



Marxism and Other Western Fallacies : An Islamic Critique

Ali Shariati , Hamid Algar (Editor) , R. Campbell (Translator)

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Throughout history, Shari'ati reminds us in these lectures and writings, people in search of deliverance from constricting social and intellectual systems have all too often followed influential thinkers out of one form of captivity and directly into another. He warns that great care must be taken in this day of search and upheaval to examine the prevailing movements that promise solutions for humanity.

Marxism, which holds special appeal for the world's oppressed peoples and those sensitive to their suffering because of its emphasis on justice, merits particularly close scrutiny. Shari'ati analyzes its roots in materialism, its relation to the Hegelian dialectic, its preoccupation with matters of production, the sources of its diametrical opposition to Islam, Marx's objection to religion, and other crucial aspects to Marxism.

But his attention is not confined to Marxism alone. He discusses the established religions, bourgeois liberalism, and existentialism, beginning with their fundamental notions of man. He examines the characteristic refusal of the major freedom-seeking movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to accept any spiritual dimension in man. Throughout his inquiry, Shari'ati offers comparisons with the ideology of Islam, drawing upon the principles and precepts contained in the Qur'an as well as cultural material from the history of Islamic society. Gradually and eloquently, he expounds his personal view of Islam as the philosophy of human liberation.

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Date : Published April 1st 1980 by Mizan Pr

ISBN : 9780933782051

Author : Ali Shariati , Hamid Algar (Editor) , R. Campbell (Translator)

Format : Paperback 122 pages

Genre : Religion, Islam, Philosophy, Cultural, Iran, Occult, Mysticism, Muslims

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Sudi says

Edisi bahasa Indonesia-nya "Marxisme dan Sesat-Pikir Barat Lainnya". Agak aneh, kenapa Ali Syariati menyerang Marxisme, padahal pemikirannya sangat kental dengan ide-ide sosialis. Mungkin demi menangkis tuduhan kalangan konservatif.

Mersad Alimoradi says

simple and straightforward Shariati gets right to the point.. great book

Hena says

hahahaha i gotta add this to my list for the title alone

Hoho says

memang orang yang menganggap dia benar belum tentu dia benar, tapi orang lain menganggap dia benar belum tentu juga dia benar adanya, karena kebenaran memang mutlak milik kebenaran itu sendiri, sedang kita hanya mengikuti, atau hanya menganggap bahwa kita benar menurut kita sendiri tanpa menganggap atau seolah-olah kebenaran tak berdiri.....

ehk2 says

Ali ?eriati was one of those intellectuals much praised and respected by people whom I attribute a sincerity in their thinking. He has been continually referred by pious sociologists but I could not have the chance to read, until now. Therefore this happens to be a much-desired but delayed reading for me.

?eriati is absolutely right in his every word if and only if he is capable to establish the existence of his God, show me a sparkle of his reason to believe.

I wish that he could do that! As he notes, there is a plain and fundamental, cosmological and ontological difference: materialism is incompatible with Islam. Why should I have to accept the existence of God a priori? He only shows me the pages of Kuran!!! Why do I have to reject the 'shallow' and 'banal' materialism but instead 'trust' on the authority of Kuran? No answer...

In this book, ?eriati attacks the maladies of modern world (capitalism and socialism) and its ideologies. The essential criticism is that modern systems and ideologies are rooted in humanism, which he rejects in the name of God. Humanism is a false start when compared with the Islamic idea of creation and human nature

(*f?trat*).

Aside from his anti-capitalist views, I am interested in his views on Marxism. His criticism on actually existing socialisms is strong at a certain point (though there is nothing original here. More convincing criticisms were already in circulation among New Left circles or among other brands of thought in the West. And ?eriati seems to be well-informed by the right-wing anti-communist intellectuals like Raymond Aron). But his attack against Marxism (on its materialistic philosophy) based on his religious viewpoint is simply ridiculous.

The main issue is the question around the possibility of a Marxist morality, a humanism based on materialist/realist view of world (a contradiction?). This is still a debated issue with a long list of references and details; but ?eriati's handling of the issue is too cursory, too haphazard and a good straw man argument. ?eriati is like a 'mosque preacher' and he has neither desire nor time to delve into a full-fledged investigation (also possibly because of the fact that these are conference speeches). But he can curse at Marx and Lenin without further ado!

In my opinion, ?eriati was not familiar with the debates on alienation and considerations on anti-humanist shades within Marxism (he is too-concerned with the official Soviet type of diamat and the humanist/existentialist types that were fashionable in those days in France).

According to him, Marxism is a philosophy of 'production' (as a blend of materialism and humanism) and not very different from the underlying principles of capitalism. He sees in that a sort of Weberian 'disenchantment of world' as it has nothing to fill the void created after the murder of God.

But what could have been otherwise? Marxists are not against 'production' and 'consumption' per se. It would be a stupid idea. Enjoying the fruits of earth and labour is not a "sin", nor trying to improve and enlarge them for everyone. Not everybody has to live a mystic's hermit life, though it appeals me personally and appears to be the right way to live.

What ?eriati confuses, I think, he takes Marxism as holistic as a religion like Islam in which nothing is excluded. No. It does not tell you how to live your daily life. It does not oblige you to go to the party headquarters to pray five times a day. Of course, it promotes fraternity, hospitality, kindness, etc. -goodness in short, as the author accepts that these are the common traits and ideals of all kinds of morality. [But it lacks a guideline which tells half of the human beings to cover their heads, to slaughter animals even for charity, to kill the infidels –OK. No strikes to the actually existing forms]. It does not claim to hold the keys of destiny and it does not attempt to do it. Of course, its materialist base causes one to question and refrain from doing acts supposed to be ordered by a supernatural force. Hence the blame of infidelity.

As a sociologist or thinker, ?eriati is surprisingly too schematic. Maybe this was the reason behind his fame, I don't know. But what does he 'preach'? A turn to 'spirituality', a turn to inner self, a re-connection with his own *f?trat*, and finally a return to the practices of the old glorious days of the prophet. Against humanism, he calls for religion and mysticism –centuries-old bubbles of non-sense. How to arrange the social life of huge populations with the rules originating centuries before? How I wish he could see today's Iran, with its huge economic inequalities, rich getting richer day by day whereas only poor masses observe the Islamic resignation to fate.

Finally, I say, Marxism is not a prescription for your existential dilemmas. And I do not see any contradiction if you prefer to seek your inner quest, morality, meaning of life, etc., and at the same time have a viewpoint on social relations that is enlightened by Marxist thought. Indeed, that is what he says in the last essay: As I understand, he tells that, to fully live a good life, to flourish, you have to consider three dimensions of individual life: love (that is mysticism –inner purification and completion); justice (that is socialism –the reason and the sense of justice, fraternity and equality); and freedom (that is existentialism

–the self, the choice). None of these is meaningful without others. And he finds the eternal perfect combination in Islam. That is it.

Murtadha says

every time i get closer to finish the book, i feel as if i haven't read anything,, so i start again,, it is very tough book to read,, the author has talked about various school of thoughts in social, economic, religious issues

Rana Saadullah says

I was introduced to Ali Shariati as a sociologist and intellectual of pre-revolutionary Iran. His impact was pervasive enough to produce Urdu translations of his work in Pakistan, so I was just curious to know how a sociologist could become as popular as Shariati was.

After reading this text, I am not sure I can answer that question, but what I can express is my utter disappointment with this text. This is a dull, basic reading of "Western" philosophy, and its dismissiveness should have been obvious to me by the title itself, but I was expecting something much more engaging. In one sentence, Shariati's issue with Marxism is its incapability to address the "mystic" and the "spiritual", and the reader is supposed to be convinced that these two elements are necessary for any society to function effectively -- actually, it is fruitless to disparage this text because it has the same arguments as any Islamist attempt at deconstructing "Western" ideologies: "too materialist", "where is the morality?", "our civilization is the best".

I am certainly not convinced that Shariati knew his history or his anthropology, and am deeply doubtful of his grasp of classical sociology.

This text can only be appreciated as a readable and perhaps as a more sincerely intellectual Islamist reading of Marxism and existentialism, so if you wish to write a thesis on Islamist readings of Marxism, this text is definitely a very good introduction.

Wan Khuzairey says

Buku ringkas dari Ali Shariati dalam menerangkan titik perbezaan antara Islam dan Marxisme.

Sebelum itu, Haji Misbach cuba untuk menyatukan kedua-dua ini dengan mengangkat inti ekonominya, Ali Shariati pula hadir dengan terma "Manusia menjadi binatang ekonomi" dimana fokus dua sistem ekonomi baik kapitalis mahupun marxis adalah tertumpu kepada ekonomi semata tanpa membangunkan nilai-nilai dalam diri.

Sedangkan Islam menuntut penganutnya untuk mengubah sistem ekonomi yang menekan juga nilai-nilai yang merugikan manusia.

Wirawan Sukarwo says

Pernah suatu ketika, menjadi kiri itu tampak seksi seperti Rangga di film AADC. Sejak baca buku ini, jujur

agak geli melihat pemuda-pemudi yang masih bergelut dengan pemikiran marx, apalagi yang dogmatis. Sungguh, buku ini amunisi berharga bagi muslim untuk berdialektika dengan pemikiran Marx..

Sajid says

its one of the great book telling about the dialectics which Marxism keeps in itself

Megat Hanis says

Ali Shariati has proven himself unmatched in this eloquent, simple yet comprehensive and elegant style of critique of both Western and Eastern tradition of religion and philosophy as a whole. His commentary on each philosophical standpoint from capitalism, Marxism, existentialism to comparative analysis of religions is a manifestation of his mastery over the subject matter with a book less than a hundred pages in profound accuracy. He dwells on the question of human nature/essence as the main theme of this book, particularly from the viewpoint of Islam, and test it against myriad of challenges from both former and latter tradition of thought. Obviously, one may find that Shariati was no typical Muslim apologist who would bring forth Islam devoid of its errors in cultural and civilizational undertaking but instead promoting Islam as a powerful philosophy and rich literature which foundation transcend those of Western and Eastern product.

His main critique was largely against Marxism as a complete form of ideological sets, which unlike Islam, operating in its core the most dogmatic, deterministic "dialectical materialism" both as a philosophical projects that wages war ruthlessly against religions and political agenda without which transition from socialism to communism would not be materialized. This is perhaps, one of the most, if not the most important writing 21st century Muslim should read and dissect as to make it resurface as an important work circulating today's intellectual discourse.
