowledge and decolonizing knowledge production continue to grapple with today. His most elaborate engagement in this instance is with the political thought of Fanon. As I have argued elsewhere, Shariati's engagement with Fanon was extensive, even if, as it turned out, he was not the much-vaunted translator of the latter's *The Wretched of the Earth* into Persian (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2020). *Vanguard* itself can and should be read as an exercise in translation not only of Fanon, but of a pantheon and emerging canon of anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial experiments in state-building with an explicitly performative dimension.

### Revolution as "Social Miracle"

The lion's share of Shariati's attention in *Vanguard* is not spent dwelling, as one might expect, on the *locus classicus* of anti-colonial thought, *The Wretched of the Earth*, but rather Fanon's observations pertaining to the changing nature and structure of kinship and gender relations in the Algerian family. Shariati takes up Fanon's 1959 essay published in *Year 5 of the Algerian Revolution (L'An V de la révolution Algérienne)* to show how the struggle for national liberation accelerates the process whereby traditions, customs, and entrenched social hierarchies are overturned as they are fundamentally transformed. In his exposition and analysis of Fanon's essay, Shariati calls this revolutionary process a "social miracle" which is neither intelligible nor foreseeable beforehand. In "The Algerian Family," Fanon poignantly argues that "[t]he old stultifying attachment to the father melts in the sun of the Revolution," adding that "the colonized society perceived that in order to succeed in the gigantic undertaking into which it had flung itself, in order to defeat colonialism and in order to build the Algerian nation, it would have to make a vast effort of self-preparation, strain all its joints, renew its blood and its soul" (Fanon 1965, 101).

The proverbial father, who once prevailed unquestioned, had lost authority. He finds himself not merely subordinated to, but irrevocably diminished by the revolution. The revolutionary agency of women stood at the forefront of Fanon's analysis of the radical unmooring of gender and power relations within the Algerian family. Thus, Fanon pronounced, "all these restrictions were to be knocked over and challenged by the national liberation struggle . . . The freedom of the Algerian people from then on became identified with woman's liberation, with her entry into history" (Fanon 1965, 107). In the process of translating and rearticulating Fanon for his Iranian audience, Shariati de-

scribed how this process unfolds “when everyone strives to reach a shared goal and has faith in that goal.” Shariati speaks of the role of “faith” (*īmān*) and the way faith is structured by the “goal” of liberation and its role in the formation of a general will. Shariati’s insights here profoundly resonate with those of Jane Anna Gordon in chapter four of *Creolizing Political Theory*, where she reads Jean-Jacques Rousseau through Fanon and vice versa (Gordon 2014).

Shariati similarly places gender and women’s revolutionary capacities and agency front and center: “the same girls become warriors, who lose everything for the sake of the homeland, and her family not only do not oppose her, but they exude pride for what they have done and the sufferings they have endured” (Shariati forthcoming). In conversation with Fanon, Shariati saw women’s revolutionary subjectivity as essential to collective will formation and the prospects for self-determination in anti-colonial mobilization and struggle. Anti-colonial struggle hastened leaps, bounds, and transfigurations which might not otherwise have taken place for generations. Even though it is beyond the scope of this essay, extant scholarship on Shariati’s depiction of revolutionary women, most notably the figures of Fatemeh al-Zahra and Zainab, the daughter and granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad, respectively (Shariati 1356/1377), could be enriched through further engagement with Shariati’s Fanonian reflections on the obsolescence of the father in the process of anti-colonial resistance and upheaval. What is important to make explicit for our purposes, however, is how *Vanguard* moved between the liberatory and enabling conditions of revolutionary mobilization, and the ongoing challenges which inexorably arise in the aftermath of formal decolonization. His haphazard insights reflected the examples upon which he draws, including movements fighting settler-colonial and direct colonial rule, as well as the often more evasive mechanisms of informal empire with which the newly independent former colonies and their national-popular elites had to contend. Shariati invokes their example just as he strives to make the case for their relevance to Iran’s neocolonial condition and developmental trajectory.

### **Third World Solidarity and Breaking the Chains of Dependency**

As should already be clear, in *Vanguard* Shariati energetically makes the case for the importance of the Third World, and specifically the African continent, as a constitutive part of an encompassing anti-colonial imaginative geography. “The problems which Sartre and his society face are not the same as the problems that we face, while our pain and the pain of the Easterners (*sharḡhī’hā*) are the same,” Shariati proclaims (Shariati forthcoming). Again, loosely drawing on Fanon, Shariati advocates for the formation of a new kind of “people” and

socio-economic order comprised of Third World nations and brought together by their common condition of "suffering" and confrontation with imperialism and neo-colonialism. He forthrightly states that "the commonality of nations, is not religion, not language . . . but is a shared condition and suffering . . . because it is a shared condition and ailment and the countries of the Third World face a single danger (the assault of capital and industry), they must join together" (Shariati forthcoming). He posits that "industrializing is not the same as becoming capitalist, and it is a dangerous lie that for industrialization we must undoubtedly be capitalist. Becoming capitalist is dangerous" (Shariati forthcoming). The diagnosis and political vision mobilized here by Shariati align closely with what Anuja Bose has called Fanon's "intercontinental populism" (Bose 2019). For Shariati, in a comparable fashion to Fanon, "the return to self," namely, the immersion and embrace of a pan-religious, cultural, or ethnic identity, was part of a multi-pronged "political struggle to develop an intercontinental consciousness of colonial oppression" (Bose 2019, 677). Even when political decolonization had been achieved at the price of inordinate sacrifice and an irreparably transformed society, without a positively articulated intercontinental solidarity and concomitant institutional form, states would find their development subordinated in the global division of labor and subject to control and domination in a manner which negated their hard-won self-determination in everything but name. In many cases, as Samir Amin and others subsequently averred, such an eventuality is basically what transpired in much of Global South (Amin 1982, 432; Getachew 2019; Kohli 2020).

The details of Shariati's own vision, which he often presented as that of Fanon himself, as one might expect from a short speech aimed at a public audience, were delivered with rhetorical flair, oftentimes sketchy, and short on details. Indeed, it is likely that his prescription, at times approximating a combination of import substitution industrialization (ISI) and the development of a Third World trading bloc, if improperly handled, could hinder, and, in the final analysis, undermine the kind of solidarity he sought to forge. A policy of ISI was pursued by the Pahlavi state in the mid-1960s to early 1970s and, on its own limited terms, met with some degree of success. The latter represented a common strategy adopted by developing countries of varying ideological hues throughout the 1950s and 1960s seeking to address declining terms of trade while weaning their economies off a stilted overdependence on the export of a single cash crop, often itself the legacy of colonial rule, or the export of a price volatile commodity such as oil (Prashad 2007, 68). The shortcomings of this strategy, however, quickly became apparent (Ibid., 73). According to its critics, ISI policies, despite delivering economic growth, gave rise to an increase in the

production of consumer durables for a small class of affluent elites and middle classes at home and export market abroad, while exacerbating the decline of the agricultural sector and further impoverishing the mass of the urban and rural population alike (Hoogland 1982, 100–1; Larrain 1989, 142). Shariati's intercontinental view of Afro-Asian solidarity, unlike contemporaneous Pahlavi-era initiatives, would in important ways mark a radical rupture with the latter, namely, a break from the U.S.-led capitalist camp, monopoly capital, and go some way to countering the “dependency” he sought to overturn and neutralize. It nevertheless remained unclear how it would guard against reconstituting widespread exploitation of recently proletarianized labor at home or address asymmetries of power and socio-economic competition and revanchist authoritarian nationalism within the Third World bloc itself.

Shariati does not express anything like Fanon's reservations vis-à-vis the nationalist elites who had led the charge against the vestiges of the old European colonial order (Fanon 2014, 175). In later years, sympathetic critics like Amin, while acknowledging the decisive role of anti-colonial liberation movements, were often less sanguine about their capacity to avoid reincorporation into subordinate relations vis-à-vis the center and the sway of powerful multinationals, barring a break with the capitalist law of value. Indeed, it would be both an instructive and generative exercise to speculate on how Shariati might have viewed Amin's theorization of “delinking” with its advocacy of “auto-centric” development. Delinking did not entail a “total renunciation of any relations with the exterior, but subjecting external relations to the logic of an internal development that is independent of them” (Amin 1985/2020, Loc 2004). For Amin, given that capitalist expansion was predicated upon “unequal exchange” with the periphery, “Development of the countries on the periphery of the world capitalist system must . . . come through an essential ‘rupture’ with that system, a ‘delinking’ or refusal to subject the national development strategy to the imperatives of ‘worldwide expansion’” (Amin 1985/2020; Loc 2004). Even though Shariati does not use the term “unequal exchange,” he does, albeit in somewhat more demotic terms, attempt to capture a similar dynamic at work in North-South relations. He writes:

The industrialized and capitalist world now pursues its own path apace and possesses so rapid a momentum that however much the Third World struggles to advance, the gap separating it increases every day. Therefore, the countries of the Third World fall under their influence and their fate is in [the capitalist world's] hands. (Shariati forthcoming)



Crucially, in *Vanguard* we observe Shariati combine an anti-capitalist politics, where he regards capitalism as one of, if not the primary driving force of economic inequality and voracious exploitation raging across the Third World, with an insistence on a form of coordinated and collaborative industrialization among formerly colonized and neo-colonized nations. The basis of their unity resides in their shared condition of oppression and exploitation and their commitment to the negation of prevailing colonial social relations. In this respect, Shariati shares much in common with other anti-colonial politicians and statesmen during this period who were deeply invested in ideologies extolling the virtues of industrialization, regional trading blocs, extractive technologies, and "heavy" industries, seeing them as the best way to decisively break the chains of economic dependency; a form of dependency which, as they saw it, continued unabated after formal independence.

Ventriloquizing Fanon, Shariati contends, "we must not build another America out of Africa, the ominous experience of America suffices. We must industrialize these countries by means of a path other than becoming capitalist" (Shariati forthcoming). Industrialization, it appears, would not take place out of a competitive drive for profit and for the purposes of capital's valorization, but presumably, for the satisfaction of human needs and the production of use-values. It would be successful to the extent that it allowed the "damned" to extricate themselves from their onerous exploitative conditions and provided for their basic individual and social needs. Thus, while he does not provide a critique of the neo-colonial incarnation of the national bourgeoisie in the style of Fanon, the intercontinental socio-economic formation he outlines, however schematically, would appear to be antithetical to a panoply of national elites exploiting their respective peasantries and proletariats for the sake of their own self-enrichment, all the while ensuring the uninterrupted drain of value from South to North. It is hard to imagine Shariati disagreeing with Amin that "industry must be made to serve the poor urban masses and no longer be guided by the 'profitability' criteria which favor the privileged local market and exports to the developed centers" (Amin 1977, 17). Nevertheless, the fact that the class character of the national bourgeoisie is never explicitly addressed or theorized by Shariati should cause pause for thought.

Other queries and caveats remain. For example, in typical high modernist fashion, Shariati gives negligible thought to heavy industries' detrimental environmental impact and the devastation which they have wrought on non-human nature, including those individuals and peoples most vulnerable in the Third World itself (Foster and Holleman 2014; Furtado 2020) nor how they themselves might be embedded in capitalist social relations and their corre-

sponding abstract social forms of domination (Foster, Clark, and York 2010; Malm 2020; Scott 1998, 4). Moreover, the peasantry—as both a social class and historical actor—are absent in Shariati’s vision, a feature which distinguishes him from Fanon and Amin in crucial respects (Worsley 1972, 202).

Unlike Cabral or the Tunisian agronomist, Slaheddine el-Amami, he does not consider how “traditional” agricultural farming and agronomy might be integrated with more novel developments in agro-ecology (Ajl 2019, 2021) or how revisiting the conditions of the peasantry might arrest many of the detrimental repercussions of proletarianization. These lacunae are hardly surprising given that Shariati was in crucial respects a quintessentially urban intellectual with a different educational background than the figures mentioned above. But he arguably missed an important opportunity for thinking through alternative perspectives on questions of development. The Pahlavi state’s own “White Revolution,” where land reform was the central component, had been inaugurated only several years prior and its consequences were just beginning to be understood. The profoundly deleterious impact of the reforms on the agricultural sector and a considerable stratum of the peasantry has not only been demonstrated in numerous studies in the years that have followed (Hoogland 1982), but it was also, throughout the course of the 1960s and early 1970s, subject to strident criticism by Marxist-Leninist intellectuals and organizations (Jazanī, Tīr 1358/1979, 13–20; OIPFG, Mordād 1352/1973; Randjbar-Daemi 2021).

At times Shariati appears to come close to arguing for a theory of comparative advantage between Third World nations, which could potentially provoke tensions in the absence of mutually beneficial terms of trade. His conjured scheme does not entertain the possibility that some nations in the Third World bloc might imperceptibly find themselves emerging as the periphery of the periphery, nor does it consider how conflicts would be adjudicated and resolved equitably and to the satisfaction of all parties, whether federally or by means of an intra-Third World arbitration body. For example, how might Shariati envision the economic relations between oil-producing states such as Iran and Venezuela and non-oil-producing states in the Third World, which faced spiraling “sovereign debt” in the aftermath of the oil crisis of 1973? In *Vanguard* it is for the most part assumed that the shared condition of exploitation at the hands of the capitalist colonial world would be enough to build enduring solidarity and thereby overcome inevitable disagreements. But as the rise of OPEC and the shortcomings of the New International Economic Order testify, the conditions of Third World nations were complex and varied and moralizing on the premise of a “shared condition” alone would prove seriously inadequate to the task (Dietrich 2017, 19).

The question of how the intercontinental populism of the "damned" and, at the domestic level, the intractable conflicts among national elites, local capitalists, the working class, and peasantry, might relate to one another, or how their potential and real antagonisms could be productively channeled is left unaddressed, or they are simply assumed to disappear of their own accord. Shariati, as was his wont, assigns an outsized role and responsibility to his own social group, namely the urban intelligentsia, for overcoming discord:

all societies in the Third World must form one system and industrial unity (*vahdat-e san 'atī*), a unified form of life (*shekl-e zendegī-ye vāhed*) and their intellectuals must strive to build one people (*nezhād*) (the role of intellectuals is more in these societies and the duty of the intellectual is this). (Shariati forthcoming)

While his valorization of anti-colonial nationalism is understandable and could be said to echo aspects of V. I. Lenin's and M. N. Roy's famous remarks on the status of "oppressed nations" at the Second Congress of the Communist International, when taken in conjunction with his amorphous conception of "the people," it arguably ends up obscuring the perils of postcolonial class exploitation and oppression (Lenin and Roy 1920; Shariati 1384/2005, 161). Moreover, there is no correlate to Lenin and Roy's advocacy of peasant and workers councils, including under those circumstances where pre-capitalist relations prevail, or an indication that national liberation was a necessary precondition of proletarian revolution (Lenin and Roy 1920).

Shariati was no political economist, nor does he claim to be one, but at the risk of falling foul of the "condescension of posterity," it is not unreasonable to submit that he had had adequate time to appreciate not only the strengths, but also many of the shortcomings of the developmental strategies of numerous Third World anti-colonial states. In this regard, Shariati's Egyptian (and similarly French-educated) contemporary, Anouar Abdel Malek (1924-2012), had proven more clear-sighted and discerning of the project's historic gains and achievements, as well as its many contradictions (Abdel-Malek 1964; 1981). It would be unfair to claim that Shariati was oblivious of the decisive role of class struggle in the various projects of national liberation of which he was well-apprised, even as he accused Marxists in the same breath of abiding by a "new scholasticism" (Shariati 1384/2005, 158).

Shariati's conception of "the people," at both the national and international levels, lacked a proper sociological grounding or analytical differentiation. He was inclined to lump "the class of common people" (*tabaqeh-e 'avām-e mardom*) or "mass of people" (*tūdeh-e mardom*) into a single amorphous category. This

problem recurs even in Shariati's more explicit discussions of class and class consciousness, where in the final analysis, the bestowal of class consciousness and the mobilization of the "masses" can only be brought about through recourse to intellectuals adopting "religion as a language and as a culture so that they might speak with the masses (*tūdeh*)" (Shariati 1394/2015, 396). Moreover, Shariati could often be highly condescending when speaking about the masses and their capacity for self-rule. Shariati's analysis was frequently devoid of a material-economic basis and was, at times, articulated in terms of a mental or psychological state: "the class of common people from an intellectual (*fekrī*), not an economic perspective (beggar or billionaire): it encompasses the major part of society. This class (*tabaqeh*) doesn't think but acts on the basis of money or its body . . . they are followers and follow the paths laid down by others (intellectuals)" (Shariati 1390/2011, 113). But it is important to acknowledge that Shariati's writings were also often contradictory on this score and that elsewhere he was clear that "the struggle against hunger in a hungry society and ignorance in a decadent (*monhat*) society is our definite and immediate obligation" (Shariati 1394/2015, 396).

## **Conclusion**

What one can and should take away from *Vanguard* is the vision that he shared with myriad other anti-colonialists across the Third World, namely, "the creation of a geographical region for distribution, production and consumption in Third World countries" in order to guarantee a more humane future; a future which by definition must be anti-capitalist, for "capitalism brought about exploitation, which was there from the start . . . but is now boundlessly violent and savage" (Shariati forthcoming). Shariati thus espouses his clear and unambiguous moral condemnation of the ills of capitalist society and imperialism, but his answers as to how the Third World might overcome these ills, even by contemporary standards, are found wanting. If he had lived to see the Iranian Revolution of 1979, he would have perhaps announced that not one revolution, but myriad revolutions would be necessary for liberation, a perspective for which there is ample evidence and resources within his own life and thought (Davari 2014; Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2019, chapter 2; Shariati 1388/2009). If only intimated in *Vanguard*, Shariati appears convinced that his fellow intellectuals as well as his popular audience should not content themselves with "general welfare" since such ameliorative measures would do little to change capitalism's inherently destructive, exploitative, and crisis-ridden character. Moreover, so long as the Pahlavi dictatorship prevailed with the approbation of the U.S.'s informal empire (Nirumand 1969; Rahnema 2021), the prospect of pop-

ular control over "development," and economic life more generally, would be well-nigh inconceivable.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Shariati paraphrases the following famous quote attributed to Kenyatta, "When the missionaries arrived, the Africans had the land and the missionaries had the Bible. They taught us how to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible."

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