Students of Revolution: An Essay on Ali Shariati’s Counter-Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT: Though Ali Shariati is well-known as the “ideologue” of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, this essay considers Shariati conversely as a student of revolution. It begins by posing a distinction between the apprentice and the autodidact through reference to Ibn Tufayl’s Hayy ibn Yaqzan and introduces a third term, the collaborator, that is crucial to Shariati’s account of counter-pedagogy. The essay then reconstructs Shariati’s critique of the pedagogical state. There, he recalls resisting interpellation by learning from other pasts, refusing instruction, and learning from others. Finally, I show changes in how Shariati conceptualized self-transformation, from an autodidactic process of soul-searching to a collaborative process that gives soul to a collective. On becoming immersed in the sounds of his compatriots grieving the martyrs of struggle, Shariati attests to being a student of history: the curriculum of a people becoming, the history of struggle, and its instructors, those who modeled it, pivoted around a refusal to be instructed. Overall, this essay develops an account of media environments as informal pedagogical spaces.

KEYWORDS: pedagogy, interpellation, ideology, collaboration, revolution, Ali Shariati

A couple people seem to be reticent about the term “study,” but is there a way to be in the undercommons that isn’t intellectual? Is there a way of being intellectual that isn’t social? When I think about the way we were using the term “study,” I think we were committed to the idea that study is what you do with other people. It’s talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice.

—Harney and Moten (2013)
When Ali Shariati returned to Iran after studying at the University of Paris, he produced a body of work his biographer Ali Rahnema describes as his “mystical murmurs” (Rahnema 2014, 144–160). “Hubut” [The Fall] is a longform reflection on the solitude of philosophers on the quest for knowledge. “Kavir” [The Desert] is a coming-of-age story that narrates how formal schooling changed him into a subject of nationhood. Where “The Fall” is a testament to philosophy’s power to question knowledge, “The Desert” is a reflection upon the hostility of formal education toward the pursuit of knowledge. A key theme in his “mystical murmurs” is “the desert.” The desert is resonant with the concept of the tabula rasa or blank slate, meaning the unmarked canvases of the mind inhabited prior to formal instruction. In learning history and geography, Shariati no longer inhabited “the desert,” experiencing it rather as “Iran,” a historical and geographical mental construct. Iran was built upon a tabula rasa. It was potential made actual. In later writings, Shariati attests to becoming transformed by informal pedagogical spaces that modified how he perceived time and space independent of national history and geography. By focusing on the theme of pedagogy in his writings, I develop an account of counter-pedagogy. In so doing, I consider a media environment that served as a public school guided by collective instruction.

While Shariati was summoned from official channels as a subject of Iranian nationhood, he attests to informal pedagogical spaces that interpellated or summoned him otherwise. In his “mystical murmurs,” Shariati was experiencing a crisis of faith in the voices that summoned him. He lamented how, as a child, he was summoned by nationalists and mindlessly responded in turn. During his politically active years, Shariati was summoned otherwise by fellow travelers. By examining Shariati’s shifting perception of the “desert,” this essay develops an account of media environments as informal pedagogical spaces. At the same time, it provides an account of what it means to be summoned otherwise—as a mode of communication that such informal pedagogical spaces enact for political ends. It also offers an account of changes in how Shariati conceptualized self-transformation, from an autodidactic process of soul-searching to a collaborative process that gives soul to a collective. The informal pedagogical space that transformed Shariati, I argue, was a sonic landscape generated by the sound of mourners grieving the death of the Imam Hussein, whose martyrdom at the hands of the forces of the Caliph Yazid marks the beginning of the history of Shi’ism. Shariati entered a public school orchestrated by a collective instructor where no single individual had mastery over the curriculum.

I begin this article by drawing out a contrast between the autodidact and the apprentice in the history of Islamic political thought through reference to
the twelfth-century philosopher Ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. This contrast anticipates a third term that plays a crucial role in Shariati’s works: the collaborator. I then suggest that the metaphor of the blank slate in *Hayy* anticipates the significance of “the desert” for Shariati, which signaled the omnipresent potential for new political orders. Second, I turn to Shariati’s critique of the pedagogical state. Where his formal instructors fashioned him as a subject of nationhood, Shariati resisted apprenticeship by learning from other pasts, by refusing to learn, and by learning from others, all while longing for a return to desert beginnings to redeem his potential. Finally, I turn to a later autobiographical text Shariati wrote on Ashura after he was banned by the administrators of the Husseynieh Ershad, the religious-cultural institute where he regularly delivered lectures on Islamic history and philosophy. He set his nostalgia for the desert aside. Shariati attested to the emergence of an alternative political order. That political order materialized when a collectivity mourned the victims of the history of the struggle for freedom. He is instructed otherwise: neither apprentice nor autodidact, but now a collaborator in a people’s coming-of-age. Shariati joined others as pupils of history.

**The Solitude of the Philosophers**

Oh you who are me as me my other, oh you for whom I am your other you, oh my compatriot, my fellow city dweller, my neighbor, my co-habitant! My familiar, my family! Do you not know yourself as a fellow traveler? Do you not know you are a traveler? Do you not know that you have fellow travelers? Oh my fellow traveler! Oh my fellow traveler! (Shariati [2007] 2008, 213)

Shariati penned these words when the Pahlavi state’s domestic and foreign intelligence agency SAVAK (Organization of National Security and Information) banned him from speaking in public. He declares that solitude was his source of pain. Shariati laments that his “fellow travelers” were now alone, summoning them to join him in travel. What Rahnema calls Shariati’s “mystical murmurs” are filled with cries of grief for his solitude and a longing for relief from the pain it brings him. In the sections that follow, I will explain Shariati’s despair at the fact that the pedagogical state in Pahlavi Iran addressed the pain of solitude by incorporating its pupils into the ideological formation of the nation-state; and follow by turning to his experience in an informal “public school” that instructed him otherwise. But first, I revisit a classic of Islamic political thought, the twelfth-century philosopher Ibn Tufayl’s allegory *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* [Alive son
of Awake], which, I suggest, offers a reflection on pedagogy that better illuminates Shariati’s thinking. I frame his reflections on pedagogy as reflections on two registers of Ibn Tufayl’s allegory: first, the contrast between the autodidact and the apprentice; second, a diagnosis of “society,” the inhabited island, as an obstacle for freedom. I conclude this section by relating Shariati’s invocations of “the desert” [kavir] to Sufism, where he envisions the “inhabited island” as the actuality of a potential political order.¹

Ibn Tufayl presents his allegory in response to a debate in philosophy over whether philosophers could “[commune] with the divine, that is, enjoy revelation, by exercising reason” (Tufayl 2003, 96).

He suggests a third way: “When I speak of the rationalists’ method . . . I do not confine myself to their knowledge, any more than I confine myself to the metaphysical when I speak of intuition” (ibid., 98). Hayy ibn Yaqzan portrays acquired and received wisdom as two aspects of learning, establishing terms of debate over the relationship between truth and method in Islamic political thought. The allegory begins with the child Hayy on an uninhabited island who attains knowledge through rational self-inquiry. Hayy was born out of “spontaneous generation” and was “joined with ‘the spirit which is God’s’” (Tufayl 2007, 106). Hayy is visited by Absal, who journeys from an inhabited island. Absal teaches Hayy language to teach him religion. In so doing, he learns that Hayy is as knowledgeable as he is, if not more so. When Hayy and Absal return to Absal’s island to educate the people, they are resisted by its ruler and inhabitants. They then return to Hayy’s uninhabited island to enjoy the solitude of contemplation together.

The allegory distinguishes between the autodidact and the apprentice, the pupil of “rational wisdom” and the pupil of “received wisdom.” Ibn Tufayl sets out to demonstrate “how [Hayy] grew up and progressed until he reached his remarkable goal” (Tufayl 2007, 106). With speculation alone, Hayy reached the highest plane of existence, the world of the divine. He was disappointed by the necessity of “leaving his vantage point to tend to his body” (ibid., 158). On the inhabited island, where a particular religion had already gained a foothold, Absal and a peer, Salman, “had taken instruction in this religion and accepted it enthusiastically,” though Absal “was the more deeply concerned with getting down to the heart of things, the more eager to discover spiritual values, and the more ready to attempt a more or less allegorical interpretation” (ibid., 158). In contrast, Salman was committed to literalism, unwilling to give “free reign to his thought” (ibid.). Once an apprentice, Absal left the inhabited island for Hayy’s island to learn by himself. There, both Hayy and Absal face solitude.
Hayy and Absal leave the pain of solitude through meeting each other. They experience the fulfillment of their own method of finding truth in learning each other’s method. When Absal heard Hayy describe “Truth Himself,” he “had no doubt that all the traditions of his religion about God, His angels, bibles, and prophets, Judgment Day, Heaven and Hell were symbolic representations of these things that Hayy ibn Yaqzan had seen for himself” (ibid., 160). The “old religious puzzlings” that perplexed Absal were resolved, “all obscurities, clear” (ibid.). On hearing Absal describe the people of the inhabited island, Hayy “understood all this and found none in contradiction with what he had seen for himself from his supernal vantage point” (ibid., 161). They both acquired knowledge in different ways and acknowledged that how the other acquired knowledge also resulted in certainty. That acknowledgement gestured toward a higher synthesis of rational and traditional wisdom, of the autodidact (Hayy’s way) and the apprentice (Absal’s way). They enjoy that higher synthesis when they decide to collaborate with one another by imparting wisdom. Though Ibn Tufayl’s allegory concludes with Hayy and Absal failing, they end up alone together.

The second register concerns society and freedom. There is a geography in the allegory: an inhabited and an uninhabited island. The literalist Salman, now the “ruler of the island,” “believed in living within society and held it unlawful to withdraw” (Tufayl 2007, 163). Hayy “began to teach this group and explain some of his profound wisdom to them. But the moment he rose the slightest bit above the literary or began to portray things against which they were prejudiced, they recoiled in horror from his ideas and closed their minds” (ibid.). Hayy gave up. He lied to the people of the inhabited island, “[telling] them that he had seen the light and realized that they were right” (ibid., 164). The institutions of formal schooling on the inhabited island educated inhabitants to be orderly, to not question the “literal,” that is, the surface of things, and thereby take things as they appear. When Hayy and Absal began to teach the inhabitants, authorities saw that they were inciting disorder. In a variation on a theme, Ibn Tufayl was suggesting that philosophical endeavor was impossible in society, not because the conditions for philosophy were absent, but because of a moralization of order.

The inhabited island was fundamentally different than the uninhabited island. Hayy and Absal were free to live the philosophical life because they were independent of any social order. Hayy and Absal “[said] goodbye to them, the two left their company and discretely sought passage back to their own island” where “they served God on the island” until they died (Tufayl 2007, 165).
In Shariati’s “mystical murmurs,” the ideal of the “uninhabited island,” the utopian abode of the philosopher, appears as the desert.

Shariati may have been thinking of Mawlana (or Rumi), who speaks to the longstanding conversation Ibn Tufayl was entering with his allegory. In the final poem of Rumi’s *Masnavi*, some pilgrims marvel at an ascetic who can withstand extreme heat and deprivation (Rumi 2007, 223–4). They ask him how he survives. The ascetic asks the sky to answer their prayers. A cloud arrives and inundates the arid land. In his prayer, the ascetic professes, “From Placelessness You’ve made this place appear” (ibid., 224). The desert is a pure and empty terrain. It is the potential for new political orders. Stated directly, the ascetic voiced his intention for a world to appear that nourished him. His prayer was answered by God. Shariati affirms the idea that another world is possible, and that nature does not set a limit on what the world can be. He flips Rumi on his head, however, by reimagining the relation between stated intentions and how those intentions become actualized. He does not look to heaven for a creator to actualize his intentions, but to his fellow travelers. Likewise, he will begin with the premise that the uninhabited island, or the desert, is a lost utopia.

In “The Fall,” in which he wrote the epigraph to this section, Shariati is grieving that he was made in the image of God, yet in working to see God in himself, he became alone. He portrays his birth as “spontaneous generation”: “Nobody built me, but God built me . . . I was dirt that lacked an owner. He breathed his spirit in me to free me on earth and below the sun in solitude” (Shariati [2007] 2008, 16).

In autodidactic mode, he works through ignorance, expressed with a refrain: “What do I know?” Echoing Socrates, he concludes that “[knowing] is to know I know nothing. Only this” (Shariati [2007] 2008, 38).

Insisting that to understand the truth is to know nothing, Shariati attests to feeling alone: “Being fortunate alone is a pained fortune, it is incomplete since solitary being is incomplete” (Shariati [2007] 2008, 61). But Shariati cannot see a way out of his solitude without losing himself to an ignorant world. Hayy attained self-consciousness on the uninhabited island; Shariati was thrown into the inhabited island. This results in a cynicism he will draw on to narrate the effect formal schooling had upon his way of being. Unlike Absal, Shariati did not have an uninhabited island on which to find refuge.

**Another Brick in the Wall**

Before Shariati developed his account of collaborative world-building where he turns his attention to fellow travelers as a pupil of the struggle for freedom, he first reflects upon his own apprenticeship as a student of the pedagogical
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state in the inhabited island, the Pahlavi state. The *tabula rasa* is not emptiness, as is commonly presumed. It is a foundation built by others. Students are not born with that foundation. They are taught it. Shariati begins with that premise. The uninhabited island that Hayy and Absal fled for does not exist. Civilization has been built upon it, and the state teaches its subjects to see it as a natural order. So too, Shariati attests to his interpellation as a protagonist in the drama of officially sanctioned Iranian history. This section turns to his autobiographical coming-of-age story, entitled “The Desert.” Shariati identifies his formal education as the instrument of his formation as a national subject. This process coincides with his formation as a rational actor disenchanted with flights of the imagination. He looks to his past as a resource to derive three ways of working against schooling: by remembering unofficial pasts, refusing official ones, and learning from unofficial sources.

Shariati describes his autobiography as a “history presented in the form of geography” (Shariati [2007] 2008, 238). It tracks Shariati’s movement from his ancestral village Mazinan to the urban center Mashhad, and the way that his formal education in the city changed his perception and understanding of the village. The autobiography begins by locating Mazinan “at the edge of the desert” (ibid., 261). The desert is not merely a biome. It is Hayy’s island or Rumi’s desert, a “place” that appeared out of “placelessness.” The desert is “the end of the earth; the foundation of the territory of life” (ibid., 379).

As a blank slate, the desert is anything it can be imagined as. In the desert “it is as if we are near another world and it is from there that we can see and feel the supernatural” (ibid.). There is a philosophy of the mind that foregrounds how Shariati tells the story of his life. The inner landscape of the soul, the mind, is reflected by and reflects its outer landscape, or context. The one does not determine the other, rather they determine each other in dialogue. The interplay of mind and context unfolds upon “the desert,” the foundation of the territory of life.

The key difference between city and village is how far from the desert each has fallen. Due to its proximity to the desert, the village is still desert while the city is alienated from it. There is good reason to retain critical distance from the teleology of Shariati’s autobiography. It naturalizes the notion that the villager is a noble savage and is legible in a framework that sees history as a narrative of progress. In Aristotle’s *Politics*, the village results from families coming together, a movement that is spurred into motion by the necessity of individuals to associate to make ends meet. I do not wish to delve into the thickets of debate about Aristotle. What is worth thinking through in Shariati’s autobiography is that the *tabula rasa*, the speculative foundation of the ethno-nation, is the be-
ginning of politics rather than the family. Shariati remembers the beginning of politics to denaturalize the official, ethno-national narrative.

Shariati shows how education naturalized the state’s official narrative of Iranian history. Education changes mind and soul. It changes how the educated experience life. The Pahlavi state enlisted schools to teach children Iran’s history, composed to depict the Shah’s efforts to change Iran into a modern nation-state as a renaissance of its golden age (see Marashi 2008, 100). In schools, children would learn to imagine what Iran is and should be as the state made the fantasy real. Shariati attended a school where he was taught the official narrative of Iran’s past. Concerning his schooling in Mashhad, Shariati speaks of his resulting “grudge” against history: “Some time ago one of my classmates showed me his journal in which I had written: I despise two ‘t’s: history [تاریخ] and the other, Taqizadeh!” (Shariati [2007] 2008, 274 n1) Hassan Taqizadeh was one of Iran’s early noted ideologues of Westernization. Shariati looks inward: “Perhaps the root of my resentment towards Taqizadeh is that he is but one part of history incarnate and yet the soul of our history is incarnated in this character?” (Ibid., 275 n1) Iran was a castle built on sand, represented by apparently great men. Schools were enlisted to persuade children that the castle was a natural formation, rather than a particular work of art.

Shariati’s formal education changed how he perceived and understood the village. He became increasingly disenchanted by ways of seeing that he did not question in his childhood. His teachers in the city would mockingly correct him by providing astronomical explanations for his astrological prejudices. Where he once saw “the way of Ali” or “the way of Mecca” as he ran his eyes across the night sky, his teacher would laugh and say, “No, my dear, ‘galaxies’” (Shariati [2007] 2008, 284). He experienced the same when he was taught that shooting stars were meteors plummeting to earth. Shariati is by no means suggesting that how he once saw the sky was a realistic representation. It was more that he could no longer experience the sky unaware of or unmediated by the scientific image. He is in grief that the night sky was once a canvass, that his imagination once had artistic freedom. His memory of the night sky when he was a child reminded him of the power of the imagination. Once transformed by the city, he was neither here nor there, suspended between two worlds—as if Hayy, after visiting Absal’s island, could no longer experience his island as he had before. It is that awareness that Shariati brings to his critique of the school as a site of ideological interpellation.

How does Shariati work against his schooling? In three ways. First, by remembering against the lineage that begins with the ethno-nation and ends with Iran. He writes his autobiography against history to remember the des-
ert, history’s origin. The source of “rational wisdom” for Hayy, an island that provides its inhabitants access to knowledge of the divine, is here the desert, the reminder that truths are opinions in rational garb. Second, by refusing learning, captured by a story he recalls when he and his peers pranked their instructor and deceived him into thinking that they had done their readings (Shariati [2007] 2008, 263–264). The source of “traditional wisdom” for Absal is now an ideological state apparatus. Shariati narrates that prank as refusal. Third, by seeking out alternative sources of knowledge. Shariati attests to learning a “lesson” when the village’s chief slit the throat of a rooster that had awakened the village at night. This “lesson” is worth sitting with because the “homeless rooster” is idiomatically used to refer to someone who speaks out of turn. The chief “taught” Shariati what fate awaits the truth-teller, as Hayy and Absal nearly learned the hard way when speaking the truth on Absal’s island. He speaks in his autobiography to these three ways of working against schooling, namely, being instructed by other pasts, refusing instruction, and learning from other instructors. Together these are key registers of what I describe as his counter-pedagogy or pedagogy against official lines.

The Public School

I told myself I should go to a mosque for rawzeh, a rawzeh whose sound tonight bellows from every alley and every house. I saw, my faith and fervor for the greatness of Hussein and his work surpassed all the humiliation I could listen to and endure. I became discouraged. Yet, the night was Ashura, the city was a seamless blanket of mourning and the home a seamless blanket of silence and pain, what could I do? I could withdraw from Ashura, but how could I withdraw myself from Ashura? (Shariati [2011] 2012, 29)

I now turn to Shariati’s testimony of entering a collaborative pedagogical space, of exiting solitude and learning from the past together. Shariati penned the above words on the night of March 14, 1971, the night of Ashura, the anniversary of the Imam Hussein’s martyrdom at the hands of the forces of the Caliph Yazid. For the past few years, Shariati had delivered lectures at the Husseynie Ershad, a religious and cultural center that featured popular religious intellectuals critical of the Pahlavi state. The Husseynie Ershad was an informal pedagogical space. By lecturing there, he publicly recalled the Islamic past, refused official narratives in turn, and assumed responsibility for serving as an alternative instructor to the pedagogical state. Though in part aimed at
the pedagogical state, his lectures also took aim at religious intellectuals, who he accused of teaching their students an Islam that worked as an opiate of the masses. The administrators of the Husseynie Ershad would ultimately ban him from speaking. Again, he was censored. Shariati describes “It was the Night of Ashura, the Ashura of 1349” as a sequel to his autobiography: “Just as in ‘The Desert’ I said, ‘A history depicted in the form of geography,’ here I tell our history and my life” (Shariati [2011] 2012, 45).

The nature of the coming-of-age story differs here since the self in question is not an “I” but a “we.” In this story, Shariati attests to being educated by a collectivity giving voice to the struggle for freedom.

On Ashura, Shariati’s relation to the people changed from instructor to instructed. The “seamless blanket of mourning,” brought about by the sound of Shia’s mourning Hussein’s death, turned him into a pupil with his peers, eliciting a transformation that endured even when he retreated to the solitude of home. In “The Desert,” he lamented how his schooling in Mashhad stole his childhood from him. Because school disciplined his imagination, he could no longer see the night sky of “the desert” as he once had. Though he physically withdrew from the city, he could not withdraw from it spiritually. He now attests to hearing a city within the city. While a history as geography, his reflection on his education on Ashura is meaningfully different from his reflection on his schooling in Mashhad. The individual pursuit of discovering utopia, the desert covered by the city, is here a collective project of building a city in the city, a heterotopia. By entering that space, “the seamless blanket of silence and pain” became Ashura too, reminding him that, despite his solitude, he was not alone. His ear also changed: the night sky of the auditory realm, of silence and pain, was a void he had been taught to hear as the refusal of the people.  

Just as horizons changed, so too did the ground: “the desert” was now “covered in blood” (Shariati 2007, 27). Were Shariati to say his peers were building a city in the city from nothing, he would be suggesting that people were free to become who they are, independent of worldly restrictions. The slate upon which the mind inscribes its designs, however, is not blank. It is stained by the marks of a war. The ideal of the unmarked desert is lost to the reality of Karbala where Husssein lost his life. Shariati no longer despairs that the pedagogical state has occupied the potential to be otherwise since the “blood” that stains “the desert” recalls a history of sacrifice to harness that potential, even if he and his peers were thrown into a world that demanded they forget themselves. The melancholy expressed in “The Desert” is here as well yet in different terms, now informed by the rituals of mourning that are also a celebration of the hard work of struggle. We are left with an image: a people longing for bluer skies
plodding through the crimson soil of history. Between earth and sky, there is the possibility of an intangible space, the collective imagination that Shariati attests drew him in, instructed, and transformed him. The mediated geography of Ashura, made real by the sound of people mourning, was a public school.

Shariati was instructed on Ashura alongside the collective mourning for Hussein. His relationship to the ideal of solitary contemplation of the divine is altered, as depicted by Ibn Tufayl’s Hayy and Rumi’s ascetic. “In the freedom of solitude and the intimacy of faith,” he writes, he was “an ascetic who is in an empty void a ‘monad’ making waves, and that bird, my imagination . . . suddenly took off from a corner of the Euphrates and from Ashura . . . cascaded” (Shariati 2007, 35–6). He adds, “I don’t want to say in Sufi fashion: ‘and withdrew into himself,’ where emancipation is cutting oneself from others and from the self, and is sole attachment to ‘Him. . . .’” Shariati has not cut himself off from others, he cannot, even with the freedom of solitude, nor is he contemplating “Him,” the divine. The object of contemplation is now a people becoming through a struggle for freedom. “I have ‘been living’ for twenty years. Before then, I was ‘only alive’ and these twenty years, comprising the entirety of my true life, have taken place on upon one ‘word . . . :’ the people!” (Shariati 2007, 20–1) Two decades prior was 1951, the beginning of then-Prime Minister Muhammad Mussadeq’s campaign to break Iran free of foreign powers. 1951 marked the beginning of a national coming-of-age, of a people learning how to be a people.

The three ways of working against the ideological training of the pedagogical state—learning from other pasts, refusing instruction, learning from others—were operative on Ashura. The other pasts: the struggles for self-determination that Shariati draws into the fold of the history of Islam and Shi’ism. The other instructors: exemplars of that struggle across space and time. Shariati had held a grudge against history lessons wherein a national pantheon represented him. He now turns to “inheritance [verasat],” weaving a genealogy not of blood, but of struggle, stretching from the origin of humanity, represented by the first man Adam, to its crux, Hussein; just as well, the Adams and Husseins are pitted in a Manichean struggle against oppressors:

In these two lines, everywhere and always in the duration of history, they battle each other face to face—right and wrong, justice and in-justice, monotheism and polytheism, faith and heresy, the people and the mullahs and the wretched and the proud—two houses also bear the responsibility of inheriting the leadership of two factions: Abel and Cain, Abraham and Nimrod, Moses and the Pharaoh, Joseph and Herod, Jesus and Caesar, Muhammad and the Quraysh or
His imagination, which he likens to a bird, soars across history, engaged in counter-memory.

The curriculum of a people becoming, the history of struggle, and its instructors, those who modeled it, pivoted around a refusal to be instructed. Where prior, Shariati performed an autodidactic method of learning and unlearning his true being, he now attests to being an apprentice to other pasts and other instructors. Though autodidactic in its method, the terms have changed since the “self” becoming is not an “I” but a “we.” He does not relinquish Hayy’s method in favor of Absal’s but sees Hayy and Absal in and through each other. The autodidactic method that begins upon the premise of collective subjectivity is collaborative, collapsing the distinction between solitary learning and learning in the company of others. The Adams and Husseins of history were solitary, and yet, they were collaborators across time. Just as well, Shariati testifies to being called away from home by the sounds of Ashura: “Who is this? This solitary and wandering and broken and hopeless and pained figure, in a desert covered in blood, who emerged from the red sea of martyrdom and is standing alone and silent! I am no longer him!” (Shariati 2007, 27–28) In being called, he is not made by the world but summoned to collaborate in changing it.

Conclusion

I have presented an account of media environments as informal pedagogical spaces and of summoning otherwise as the mode of communication that such spaces enact for political ends. The media environment here, the soundscape, called Shariati to join in receiving a political education through collective reflection upon the history of freedom struggles and its exemplars across time. It is crucial to not take the account provided above as the exclusive province of “fellow travelers”—by which I mean to not simply assume that to learn otherwise is to learn well—but rather, as framing mediascapes as sites of contestation for a people becoming. Mediascapes are where the pupils of unofficial pedagogical spaces unlearn allegiances they did not ask to learn. The Pahlavi State, an ideological state apparatus, was the primary mechanism of ideological training. In its capacity as a social engineer, it designed formal education only to witness cities within cities appear, heterotopic spaces where Iran was imagined otherwise. Other histories and geographies featured in the myriad curricula of unofficial public schools, where the attendees learned from other
pasts, refused instruction, and learned from each other. This essay has examined one such public school and the miseducation of one such pupil.

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ENDNOTES

1. Samar Attar (2007) claims that Daniel Defoe and John Locke, among others, derived the concept of the *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, from a Latin translation of Ibn Tufayl’s allegory. Notwithstanding whether Attar’s historical claim holds water, the “uninhabited island” in *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* more or less functions as a blank slate, providing its solitary inhabitants a place from which they can understand the world in solitude.

2. I have argued elsewhere (Mansoori 2021) that Shariati attempted to modify the perceptual habits of his audiences to hear the silence of the people as a sign of tacit disagreement with sovereign order.

REFERENCES


