Cardiff University

Iran as a Symptom:

A Psychoanalytic Critique of the Ideological Structure in the Islamic Republic

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis offers a systematic analysis of the ideological structure in the Islamic Republic of Iran through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalytic critique of ideology. The Lacanian emphasis on the libidinal constitution of ideology changes the object of analysis from social reality in its empirical aspects to the unconscious or disavowed conditions sustaining social reality in the Islamic Republic. The overall analysis of this thesis is divided into three interrelated research domains: the first domain of political subjectivity examines how subjectivity in Iran is embedded in the ideological order, as well as how that order was constructed through the 1979 Islamic revolution by tapping into the unconscious agency of political subjectivity; the second theologico-political domain inquires into the form of ideology materialised in the socio-political framework of the Islamic Republic and analyses its libidinal sustainability; the third domain explores the political economy in Iran by conflating its historical and ontological inquiry. The analysis of the three domains helps me to discern the inherent contradictions of the ideological structure in contemporary Iran and the peculiar way these contradictions are mediated. Their mediation conversely ensures the reproduction of ideology on an unconscious level. This thesis therefore explores how ideology in the Islamic Republic of Iran enables a consistent experience of social reality and how subjectivity sustains the ideological order through libidinal investments.

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1. Introduction

One of the most interesting features of the revolutionary regime in the Islamic Republic of Iran is its self-perception as a permanent challenge to the established world order. Iran's political discourse seems to reinforce the identity of the socio-political project that emerged with the 1979 Islamic revolution and toppled an increasingly oppressive monarchy. The Revolution was based on a quest for a lost identity by returning to the nation's 'authentic religious roots,' which produced ambiguous and, at first glance, paradoxical outcomes. The Islamic Republic established a political system based on a functional fusion of clerical and democratic institutions that appears to be a contradiction in terms, aptly captured by the oxymoron 'theo-democratic-totalitarianism.'[1] Its legal system is inspired by religious laws, whose pragmatic interpretations conform to the interests of the state. Adding to the confusion is the organisation of the political economy, which seems to rest more on the principles of the free market, rather than the revolutionary ideals vociferously advocated in the political arena. These inconsistencies are mediated into a peculiar socio-political order, whose particular arrangement stems from the constant striving for a dynamic ideological balance. While such disposition provides the regime in Tehran with some source of legitimacy, it simultaneously enables the West to label it as 'fundamentalist,' 'extremist,' and 'ideological.'[2] What emerges on the background of these ambiguities is a political regime, whose inflammatory revolutionary character appears to be in stark contrast with the coldly calculating rationality of its political decisions. These considerations open an intriguing question of how the ideological matrix in Iran negotiates its inherent antagonisms to sustain itself in the contemporary world. While there are numerous studies on Iran's social and cultural aspects as well as its idiosyncratic political system, scholars have tended to neglect the inquiry into its peculiar ideological vitality.

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[1] See introduction to Part II and chapter 5 for a description and the analysis of the Iranian political system.

[2] An example of such discourse is found particularly in the US mass media, amplifying the fears surrounding the Iranian nuclear programme. They echo views such as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's warning one "cannot bet on their [Iranian] rationality" (CNN 2012), or US senator Lindsey Graham, who declared the Iranian regime "evil," adding "I fear them more than I fear ISIL" (NBC 2015). The US administration of George W. Bush enthusiastically placed Iran on "The axis of evil" in 2002 and advocated the irrationality of Iranian leadership on the nuclear issue to justify increasing economic sanctions and political isolation. See also Pollack 2013.

This research strives to answer the question of how the ideological order in Iran is produced and sustained. I will analyse this question through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which conceives ideology as an unconscious matrix that shapes social reality. To inquire into the ideological balance in the Islamic Republic, I will centre my research on three interrelated domains: the identity of the political subjectivity, the theologico-political structure of the state, and the organisation of the political economy. At the level of political subjectivity, I will show how religion provided a framework for identity formation and analyse the shifts that enabled the construction of the current socio-symbolic order. At the theologico-political level, theology as a metaphysical order of beliefs and politics as a mode of governing formed an explosive mixture in the 1979 Islamic revolution that resulted in the unique institutional structure of the Iranian state. I will analyse the state's political organisation and elucidate the way that the political subjectivity inscribed within it ensures its reproduction. At the level of Iranian political economy, I will conflate its historical as well as ontological dimensions to approach the predominant capitalist logic that appears to permeate the previous two domains. In each of these three domains, a battle is raging to mediate the inconsistencies of the Iranian socio-political order and provide a libidinal balance to the entire ideological edifice.

The following thesis elucidates the approach to ideology critique informed by psychoanalysis, which is applied to the Islamic Republic of Iran for the first time. The method of inquiry implies a construction of a new theoretical model of analysis, which I will develop in detail in the succeeding chapter on Methodology. The shift of perspective to the libidinal features of ideology reveals the mechanisms constructing and sustaining the ideological stability from an unconscious position. If the function of ideology is to negotiate the above-mentioned contradictions in social reality, psychoanalysis as a method of inquiry enables me to discern how ideology intervenes in the subject's unconscious structures, where these contradictions are mediated. Such intervention should simultaneously also reveal how ideological balance in Iran is sustained. The central aim of this research is therefore to illuminate the libidinal structure of the hegemonic ideological order in the Islamic Republic. To achieve it, the analytical focus will be placed on the conditions of possibility sustaining the socio-symbolic edifice, rather than the evolution of empirical and phenomenological aspects of its social reality.

The original contribution of this research lies in the psychoanalytic analysis of the libidinal disposition of power in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It simultaneously answers the underlying question of how the subjects are embedded in the ideological order by analysing their engagement in ideological rituals and explaining the libidinal interconnections between ideology, institutions and the subjects. The research therefore inquires into the ideological structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which produces an intriguing and seemingly antagonistic ideological balance. Such theoretical approach was mostly used to analyse the specific dynamics of liberal democracy, but no attempt has yet been made to utilise it on a different form of governance.[3] Despite the growing literature on the psychoanalytic theory of ideology and on the state of Iran, conflating the two has never been attempted.

This thesis therefore follows new developments in today's critique of ideology, while applying such critique to the institutional and societal dynamics that structure the Islamic Republic of Iran. Though the understanding of empirical phenomena is indispensable, the focus of this research lies on the analysis of the ideological form enabling social experience, rather than the former. My aim is to look beyond the otherwise necessary empirical inquiry and analyse the way the libidinal structures are able to unconsciously produce, sustain and transfer their ideological grip. This will allow me to determine the ideological grounds on which Iran stands, while attempting to predict where it is heading. This thesis will also demonstrate how the unconscious ideological matrix produces political subjectivity in a socio-political system that differs from liberal democracy. In turn, this will provide an opportunity to shed new light on some of the frameworks through which Iran is understood in the West. This research therefore also hopes to contribute to the formulation of new social and governmental policies that might lead to greater mutual understanding and constructive relations between Iran and the West.

[3] One of the most noteworthy authors who dedicated the majority of his philosophical opus to this topic is Slavoj Žižek (e.g. 2008b; 2008d; 2014a; 2016). His work inspired similar analyses by leading authors, such as Fredric Jameson (1992; 2002), Alenka Zupančič (2000; 2006), Alain Badiou (2007), Ernesto Laclau (1990; 2014), and Mladen Dolar (1993), who have contributed specific views to the psychoanalytic ideology critique.

1.1. The state of research and the research approach

Drawing on the above change of perspective to the libidinal constitution of ideology, this research systematically analyses the socio-political power structure in Iran with particular attention on its inherent antagonisms. The approach is further designed to avoid using Iran as a mere example upon which preconceived ideas and conclusions are conferred. Instead, its socio-political realities are intensively studied in their empirical dimensions to produce authentic research results and illuminate new approaches to the current analysis of both Iran and the psychoanalytic critique of ideology. This research therefore engages in a comprehensive study of Iranian history, society, politics, economy and the pertaining institutional dynamics through the lens of a psychoanalytic critique of ideology. Such inquiry will elucidate a new dimension of political analysis that reveals how ideology functions and reproduces itself on an unconscious level. The research approach therefore seeks to close the gap between psychoanalytic critique of ideology and its utilisation in a new form of social and political dynamics.

This will be achieved *via* the extensive analyses of the three pivotal research domains described above, which are expanded and elaborated throughout the subsequent chapters. In each of these domains, acclaimed international and Iranian authors are studied to provide an in-depth empirical understanding of the contemporary socio-political dynamics in Iran. I will discuss their specific contribution to the literature on Iran in the introductions to each of the three research domains, while I offer an indicative overview below. In the first domain of political subjectivity, the questions necessarily touch the history, identity and social dynamics of Shi'a Islam, the socio-political conditions that ended 2500 years of monarchical rule, and the revolutionary political doctrines that fused Shi'a religion with politics. These aspects will be discussed in a dialogue with established authors such as Nikkie Keddie (2004; 2006), Hamid Dabashi (2006; 2011), Ann Lambton (2004) and Said Arjomand (1988; 2003) among others, who have contributed to the exploration of socio-historical conditions that led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The second domain dealing with the theologico-political structure of the state and its sustainability concerns the institutional disposition of the Iranian political system and the analysis of politics. The works of Ervand Abrahamian (1989; 2008), Shaul Bakhash (1985), Ali Ansari (2007), Olivier Roy (2004) and others are studied to embark on the socio-political analysis of contemporary Iran. The third domain on the political economy will briefly inquire into

the early organisation and transition of the economy after the 1979 revolution, as well as how the Iranian economic model adapted to contemporary global capitalist dynamics. Hooshang Amirahmadi (1990), Djavad Salehi-Isfahani (2009), Jahangir Amuzegar (1997; 2014) and Suzanne Maloney (2015) will elucidate the often neglected category of political economy in Iran. There are many other established authors like Wilfried Buchta (2000), Daniel Brumberg (2016), Ramin Jahanbegloo (2013), Hashem Pesaran (1985), Homa Katouzian (2003; 2009) and Dilip Hiro (1985; 1991), who contribute to and fluctuate between these research domains. In fact, the interests of most of these authors overlap on several points within and between the above three domains, which helps to create a consistent empirical background for the analysis of ideological order in Iran.

The empirical inquiry into the social reality in Iran is traversed by the essential understandings of theoretical psychoanalysis developed by Jacques Lacan (1994; 2006a; 2007), whose endeavours provide the conceptual tools for analysis. I will engage in the study of authors who have developed and adapted his views with Hegelian dialectics and Marx's critique of commodity form to derive a powerful concept of ideology critique, like Louis Althusser (1971), Ernesto Laclau (1990; 1996), Fredric Jameson (2002) and Slavoj Žižek (2008a; 2008b; 2008d; 2012a). Žižek's work in particular has expanded the terrain of psychoanalytic intervention and produced secondary literature in the fields of theology,[4] philosophy,[5] media studies,[6] as well as pointed to the importance of Lacanian psychoanalysis for political and cultural theory.[7] The expanding terrain of psychoanalytic inquiry allows me to engage with different authors and adapt their work for the purpose of this research. The first domain of political subjectivity builds on the above empirical explorations and develops a critique of subjectivity and the conditions that led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Lacan's examination of subjectivity and the way it sustains an ideological order is at the centre of this inquiry. It provides the background for further analysis of ideology, such as those of Alain Badiou (2007) and Alenka Zupančič (2000; 2006), who are particularly helpful to analyse the ideological formation of the Islamic Republic through subjectivity. The second

[4] Adam Kotsko, Žižek and Theology (2008).
[5] Thomas Brockelman, *Žižek and Heidegger: The Question Concerning Techno-Capitalism* (2008).
[6] Paul Taylor, Žižek and the Media (2010).
[7] Todd McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction* (2003); *Enjoying What We Don't Have: The Political Project of Psychoanalysis* (2013); Yannis Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics* (2007).

theologico-political domain engages with the socio-political analysis of contemporary Iran by building on the previous domain. Louis Althusser (1971) has already demonstrated how socio-political framework of the state shapes subjectivity. Through the intervention into the political field, authors like Ernesto Laclau (2014), Slavoj Žižek (2001; 2008c; 2011) and Yannis Stavrakakis (1999; 2007) among others have pointed to libidinal structure of the contemporary political subject. That allows for a further inquiry discerning how the subjects sustain the ideological order in Iran on a libidinal level. Psychoanalysis has also developed an intriguing critique of the political economy, which will be utilised in the third domain in an Iranian framework. This critique was developed on the background of Marxist theory by Fredric Jameson (1992), Slavoj Žižek (2014a; 2016), Heiko Feldner and Fabio Vighi (2015) among others. Their contributions can help elucidate the peculiar structure of the Iranian political economy within contemporary capitalism. The research also derives inspiration from deconstruction, structuralism and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory through authors like Walter Benjamin (1986; 1992).

A chief obstacle for the inquiry into the unique ideological balance in Iran is the lack of existing literature at the intersection of psychoanalytic critique of ideology and the Islamic Republic. One of the unique contributions of the following thesis is thus to bridge the gap between the psychoanalytic understanding of socio-political practices in ideology and the analysis of their empirical experience in Iran. The research approach is designed to tackle the fundamental question of how Iranian subjects are engaged in unconscious ideological practices, which will conversely also reveal their libidinal support for the existing ideological order. That implies focusing on the conditions that enable the social experience in Iran by looking beyond the framework of empirical reality. As Lacan repeatedly pointed out, the understanding of social reality is already stained by the meaning of the social order in which the analysis takes place. In other words, the analysis of empirical reality is already ideological, since it is done from a particular position of enunciation and has already been mediated through subjectivity immersed in the meaning of the ideological order.

But how are we to approach the analysis of the ideological matrix if ideology already engulfs reality? Althusser (1971, 171) has already pointed out that there is no externality to ideological dynamics, to which we should add Žižek's take on ideology that poses the following paradox: the fundamental level of ideology is not that of an

illusion masking the real state of things, but that of an unconscious fantasy structuring social reality itself (2008b, 30). Consequently, the research cannot unreflectively use the traditional language of philosophy and science, for these are ideological as well. A careful resistance to epistemological certitude is in order, if we are to avoid falling into the dogmatic circle of ideology. The possibility of an effective critique seems to hinge on the condition that the object of analysis remains empty of any empirical reality. Conducting the research from an 'empty viewpoint' allows me to bypass the empirical traps that pull the analysis right back into ideology. Such theoretical perspective therefore elucidates the underlying matrix of ideological fantasy in Iran that provides the subjects with a consistent experience of social reality.

The shift of perspective to the libidinal dimension of ideology endorses the premise that the place of inquiry should be devoid of any positively defined content. Psychoanalytic method provides the conceptual framework and tools by accessing the libidinal economy of the subject invested to fill this lack and analysing the processes structuring social reality. If the function of ideology is to mediate social reality in a way that the subjects experience it without its inherent antagonisms, then this mediation must occur beyond its discursive frame. The approach to empirical reality would thus already be immersed in ideology and the analysis of its discourse already stained by certain meaning. The inquiry must therefore intervene in the place where there is no externality to ideological dynamics – the unconscious. This is precisely what a Lacanian conceptual approach strives to achieve, namely to elucidate the access to the unconscious apparatus through observable mechanisms and structures that can be subjected to analysis. These manifest, interpret and transfer ideological content of the subject, which is essentially founded upon the misrecognition of the unconscious. In other words, psychoanalysis grants us the access to the unconscious ideological structures that strive to erase the antagonisms of the socio-symbolic order.

Such approach also avoids the ideological traps of traditional critique, which conceives ideology as an external mask obfuscating reality.[8] The latter unwittingly confines itself to seek some alienated truths laying behind the mask, overlooking the fact this very idea

[8] One of the pivotal works of the traditional critique of ideology is Marx and Engels' book The German Ideology (1970), where ideology is considered as an inversion of reality, as a camera obscura. See Methodology chapter for further reading; for the liberal tradition of ideology analysis, as opposed to ideology critique, see Michael Freeden (2003); Freeden, Sargent and Stears (2015).

is already ideological. "The ultimate idolatry is not the idolizing of the mask, of the image itself, but the belief that there is some hidden positive content beyond the mask" (Žižek 2003, 138). Such approach is blind to the difference between the discursive frame and the positive content that fills it out, which traps it in the framework of ideology. In contrast, the psychoanalytic approach outlined above moves beyond the analysis of ideological content by endorsing the inquiry from the vantage point of ontological lack. In other words, it moves beyond discourse analysis, which would inevitably situate the inquiry within the framework of ideology. To avoid stepping in the dogmatic circle of ideology in Iran, I will approach it by following Žižek's conceptual division of ideology as described in the book Mapping Ideology (2012a). He conceives ideology as a series of practices, mediated but not limited to language, which produce and legitimise certain power relations on three interconnected levels (Doctrine, Belief, Ritual). Ideology can only fully constitute itself through all of these three ideological levels, where subjects are simultaneously influenced by ideology both internally and externally.

The insights emanating from such an approach reveal that a successful ideology conceals itself in the seemingly complete socio-symbolic order by covering its inherent contradictions. These observations are crucial, since the subjects gain identity through ideological rituals and practices *via* the symbolic network of signifiers constituted by the above three levels of ideology. According to this theoretical perspective, the ideological subjects exclude certain disturbing elements from reality in order to experience it as a meaningful totality. Their identity is therefore accompanied by a notion of the world that is necessarily incomplete, since ideology strives to exclude certain antagonisms to achieve a stable socio-symbolic order. Ideology therefore fills the place of these excluded contradictions, meaning we can analyse them by approaching the inherent ideological antagonisms. The contradictions of the Iranian ideological order can be discerned through the social antagonisms as described by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe through the over-identification with the symptom of ideological fantasy.[9] They can be approached through subjectivity, since the latter excludes antagonisms from ideological totality. These antagonisms then return to social

[9] The approach to the social antagonism and the symptom of fantasy will be developed in the Methodology chapter. For further reading on the analysis of the social antagonism, see Laclau and Mouffe 2014.

reality as spectral apparitions in the form of the symptom. I will adapt the inquiry into ideology in Iran according to the above ideological triad in order to identify and analyse different mechanisms that constitute its matrix. Such approach should conversely also reveal how the libidinal structures of Iranian political subjectivity sustain the ideological balance. This research therefore identifies and analyses the gaps and antagonisms in ideology in Iran, as well as discerning the way these antagonisms are neutralised by ideology through subjectivity.

1.2. Key research questions and interests

To pinpoint the entry points into the analysis of the ideological balance in Iran, the thesis pivots around the following four fundamental research questions. These questions simultaneously serve to further explore both the theory of ideology and the socio-symbolic order of the Islamic Republic. They form the backbone of this thesis and are spread throughout different chapters addressing various angles of inquiry. Such approach allows me to analyse the roles of different ideological mechanisms, their specific functions in various frameworks, along with the way their interdependency constitutes and sustains social reality. A detailed theoretical procedure on how to approach these questions will be developed in the Methodology chapter.

a) How to access the libidinal dimension of the hegemonic ideological order in Iran?

I will borrow Slavoj Žižek's conceptualisation of the Hegelian triad from Mapping Ideology (2012a) to define the basic disposition of ideology in Iran and approach the analysis of its specific mechanisms. The first level of ideological Doctrine will be concerned with the theoretical foundations and arguments rationalising the Iranian socio-political order. The next level of ideological Belief embodies the material practices and apparatuses of its Doctrine, wittingly explained by Louis Althusser's inquiry into ideological apparatuses of the state.[10] Together they culminate in the ideological Ritual, where ideology occupies a place of an unconscious existence. The disposition of ideology on these three levels will allow me to interrogate the libidinal relations between the subjects, institutions and the ideological order. This conceptual

[10] See Louis Althusser's famous essay Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (1971).

division is in the background of the following chapters and points to the interdependency of different ideological levels that constitute the social reality in Iran.

b) What keeps the underlying meaning of the ideological edifice in Iran consistent?

According to my theoretical perspective, society requires certain signifiers (in the form of politics, culture, history, economy etc.) to cover the cracks in the socio-symbolic order and provide a balance to the ideological structure. Lacan described this textual operation through the theory of the Master Signifier, which endows the ideological structure with meaning. Certain ideological content therefore acquires a hegemonic position through the Master Signifier, which provides a seemingly complete experience of the ideological order without its antagonisms (Lacan 2006a, 694; Žižek 2008d, 22-23, 51). The identification of the Master Signifier would point to the renouncement of other particular socio-political contents, which simultaneously enables ideology in Iran to absorb the general discontent and hold individuals accountable for a particular transgression. What pins down the meaning of ideology in Iran and provides the regime in Tehran with the needed political and public stability?

c) From where does the ideological order in the Islamic Republic derive its power?

Žižek and his contemporaries have identified the ultimate place where ideology retains its power as a category of ideological enjoyment. All ideologies are structured around a particular object of enjoyment, which may be located by interrogating particular responses to the social order sustained by desire, the big Other.[11] I will identify this object by analysing the relation of the subject to the Other, in this case, the Other in the Iranian ideological edifice. The subject's relation to the object of enjoyment would conversely also reveal its basic psychic structure that sustains the Other *via* this object. The fixation on the Other provides a particular enjoyment for the subject and reveals a fantasy space for ideology. A consideration of how the Other is related to the subject's fantasy should also expose the libidinal investments into the symbolic structure in Iran. The analysis of the ideological enjoyment therefore concerns identifying a whole

[11] I will elaborate on the theory of desire, the object of fantasy, the big Other and the ideological enjoyment in the Methodology chapter.

spectre of interwoven ideological mechanisms and discerns the modality of libidinal investments for the sustainability of the ideological order.

d) How is the peculiar ideological balance in the revolutionary state and its political economy achieved?

This inquiry overlaps with the previous research questions, while it simultaneously analyses the organisation of socio-political structures in the Islamic Republic. The analysis of ideological balance would bring to the fore the mechanisms behind the country's remarkable resilience in the face of international political and economic isolation.[12] This particular inquiry also intervenes in questions puzzling political scientists in regard to Iran's revolutionary potential and simultaneously elucidates its utilisation for ideological reproduction on an unconscious level.[13] The question of ideological balance is equally intriguing in the case of political economy. Since the country was founded on anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist rhetoric, how is its economy organised? Is the apparent mutually exclusive option between capitalist globalisation and religious fundamentalism only a superficial one? If so, how is the balance between them achieved?

1.3. The structure of the thesis

The thesis is composed of interdependent chapters, articulated into a discursive whole. It is an interpretive analysis, establishing consistent relations between each chapter. A holistic approach is favoured, where different parts and chapters of the thesis analyse various topics that culminate in the Conclusion. The thesis consists of eight chapters: the Introduction and the Methodological framework are followed by three thematic parts consisting of five chapters dealing with ideology critique of the Islamic Republic, succeeded by a Conclusion to the thesis that provides a synthesis of the underlying argument. I will utilise the psychoanalytic critique of ideology in the Iranian framework, separated in different social, political and economic domains. Each part and its chapters necessarily build on and develop the knowledge from the preceding chapters and I will justify the specific theoretical approach in the introduction to in each part.

[12] Iran has been under severe international economic and political sanctions. See chapter 7 for further details.

[13] I will analyse the libidinal sustainability of the ideological order in Iran in chapter 6.

The core of the thesis is divided into three thematic domains previously mentioned, where each part consists of an introduction and an empirical inquiry that illuminates the background of the ideology critique in the subsequent chapters. Part one 'Ideological formation of the Islamic Republic' consists of chapters three and four, which analyse the social, political and cultural background that played a major role in the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Within the first part, chapter three deploys an ahistorical approach to discern how the history of social and religious features form the core of identity of both the subjects and the state. It seeks to show how religion offered an empty space for the formation of the subject's identity, which was attached to the identity of the emerging state. This move made religious and national identity consubstantial, whose fusion is tied with the enjoyment of the Nation appropriated by the state. Chapter four analyses the deconstruction of the millennia old monarchical order and the subsequent construction of an entirely new socio-symbolic order under the Islamic Republic. This structural shift is approached with the help of Alain Badiou's theory of the Event, whose Lacanian reading allows us to observe the ontological aspects of the Islamic revolution that tied the subjects to the new ideological order. Part one of the thesis therefore looks at how subjectivity is imbedded in the Iranian ideological order and analyses how that order was constructed at the level of an unconscious agency.

Part two 'The socio-political analysis of contemporary Iran' consists of an empirical inquiry, followed by two chapters dedicated to the analysis of Iran's hybrid political system and the libidinal sustainability of such construction. Chapter five analyses the power relations in the political arena that elucidate the functions of the state and its associated institutions in the ideological order. It expounds how the ontological shifts constructing a new ideological order described in the previous two chapters materialised themselves in the framework of the Islamic Republic. Is Iran a modern state with fully functioning institutions, or a loosely governed structure based on religious rules? How does the systemic disposition of religious and republican institutions influence the relations to Authority? What kind of ideological power structure does such a systemic dichotomy produce? Chapter six builds on the answers to these questions and develops a critique of the system's libidinal sustainability. It approaches the reproduction of ideology through Lacanian forms of subjectivity and analyses how the relation between the religious state and its subjects is maintained on an unconscious level. Part two

therefore analyses the materialisation of ideology in the socio-political framework of the Islamic Republic, as well as its libidinal balance.

Part three 'Iranian Political Economy' builds on the combined insights of the unconscious attitudes to Authority, as well as the anonymous power structure within which Authority is exercised. Given that the political order is established on an anti-capitalist discourse, is the Iranian economy based on its own revolutionary principles, or is it silently embedded in the global capitalist dynamics? Is it possible that these seemingly contradictory phenomena are the opposing sides of the same coin? If so, how are they fused together into a functioning political economy? This chapter therefore utilises the historical, as well as ontological approach to construct a critique of the political economy in Iran. The concluding chapter eight then puts the findings of the above chapters in perspective by assessing the undertaken analysis and opening questions for further inquiry.

2. Methodological framework: The matrix of ideology

This chapter aims to explain the theoretical assumptions that underpin the approach of this thesis to the study of ideology in the framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Following the Introduction, it attempts to define the change in the method of inquiry informed by theoretical psychoanalysis. I will differentiate my approach from other forms of research by separating it from the predominant empirical analyses. The prevailing methodological approach to the investigation of power was spearheaded by Michel Foucault in the 1970's through discourse analysis.[14] As much as such an approach appears to offer a compelling alternative to the Marxist paradigm of ideology critique, it simultaneously abandons the problematic of ideology by failing to recognise that the existing power relations are a necessary result of the inherent contradictions of a given socio-political order.[15] As Lacan stressed again and again, social reality itself is already a consequence of a successful mediation of such contradictions.[16] In this sense, a discursive analysis of social reality is unable to look beyond its empirical frame, which consequently situates the inquiry within the prevailing ideological meaning.

The complexity of the above problematic lies in the fact that, from a psychoanalytic perspective, power concerns creating unconscious beliefs and fantasies that sustain an ideological order, not merely imposing one's will. These beliefs are manufactured

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[14] Foucault approaches the notion of power by analysing its omnipotent consequences on the level of empirical reality. However, his discourse analysis overlooks the conditions of possibility sustaining a power structure and cannot reveal the production and manifestation of its effects beyond its discursive frame. Conversely, a psychoanalytic approach points to the lack in the symbolic structure of power, where this lack is masked precisely by its apparent ubiquity. Such inquiry conceives power as an anonymous structure of relations, maintained by imposition of rules that determine social reality. For readings on the psychoanalytic take on power and ideology, see Verhaeghe 2014; Vighi and Feldner 2007; for a discursive approach to power, see Foucault 2012 and 2015; see Part II and chapter 5 for the political analysis of the power structure in Iran and chapter 6 for its libidinal sustainability.

[15] The early Marxist approach to ideology considers it as an external veil masking reality, which is additionally obfuscated by the social relations under capitalism. This veil should be removed if the real social conditions are to emerge, which inevitably confines the critique to invent new ideological truths and meanings behind the mask. This deadlock was approached by Lacan in the late 1960's, who developed a connection between Marx's critique of political economy and Freud's discovery of the unconscious. See Lacan's *Seminar VXI* (2006b) and *Seminar XVII* (2007); Marx and Engels 1970; for the development of the psychoanalytic critique of ideology, see Žižek 2012a, 2008b, 2008a; Dolar 1993; Althusser 1971; Laclau 1990; for the liberal tradition of ideology analysis, as opposed to ideology critique, see Michael Freeden (2003); Freeden, Sargent and Stears (2015).

[16] See subchapter 2.1. for further reading; see also Lacan 1992, chapter 2; Lacan 2002.

through consent rather than coercion by concealing their true relations of domination.[17] A successful power structure inevitably creates some irresistible lure and the greatest form of power appears to be precisely this hypnotic force, which reveals itself as the glue that keeps the social fibre together. Any power structure seems to intervene in the unconscious by providing the fantasy space to conceal its domination. Indispensable as they are, the analyses of empirical reality can only inquire into the consequences those fantasies produce, but cannot elucidate how precisely such power originates and reproduces itself. While this research benefits enormously from the literature discussing various aspects of the Islamic Republic through the historicist approach, ethnography, sociology and the analysis of socio-political discourse that I will discuss throughout the thesis, these inquiries by themselves cannot help us address the complexity of research questions laid out in the Introduction. Such approaches overlook that the content in question is already negotiated through subjectivities immersed in the meaning of the ideological order they try to analyse. They alone are unable to address the ideological ramifications of this thesis that changed the research interest from the analysis of social reality of the Islamic Republic to the conditions of possibility sustaining such reality.

Psychoanalytic inquiry allows for a new approach to the study of ideology by locating the place where the latter intervenes in subjectivity – the unconscious. While the psychoanalytic method is most commonly associated with clinical practices established by Sigmund Freud, it has also developed a variety of theoretical explorations.[18] While this research does not concern itself with clinical inquires, it develops its arguments on primary and secondary literature dealing with theoretical psychoanalysis developed by Jacques Lacan (2006a; 1994; 1991), Bruce Fink (2004; 1997), Slavoj Žižek (2008a; 2008b; 2012a) and others. This research also attempts to analyse the ideological balance in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which presupposes an engagement with the studies of its social reality. The analysis of social phenomena is a relatively untapped, if not neglected, domain in Lacanian psychoanalysis. However, a number of established scholars are showing a growing interest in the research of social phenomena *via*

[17] This idea was developed by Antonio Gramsci through his notion of *hegemony* in his famous *Prison Notebooks* (2011); for the development and interpretation of this notion, see Laclau and Mouffe 2014.

[18] Freud distinguished between psychoanalysis as a method investigating unconscious mental processes, a method for treating neurotic disorders, and a set of theories about the mental processes revealed by treatment. The term psychoanalysis on its own can therefore refer to psychoanalysis as practice, as theory, or both (Evans 2006, 152-153).

psychoanalytic theory, such as Eric Santner,[19] Claude Lefort,[20] Kenneth Reinhard,[21] as well as Slavoj Žižek.[22] These authors promote the psychoanalytic shift of perspective to the libidinal dimension of ideology in order to discern how it underlines the structure of social reality in question.

But is the psychoanalytic method equipped with the right tools to approach the questions that necessarily concern the analysis of society? We should address from the start the 'psychological reductionism' psychoanalytic intervention is often accused of, that is to say, the understanding of socio-political phenomena through the reference of the individual psyche.[23] As Lacan explained in *The Freudian Thing* (2006a, 362), Freud regarded the study of social reality such as languages and institutions, literature and art as an essential qualification of the analytic experience.[24] Lacan himself is known for his creative readings of a variety of philosophical discourses (Kant, Hegel, Descartes, Plato, Aristotle), structural anthropology (Levi-Strauss), linguistics (Saussure, Jakobson) and topology. While agreeing with Freud on the legitimacy of the psychoanalytic method, Lacan more carefully recognises the analytic discovery of "relational tensions that seem to play a basic role in all societies" (Lacan 2006a, 104). He indicated that the Freudian movement from the individual to the social should be complemented with the opposite movement from the social to the subject that is not reduced to individuality.[25] Lacan

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[19] Eric Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (2011); *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (1997).

[20] Claude Lefort articulated the notion of 'democratic invention' in Democracy and Political Theory (1988) *via* Lacan's categories of the Symbolic and the Real. See analysis developed in subchapter 5.3.2.

[21] Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbour: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (2013) with Žižek and Santner; *After Oedipus: Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* (2009) with Julia R. Lupton.

[22] Žižek has moved to pursue more philosophical aspects of psychoanalytic theory, but produced volumes such as Did somebody say Totalitarianism? (2011), Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle (2005) and Enjoy your Nation as Yourself! (in Žižek 1993), along with his frequent interventions in the political realm.

[23] Against the usual reproach that psychoanalytic inquiry ultimately produces a theory of the cult of personality by intervening in social or political domain, Žižek argues (2012a, 29) that the theoretical as well as practical solution to authoritarian populism is offered precisely by psychoanalysis; it can discern how ideology captures the underlying structure of a given order and delineate the subject's libidinal economy sustaining it.

[24] Freud wrote at the very beginning of his Group Psychology that individual psychology is simultaneously social psychology dealing with social phenomena (1949, 1-2). He further lent the psychoanalytic method legitimacy to embark on social analysis by arguing that the social self is reduced to the individual, indicating the inquiry moving from the individual to the social (Freud 1989).

[25] Lacan's novel notion of the unconscious Cartesian subject of science is central to his work and at the heart of most contemporary Lacanian attempts to articulate the analysis of the socio-political spectrum on the 'objective,' social and/or political level. The Lacanian theory of subjectivity allows a proper implication between psychoanalysis and socio-political inquiry, while avoiding the traps of a mere

conceptualised subjectivity on the level of social reality, where the construction of social objectivity overlaps with the political identity in the unconscious.[26] Such approach elucidates the overlap of subjective and objective dimensions and is indispensable in showing that the understanding of social reality is not equivalent to understanding of what society is, but what it prevents it from being (Laclau 1990, 44).

The psychoanalytic change of perspective in the method of inquiry into ideology stresses the importance of its pervasive libidinal constitution. If ideology intervenes in the subject's unconscious to mediate the inherent contradictions of the socio-symbolic order, the psychoanalytic method enables us to locate the way these contradictions are negotiated. Such approach allows me to attempt to define the form of ideological order currently present in Iran, while it simultaneously discerns the conditions sustaining it. With the change of perspective to the libidinal dimension of ideology, the psychoanalytic approach can therefore help us illuminate the balancing of ideological mechanisms in relation to the unconscious agency in Iran. The unconscious configuration of ideology can be analysed as a structure through a series of concepts Lacan introduced throughout the 1960's.[27]

I approach the psychoanalytic ideology critique by developing a model of analysis through the Lacanian notion of fantasy.[28] Fantasy should not be read as opposed to reality; rather, Lacan stressed its role in the mediation of the inherent antagonisms of social reality into a consistent unit. Such mediation negotiates certain inherent contradictions of the socio-symbolic order, which further disturb social reality in the

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'application' that simply adds a theory of subjectivity to the field of political analysis. For readings on the Lacanian subjectivity, see his essays Presentation on Psychical Causality, The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectics of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious in Lacan 2006a; Lacan 1994; Fink 1997, chapter 4, 5; Stavrakakis 1999, chapter 1; Žižek 2008b, part 3; 2008c, chapter 2.

[26] I will show how such unconscious process shapes religious, as well as national identity of the Iranian subject in chapter 3 and discern the way they overlap in ideological fantasy in chapter 4.

[27] The famous Lacanian approach to the unconscious is resonated in the dictum "the unconscious is structured like a language" and was proposed in Seminar III (Lacan 1997). Lacan furthered his approach with a set of mechanisms throughout the 1960's in his collected writings the Écrits (Lacan 2006a). See also Lacan 1994, part 1.

[28] Lacan developed the notion of fantasy from Freud in Seminar IV (1998) and devotes Seminar XIV (2002) to this concept. Its theoretical explanation for this inquiry can be found in subchapter 2.1.; see also Lacan 1994; Lacan 2006a; Fink 1997, chapter 5; Žižek 2008a, chapter 1; for the construction of fantasy in Iran, see chapter 4; for its political function and libidinal sustainability in Iran, see chapters 5 and 6.

form of what Lacan names *objet petit a*.[29] *Objet a* plays an implicit socio-political role in ideological fantasy by representing a certain lure, which the subjects follow through the fantasy narration. The desire to attain this object triggers the fantasy and seduces the subject into believing it can reach the object.[30] We can observe how fantasy and desire are a part of the same logic, which attends to the mediation of both the subject and society. Lacan pointed to the dialectical overlap of the subject and the social order by discerning the way an object is signified into the subject's fantasy *via* an overarching signifier, the Master Signifier (S1), which pins down the meaning of the ideological order.[31] Its dialectical function is to bind subject and object in the field of meaning, which provides enjoyment to the subject that sustains the libidinal consistency of the entire fantasy.[32] A successful overlap of the subject and object must be registered in the unconscious network of signifiers sustaining the socio-symbolic order, the big Other.[33]

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[29] Lacan defines *objet a* as the lost object of desire the subject seeks, but can never attain, which sets desire in motion. In Seminar X (2014) and The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis (1994), *objet a* is defined as a residue from the process of symbolisation, further elaborated in Seminar XVII (2007). As an object-cause of desire, it simultaneously fills the lack produced by the process of symbolisation, as well as presents its impasse. See the explanation in subchapter 2.2.; Fink 1997, chapter 7; Stavrakakis 1999, chapter 2; for its emergence in ideology in Iran, see chapter 4; for its political and libidinal role, see chapters 5 and 6.

[30] Desire has a peculiar status in Lacanian psychoanalysis and should not be mistaken with need. Desire can never be fully satisfied, and its function is to ceaselessly reproduce itself. It does not represent the object, but the relation to the lack in *objet a*. See its theoretical description in subchapter 2.2.; Lacan's essay The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectics of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious in *Écrits* (2006a); Lacan 1994; Fink 2004, chapter 4; for the emergence of desire in the Iranian framework, see chapter 4.

[31] The Master Signifier captures the underlying meaning of the symbolic order. Lacan defines the Master Signifier as the "signifier that signifies nothing" (Lacan 1997, 185), as "what represents the subject for another signifier" (Lacan 2006a, 694). This signifier lends its overarching empty meaning to other signifiers in the signifying chain that constitute the field of meaning. See theoretical explanation in subchapter 2.3.; Lacan 1997, part 3; Lacan 2006a, chapter 30; Fink 2004, chapters 3, 4; for its emergence in the Islamic Republic chapter 4 and its political function in chapter 5.

[32] Enjoyment expresses the paradoxical satisfaction the subjects derives from the attempts to enjoy his symptom, namely the suffering from his own satisfaction. This paradoxical transgression is captured in the French word jouissance, which Lacan conceptualised as opposed to the pleasure principle that limits enjoyment in Seminar VII (1992) and developed further in Seminar XX (1999). Žižek's most unique contribution to ideology critique is to conceptualise ideological enjoyment as a political category, as the last libidinal support of ideology. See theoretical explanation in subchapter 2.4.; Žižek 2008b and 2008d; for its emergence in Iranian fantasy, see chapter 3 and its political role in chapter 4; for its role in libidinal sustainability of fantasy in Iran, see chapter 6; chapter 7 for its role in political economy in Iran.

[33] The big Other is one of the most complex terms in Lacan's work and integral to the symbolic order as a radical alterity. It lends identity to the subject and mediates the relationship with other subjects. The subjects presuppose the Other as a symbolic field of meaning to recognise themselves in it. Consequently, speech and desire originate from the Other, despite the Other being a symbolic fiction of the subject. See theoretical explanation in subchapter 2.5.; Lacan 1994, part 4; Seminar XVI (Lacan

What we see emerging are interdependent conceptual relations that constitute the unconscious ideological matrix, which I will develop in greater detail below.

In order to develop a critique of the libidinal dimension of ideology, I will approach it as a series of practices mediated by, but not limited to, language, which produces and legitimises certain power relations. I begin by aligning ideology to Žižek's (2012a) conceptual division of ideology on three different levels in regard to its discursive, material and reproductive dimensions. Different ideological levels can be analysed by aligning them to the Hegelian triad of Doctrine, Belief and Ritual. Ideological Doctrine analyses ideology in itself, as a pure set of ideas, theories and arguments that provide it with discursive meaning. The level of Belief analyses ideology for itself, in its external materiality that influences the subject through ideological state apparatuses (ISA).[34] Ideological Ritual approaches ideology both in and for itself, reflected back onto itself, as 'spontaneous' social practices. This category is split into institutional apparatuses that dominate and regulate the life of individuals 'from above' (ISA) and ideology that emerges spontaneously 'from below,' out of the subject's activities. ISA therefore represent the materiality that always-already pertains to ideology as such, while a decentred mechanism constructing the socio-symbolic order (e.g. commodity fetishism) always-already pertains to external materiality as the social actuality of production.[35] According to Žižek, this opposition surfaces as the ultimate struggle between the state and the market, between an external organisation of society 'from above' and a seemingly spontaneous organisation 'from below' (2012a, 9-15, 17-18).

To identify and analyse different mechanisms constituting Iranian social reality, I will align ideology in Iran according to this triad throughout the following chapters. I will first consider ideology in Iran on the level of Doctrine in the introduction to each of the three Parts, which will provide the insights on its discursive level, namely the way the Iranian Regime justifies certain policies and decisions. This can be discerned through the complex set of ideas, beliefs, convictions and arguments destined to convince subjects of their 'truth,' which, in reality, serve particular power interests. The

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2006b); Fink 1997, chapters 1, 3, 5; for its emergence in Iranian fantasy, see chapter 4; for its political and libidinal functions, see chapters 5 and 6.

[34] For the analysis of this process, see Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1971).

[35] For a description of commodity fetishism, see Marx 1982, 164-165; Vighi 2012, 33-35; Lacan 2007.

arguments and theories on the level of Doctrine are empty and pointless if they are not supported by ideological Belief, which designates the material manifestation of ideology through ideological practices, rituals and institutions *via* state apparatuses (ISA). On the level of Belief, I will analyse the composition and ideological practices of Iranian institutions, social structures, the political system of the state and the organisation of political economy that constitute social reality. In terms of religious practices in ideology in Iranfor instance, the level of Ritual reveals that religious belief itself is not merely an inner conviction, but derives from religious institutions and their rituals, which stand for the very mechanisms that generate that belief. Performance of external rituals therefore generates its own ideological foundation and I will address this point in subchapter 2.5. (Althusser 1971, 171, 176; Žižek 2012a, 10-13). This inquiry is focused particularly on the level of ideological Ritual, where a successful ideology conceals itself in social fantasy.

2.1. Ideological fantasy and its symptom

Every successful ideology conceals itself in the totality of the socio-symbolic edifice that is sustained through ideological fantasy. For Lacan, fantasy is not opposed to reality, since reality is already a mediated subjective process stained by the subject's desire. Fantasy, rather, serves as a protective screen mediating the inherent contradictions of the socio-symbolic order and provides the matrix through which the subject begins to desire. In fantasy, the subject is frequently unperceived, but always present and situates itself as determined by it (Lacan 1994, 60, 185; 2002, 6). Fantasy contains the libidinal investments of the subject and is basically the subject's own answer to the process of symbolisation, i.e. the subject's inclusion into the symbolic order. We can conceive fantasy as the subject's solution to the deadlock of the inherent social antagonism of the ideological order, whose contradictions are embodied in the objects or ideas of a certain society (e.g. freedom, God, Nation).[36] Fantasy thus serves a political role for the social body by mediating these ideological gaps, which are necessarily negotiated through the symbolic order. This mediation binds the subject and the social order precisely at the intersection of their gaps, which is simultaneously the

[36] Laclau and Mouffe (2014) conceptualised the social antagonism as an entry point for ideological analysis by stressing that the distorting mechanisms themselves represent society as an object, which is simultaneously necessary as well as impossible. Such approach shifts the study to the illusion sustaining social totality as its integral part.

hinge keeping them together.[37] That points to the overlap of subjective and objective dimensions, which implies that subjectivity cannot be separated from the social fabric. The gap in the subject thus reflects the gap in the social order, where the otherness of society in its antagonistic nature mirrors the otherness of the subject (Vighi 2012, 99).

Fantasy is thus the subject's response to some fundamental social impossibility, which I will approach in the Iranian case by detecting the radical inconsistency of its social structure that can be located in the symptom.[38] The symptom marks the point where a materialised social antagonism erupts in the social surface and disturbs the smooth appearance of ideological fantasy as the repressed remainder of the socio-symbolic order. At the same time, highlighting its ambiguity, it could also be regarded as a way for the subject to organise its social reality, whose fantasmatic completeness is kept together by unconscious enjoyment. The key point, however, is that the subject can only enjoy his symptom as long as its logic escapes him. Since social totality hinges on symptomatic exclusion, it is necessary to see how social reality negotiates its inherent contradictions. These inconsistencies are disavowed through fetishism, which simultaneously also embodies the structural impossibility of a totalised society.[39] By suspending the antagonism of the socio-symbolic order, the fetish marks the eruption of enjoyment in the social field, whose logic is solidified through ideological belief (Žižek 2008b, 16, 18, 22, 78-82, 140-144).[40]

Let us first draw a demarcation line between the fetish and the symptom. The symptom disturbs the ideological lie sustaining the socio-symbolic totality as spectral apparitions

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[37] That echoes the Lacanian thesis of the subject's mediation by the symbolic order, the big Other. Subject's identity depends on this inextricable relationship, since the subject is a subject by the virtue of its subjection to the field of the Other (Lacan 1994, 246). The lack in the subject is thus the lack in the Other, the social order, whose overlap binds them together. See also subchapter 2.5.; Lacan's Seminar II (1991).

[38] For reading on the symptom, see Laclau and Mouffe 2014; Žižek 2008b, part 1 and 2008g.

[39] Žižek introduced the notion of fetishist disavowal, which suspends the knowledge on the inherent antagonism of the socio-symbolic order by tying the subject to the enjoyment of its disavowed core. He illustrates this point through Mannoni's formula '*Je sais bien, mais quand-même …*' (I know very well, but …), claiming totalitarian systems rely on such fetishist disavowal. This suspension enables the subjects to continue believing in the system despite the materialisation of its antagonism in the social edifice. To put it bluntly, fetishist disavowal suspends the distance between knowledge and action. See Žižek 2008a, chapter 3; Freud 1956; Lacan 2007; Mannoni 1969; for political and libidinal role of fetish in Iran, see chapters 5 and 6.

[40] Ideological belief concerns the practices and rituals solidifying the ideological order and unconsciously tying the subject to it *via* material repetition. See theoretical explanation in subchapter 2.5.; Pascal 2006; Žižek 2001; 2012a; for the function of ideological belief in religious and political identity in Iran, see chapters 4 and 5.

emerging from the repressed antagonism. On the contrary, a fetish is an embodiment of a lie, which helps to sustain the truth; the subjects can accept reality, since they cling to their fetish in order to sustain it. The fetish allows the subjects to embrace reality despite the knowledge of its inconsistency, which they suspend through fetishist disavowal. The latter therefore enables them to experience social totality without its inherent contradictions, which produces ideological enjoyment. In this sense, we could also discern religion as a form of social totality, whose inherent antagonisms need to be disavowed for it to function. With the suspension of such unbearable knowledge, the fetish implies consequences on the level of action, making subjects fetishists in practice rather than in the mind. The line between the symptom and fetish is indeed blurry, as an object can function both as the symptom of a repressed desire, a reminder of certain loss, and simultaneously as a fetish, embodying a renounced belief that covers a certain loss. We can therefore conceive the symptom as a sort of reverse of the fetish. If the fetish represents a lie sustaining the false appearance of the socio-symbolic totality, the symptom then represents a false appearance that disturbs the very lie of the socio-symbolic totality (Vighi 2012, 30-31; Žižek 2001, 13-14).

The role of fantasy is therefore to construct a framework of relations that provide the subjects with the experience of society as a complete structure, whose contradictions are suspended through fetishist disavowal. The relation between fantasy and the ideological antagonism is ambiguous in the way fantasy conceals this traumatic moment, yet at the same time creates its repressed point of reference. This negativity enters the fantasy frame *via objet petit a*. Consequently, it is necessary to detect this element and analyse how desire sustains fantasy through an impossible object.

2.2. Desire and the sublime object of fantasy

Desire triggers the fantasy by pointing to an object, which the subjects identify as the cause of their desire. It lures the subjects into believing they can reach the object that would solve the deadlock of the inconsistent social reality. However, the function of desire is not to find satisfaction to this deadlock, but to endlessly reproduce itself. If desire brought satisfaction, it would simply disintegrate and thus fail to support the fantasy frame. Desire supports fantasy by attaching itself to an object, which would fill the gaps emerging in the socio-symbolic order from the process of symbolisation. However, unconscious desires follow no pre-established objects, which is why desire in

its quest to fill the gap inscribed in subjectivity slides from object to object. The subject, on the other hand, always experiences a lack in the given object of desire. Desire's constant failure is then precisely the mechanism enabling its reproduction by endlessly attaching itself to new objects. This consideration points to its necessary mediation by the symbolic order, reverberating the Lacanian premise that desire is always the desire of the Other (Fink 2004, 119-121; Lacan 2006a, 525).

Objet a enters the fantasy frame as a minimal embodiment of some excluded element, whose exclusion helps to establish social totality. Since the Lacanian subject is mediated by the Other, it depends on symbolic castration for the inclusion in the socio-symbolic edifice, which is ultimately the function of language. Castration marks a certain prohibition of the socio-symbolic construction, which returns in social reality as a spectral apparition minimally materialised in the object of fantasy, the *objet a*. The latter functions as a substitute for some missing representation and fascinates the subject by materialising its lack. Since desire relies on fantasy to fill the lack with certain objects, these become substitutes for the repressed desire through *objet a*. That is to say, fantasy constructs a framework of social reality by mediating between the formal symbolic structure and the objects in reality. Through this mediation, fantasy puts certain objects in a position where they function as objects of desire, which would close the gap opened in the socio-symbolic structure. The subject then follows the object through the fantasy narration in vain hope to satisfy its desire (Lacan 2006a, 439, 696-697; Žižek 2008a 7, 58, 276; 2008b 69, 178-181).

The object of fantasy thus sets desire in motion and provides it with a frame of consistency. That means *objet a* is simultaneously a signifier, which is a part of representation of reality by filling its own impossibility, and also an object, which must be included in the signifying text. Here lies the sublimity of *objet petit a*: it is an ordinary object, which happens to find itself occupying a position of an impossible object of desire. While the object of desire can be isolated and identified, the very cause of this desire, the lack embodied by the unconscious, which is what the object masks, must remain repressed. The function of *objet a* is thus to assume the role of a mediator between the repressed knowledge that produces certain apparitions in reality and empirical objects that embody this impossibility. It is crucial to think of the function of *objet a* as both the element that fills the gap in the socio-symbolic order and the object that simultaneously embodies its radical inconsistency. In a dialectical overlap, it

therefore simultaneously enables and prevents the subject's full identity (Žižek 2001, 97; 2008a, 105; 2008b, 211-223, 234; 2008c, 126).

Objet a fills the gap in the socio-symbolic structure for a consistent field of reality to emerge. Since subjectivity and the socio-symbolic order emerge simultaneously by the intersection of their gaps, *objet a* correlates to the subject by filling the lack of the Other for it. Their dialectical interdependence thus enables the structuring of relations between subjects *via* the symbolic order, insofar as they presuppose there is something 'more in the subject than himself,' namely the fascinating object. *Objet a* is the mediator in the triad of two interacting subjects and the Other, providing the subject with the minimum of identity (Vighi 2012, 101-102; Žižek 2008a, 10, 105, 276; 2008d, 148). For example, an Iranian subject is not only an individual, but also carries within him an inexplicable dimension, such as the divine religious features, supposedly unique to the Iranian nation. These extraordinary features embodied in *objet a* make them greater than their individual characteristics and enable the structuring of identity within a certain social order. The socio-symbolic edifice is therefore always stained by this particular object. It imposes a certain view of reality on the subject and marks its inclusion in the socio-symbolic network. The subject and object overlap when their field of meaning is sutured by a certain overarching signifier that keeps the meaning of the entire ideological field consistent.

2.3. The ideological field of meaning and the Master Signifier

Ideological fantasy becomes effective when an overarching signifier totalises other signifiers through its intervention at certain 'nodal points' in the shifting signifying chain of ideological meaning. Since the content of the subject's reality is managed through fantasy, it necessarily implies the mediation of the symbolic order, i.e. language as the "treasure trove of signifiers," as Lacan puts it in *Écrits* (2006a, 682). In the interaction between subjects and the symbolic order, the whole content is sutured by a central element through the fusion of interconnecting signifiers in the field of ideological meaning. Such an element represents an ideal unity beyond its true properties, when it gets materialised through the socio-symbolic order. This single signifier operates as the Master Signifier (S1), as the ideal frame, when it reduces the signified content to its image.

Since signifiers represent a set of differences to each other, ideology as a fantasy solution deploys a signifier that functions as an empty container for the others' particular meanings.[41] That empty "[…] signifier is what represents the subject to another signifier. This latter signifier is therefore the signifier to which all other signifiers represent the subject – which means that if this signifier is missing, all the other signifiers represent nothing" (Lacan 2006a, 694). This paradoxical signifier therefore represents for another signifier an overarching meaning of fantasy, to which particular signifiers in the signifying chain are attached. S1 therefore holds the meaning of the ideological order together through an ideal notion of reality that is devoid of any particular meaning (Žižek 2008b, 95-97, 107-110; 2008d, 22-23, 51-52, 76). In other words, the particularities of single signifiers are not suppressed, but interlinked with the universal meaning of the chain.[42] That enables them to adapt their particular meanings in the service of the prevailing socio-political structure.

S1 therefore pins down the meaning of a certain socio-symbolic order through an omnipresent notion that represents a certain social impossibility, which is simultaneously embodied in other concepts of the ideological field. The hegemonic struggle of ideology is won or lost if it is able to successfully refer to and manipulate some extra-ideological kernel that holds the community together and cannot be directly reduced to a leverage of political power. Social unity can thus be presented through the reliance on an empty signifier, hegemonised by a particular content of political struggle. The political struggle is therefore the struggle for the content of the empty signifier. Politics marks the gap between an ordinary signifier (S2) and an empty signifier S1. In the hegemonic struggle for ideological meaning, one particular content becomes successful when its signifier is hegemonised and displaces other particular contents by providing the experience of an organised and consistent socio-historical narrative. This narrative predetermines what subjects will experience as reality (Žižek 2008a, 28;

[41] See for example the texts *The instance of the Letter in the Unconscious* and *The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectics of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious* in Lacan 2006a; see also Lacan 1994, part 4.

[42] In the formation of ideological meaning, every signifier becomes a part of a series of equivalences, where its metaphorical surplus connecting it to other signifiers determines its identity retroactively through the process of *differentiality*. It signals a gap where the opposite of one signifier is not another signifier, but the lack of the first; the presence of one signifier equals the absence of its opposite. They enable a chain of meaning when S1 'quilts' the whole field and attaches other signifiers to its overarching identity (Žižek 2008d, 21-23).

2008b, 125-126; 2008c, 206-207).[43] The emergence of S1 in the political field is thus not defined by its own content, but by its possibility of transference. While this element totalises the socio-symbolic order, it also manifests an effect of a certain misperception of the ideological text. It is therefore crucial to detect this element that holds a specific socio-symbolic field together (e.g. God, Nation, Party, Freedom …).

If the task of *objet a* is to bring forward new objects to fill the gaps in the socio-symbolic structure while simultaneously presenting its impasse, the crucial dialectical function of S1 is then to bind and materialise the overlap of subject and object in the field of meaning. That means S1 quilts or sutures the subject's ontological incompleteness and enables the emergence of subjectivity as well as objectivity. The Lacanian understanding of identity confirms this consideration, since the subject is by definition the result of a detour through the Other. The subject borrows the components of its identity from what is available within the specific context of its social order, but, simultaneously, objective reality emerges through the self-alienating acceptance of the mediated role of language (Feldner and Vighi 2015, 67). The dialectical overlap of S1 and *objet a* then enables an at least minimally coherent experience of reality, which produces enjoyment as the ultimate support of ideology.

2.4. Enjoyment: the overlap of lack and excess

Fantasy negotiates the inconsistencies of the subject and society into a consistent unit through the knot of unconscious enjoyment (jouissance), which ties the subject with the socio-symbolic order. Ideological enjoyment is the last support of ideology, which sustains itself by the libidinal satisfaction the subject gets in its attempts to enjoy the symptom. Fantasy is based on the misrecognition of the subject's traumatic core, whose mediation points to a particular logic of enjoyment. According to Lacan, the substance behind the form of fantasy represents a certain enjoyment as a senseless libidinal surplus, which the subjects experience as lack. It functions as the paradoxical 'pleasure in pain,' where enjoyment is generated by the failure of attaining pleasure. It fuels desire when a signifier assumes a material texture of a certain traumatism. This material

[43] Re-articulation of the symbolic order is therefore possible with an emergence of a new S1, which does not only displace the socio-symbolic field, but changes its structuring principle. It marks the reversal of the fundamental matrix of existence, i.e. the acceptance of the terms of the big Other (Žižek 2008c, 311-313). This process happened in the 1979 Islamic revolution, analysed in chapter 4.

fetish-object, recognised in the signifying chain by *objet a*, gives rise to jouissance in the very sense of its impossibility or failure, which both drives and disturbs the subject's activity (Vighi 2012, 11-12; Žižek 2008a, 58; 2008b, xxv, 73-74).

We can discern the modality of enjoyment by looking at the dialectical overlap of lack and excess, where lack is perceived as plenitude. The objects chosen to fill the gap in the symbolic order must get signified by the meaning of the ideological field *via* S1. Their dialectical overlap produces a stable fantasy structure, seemingly devoid of its inherent antagonisms. This overlap produces jouissance, tying the subject to the surplus-enjoyment as the last support of ideology beyond meaning (Žižek 2001, 20-22). In other words, the subject's enjoyment is produced by a dialectical overlap of the subject and object structuring a coherent appearance of the ideological order that is registered by the Other. This conversely creates a social reality seemingly devoid of its antagonisms, which solidifies the fantasy structure and produces enjoyment for the subject. The overlap of S1 and *objet a* therefore creates a certain enjoyment that is inscribed in the political subjectivity immersed in ideology. This overlap is particularly intriguing in the libidinal economy of religion, nationalism and capitalism in Iran, which points to the conflation of the unconscious fantasy with the capitalist matrix I will develop in chapter seven.

In the context of my analysis, we can perhaps best observe the overlap of lack and excess in the religious economy of desire through Law or prohibition. Religious institutions do not prohibit desire, but function as its very guarantee. Their main task is to regulate these desires in the framework of their Law. Desires in such context can thrive freely, since their transgressions do not pose any serious threat to religious authority. The key aspect is to control the excess of jouissance, which cannot be contained in the symbolic Law. Religious institutions have learned not to prohibit and repress jouissance but to channel it, since pure prohibition would only amplify it and undermine the established network of signifiers invested in Authority. A strict enforcement of the symbolic prohibition would eliminate the satisfaction provided by its indefinite postponement and shift the libidinal economy of the subjects from desire to drive.[44] That would conversely provide a more intense and disturbing jouissance that

[44] For an explanation of the notion of drive, see for example Lacan 1994, particularly part III; see also the essay The position of the Unconscious in Lacan 2006a.

could undermine the regulating power of Authority, as we shall see in the example of the Islamic revolution in chapter four (Žižek 2008c, 361).

Instead of prohibiting it, channelling this jouissance properly produces enjoyment in the religious experience. This experience, materialised *via objet a* and perceived by the believer as a unique kernel understood only by his community, is jouissance in its ambiguous excess. This surplus-enjoyment marks the place of the subject's libidinal economy, where the postponement and repression of satisfaction becomes the source of satisfaction itself and the cause of submission to Authority. Ideology attaches itself to the kernel of jouissance, which is the cause of some inexplicable enjoyment (Vighi 2012, 89; Žižek 2008a, 62-63; 2008c, 124-125). Every social system relies on enjoyment and the potential traumatism that structures its socio-symbolic reality. In short, enjoyment ties the subject to the social order and solidifies the subject's belief through the material repetition that sustains the symbolic order, i.e. the big Other.

2.5. Ideological belief and the big Other of fantasy

Let us now look at the way subjects materialise and sustain the entire ideological fantasy of the social order through the three ideological levels of Doctrine, Belief and Ritual. The materialisation of fantasy occurs on the level of ideological Belief, when subjects are interpellated by the big Other on the basis of ideological Doctrine.[45] The Other represents an unconscious agency maintaining the social order through a network of established signifiers. The subjects presuppose the Other as a symbolic field of meaning, which is always-already there for the subjects to recognise themselves in it. The subject and the Other therefore operate through their interdependence; there is no Other without the subject's libidinal investments sustaining the socio-symbolic order and there is conversely no subject without a functioning network of signifiers presupposing the social order. This fictional order is materialised through the dialectical mediation of their lack, which builds and sustains a steady flow of appearances.

[45] Ideological interpellation as the unconscious subjection of the subject to the hegemonic social order was wittingly explained by Louis Althusser (1971). According to Althusser, individuals are interpellated into subjects in a way that they recognise their own existence in the dominant ideology of society in which they live and are as such always-already the products of ideology. However, Althusser does not adequately explain how the external ideological apparatuses of the state become internalised. Žižek suggests this deadlock can be solved through the Lacanian account of the subject's immersion into the symbolic order, the big Other (2008b, 42-44). See particularly Žižek (2008b, chapter 1; 2012a) and Dolar (1993), whose insights form the background of my analysis in the introduction to Part II and chapter 5.

The self-referential circle of the subject and the Other thus maintains an empty distance to the disavowed (Real) kernel of the ideological order. This emptiness exposes the lack of the Other and resonates Lacan's premise that 'there is no such thing as the big Other' (2006a, 700). The knowledge that the big Other is a virtual order, a shared fiction of a real social construction, also introduces the inconsistency reflected in the subject. However, subjects feel bound by the social constrains emanating from this virtual order and follow the commitments structuring their real social relations by suspending the inconsistencies on the level of Ritual. The knowledge of the Other's non-existence must therefore be suspended, since it serves as a guarantee of the fantasy's consistency (Žižek 2001, 109-110; 2008c, 389; 2008d, 151-155).

A closer look reveals that what is at stake is not the subject's own fantasy, but the fantasy of the Other. Fantasy as an imaginary scenario opens up the desire of the Other and enables the subjects to translate this desire into a positive interpellation with which they can identify. The subject is forced to accept a certain social identity *via* the Other along with the common misperception of that order. Identity is then materialised through rituals and practices in the form of belief, which solidifies ideology through its senseless repetition and shapes political consensus on the appearance of the socio-symbolic order. For this reason, ideological belief is always displaced onto the Other, producing a need for symbolic fiction as it forms into a symbolic trust (Vighi 2012, 108; Žižek 2008a, 40; 2008b, 128; 2008c, 362).[46] The fantasy sustaining the ideological field is therefore particularly effective precisely as a displaced shared fiction, which deploys its real power through material repetition regardless of the subject's belief in it. While the Other's omnipotent appearance must be preserved at all times, the subjects are simultaneously balefully aware of its non-existence. This traumatic knowledge must be disavowed or repressed to enable the continuous functioning of fantasy.

In terms of the religious Authority in Iran, we can observe that it aims at solidifying itself on the basis of faith, on the conviction of the subject that it deserves obedience because it is good or just. What we should not overlook is that this obedience is already mediated through subjectivity, since the subjects will find reasons to believe retroactively. They justify their unconscious belief by citing arguments based on their libidinal investments. As Pascal remarked (2006, 216): "Proofs only convince the mind.

[46] I will analyse the displacement of ideological belief in Iranian framework in chapter 5.

Our strongest proofs and those most generally accepted with conviction are those created by habit. So it is habit that guides the automaton, which leads the mind mechanically or unconsciously along." Following Pascal, subjects then simply repeat the ideological ritual (e.g. praying, voting, marching) *via* the same meaningless gestures, which unwittingly convince them to believe.[47] Belief thus generates its own ideological foundation on the basis of its performativity and transference through the social fibre. External rituals support the subject's unconscious belief, giving meaning to social reality and solidifying the level of ideological Doctrine. A belief is never really the subject's own, but mediated through the Other (Žižek 2008b, 32-39). A subject therefore assumes other subjects to believe in the Other and acts from a position that does not disturb the constituting social mechanism enabling the transference of belief between them. Even in the case of a theocracy, what really matters is not the true inner belief of the subjects, but following and participating in certain rituals and practices, through which ruling ideology is reproduced.

The ultimate task of a successful ideology is therefore to gain consistency and organise its heterogeneous material into a coherent experience for the subject by erasing its own impossibility. What Lacan offers us is a set of interdependent and observable tools that form the unconscious ideological matrix. Ideological critique informed by psychoanalysis therefore looks beyond the concepts of false consciousness and class struggle. According to this perspective, ideology is based on a certain lack that allows the subject to sustain the frame of fantasy, which paradoxically structures social reality itself. To approach the libidinal consistency of fantasy in Iran means to intervene in its repressed point by over-identifying with the symptom of fantasy, namely the gaps in the socio-symbolic order. By overlooking the libidinal dimension of ideology, the latter managed to escape other forms of analyses by concealing itself behind the structure of the unconscious ideological enjoyment and as such pose as non-ideology.

[47] As we can learn from Pascal, Althusser's ideological apparatuses of the state can impose their force only if they are experienced in the unconscious of the subject as a traumatic, senseless injunction. This leftover of traumatic irrationality is structurally necessary and is not preventing the full submission of the subject, but is on the contrary the very condition of submission. This irrational traumatism provides the Law its authority by escaping the ideological sense and sustaining jouissance as the last support of ideology (Žižek 2008b, 43).

Part I

Ideological formation of the Islamic Republic

I.I. Introduction

Part I of the thesis explores the ideological formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It elucidates the unconscious structures constituting the ideological matrix in Iran by analysing the formation of political subjectivity. Chapter three aims to reveal the unconscious features of political subjectivity by first analysing how the religious framework influenced its development, and, secondly, how national and religious frameworks are fused in a socio-symbolic order through ideological enjoyment. Chapter four builds on that knowledge and elucidates the logic of unconscious mechanisms forming the ideological order in the Islamic Republic. Religious identity permeates subjectivity and the state, which are further analysed in their political and economic aspects in Part II and III of the thesis. Part I therefore provides the understanding of how subjectivity is embedded in the current ideological order of the Islamic Republic through religious features and establishes the basis for further analysis of the ideological matrix. It consists of two chapters and an empirical introduction that brings to light the socio-historical conditions that influenced the unfolding of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The 1979 Islamic revolution represents a radical departure from 2500 years of monarchical rule, which transformed the last Pahlavi monarchy into the Islamic Republic. The Revolution produced a plethora of political discourses and movements emerging from the chaotic disintegration of the monarchical social order. It has utterly transformed the political, legal, cultural and economic foundations of the state, and established an entirely new socio-symbolic order. What made the transition from a Western-style monarchy to an Islamic-based society possible? How did such a radical (de)construction of the social structures take place? The 1979 Revolution is perhaps one of the most well documented political events of the last century, which nonetheless still triggers the same questions nearly four decades later. The very idea of a religious revolution in the 20th century fascinated observers of this socio-political leap into the unknown. Many intellectuals flocked to Iran trying to decipher the extraordinary socio-political events, the most famous of whom was probably Michel Foucault.[48] As

[48] Foucault endorsed the Revolution as a liberating political movement, but reduced it to an empty screen for his own ideological projections. He was fascinated by the political charge of the movement and its enchanting religious rituals. Although he was an admirer of Nietzsche, Foucault disregarded his warnings on priestly asceticism as the instrument and licence for power by exploiting the believer's

Foucault was struggling with the above questions, he also pointed to the specific religious spectre of Shi'a Islam that offered the clergy an upper hand in the uprisings.[49] "At the dawn of history, Persia invented the state and conferred its models on Islam. Its administrators staffed the caliphate. But from this same Islam, it derived a religion that gave to its people infinite resources to resist state power" (Foucault in Afray and Anderson 2005, 208). What precisely are those resources of resistance the 1979 revolution supposedly revealed?

Foucault pointed to the religious framework of the Revolution, which provided popular mobilisation against the ruling monarchy and noticed a subversive potential hidden somewhere in the political theology of Shi'a doctrines. What is so peculiar about Shi'a theology that might drive the subjects to rebel against those in position of authority?[50] What kind of identity does it produce and how does it influence the perception of reality? How does this mechanism of subversion work and what triggers it? Foucault's engagement with the Revolution did not illuminate what that mechanism is, nor how it functions. His perceptive eye also noticed a double registry of the revolutionary events and the revolutionary subject, who had "his political calculation, which was this or that, and at the same time he was an individual caught up in that revolutionary movement," without the convergence of the two (Foucault in Afray and Anderson 2005, 256). It seems that the often miserable and violent battles fought on the level of social reality had their echoes on another, ontological level that underlined the structuring of the new social order itself. How did the religious faction of the uprisings come to dominate an explosion of other political discourses and movements? In what way was religious identity fused with the national identity in a country that is historically a mosaic of different cultures and ethnicities? How was the socio-symbolic order with over 2500 years of monarchical tradition transformed into a functioning polity based on religion? How was the transformation of conditions that sustain the social reality in Iran achieved?

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sense of guilt, which ayatollah Khomeini achieved through religious rituals (Afary and Anderson 2005, 4-6, 36, 45, 256; Nietzsche 1967, 97). For Foucault's engagement with the Iranian revolution and his most important contributions, see Afray and Anderson 2005; Žižek 2008f.

[49] Shi'a Islam is the official religion of the Islamic Republic. See the following introduction for details.

[50] I will approach the question of power and authority as the difference between the structure of rules forming a social order and those that exercise authority in that order. I will follow the Lacanian understanding of those concepts, which are explained in more detail in Part II of the thesis. See also Verhaeghe 2014.

The extensive literature on the 1979 Islamic revolution covers a multitude of approaches dealing with different aspects of the revolutionary process. The volumes written on the state of Iran as well as its branch of Shi'a Islam mostly focus on the historical development of religion that was imbedded in the state through the Islamic revolution. These empirical engagements allow us to observe the specific cultural, historical and political conditions that led to the formation of the Islamic Republic and are indispensable for further analysis. Mojan Moomen (1985) and Ann Lambton (2004) among others can help us understand the formation of Shi'a theology and its relevance for political engagement. Nikkie Keddie (2004; 2006) and William Cleveland (2009) bring to light the historical and social background that led to the 1979 Islamic revolution, while Hamid Dabashi (2011; 2017) points to its cultural identity. Ali Ansari (2007; 2013) and Said Arjomand (1988; 2003) focus particularly on social and political aspects that led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic as it is known today. There is a number of other established authors who contributed extensively to the topic, such as Olivier Roy (2004), Negar Mottahedeh (2008), Roxanne Varzi (2006; 2011) and Homa Katouzian (2003). The research engagement of these authors overlaps on several points and analyses particular historical events and their consequences by elucidating the intriguing political theology of Shi'ism. On the level of social reality, these authors can thus help us understand the gradual formation of social identity explained in the context of historical and political development. However, these analyses alone cannot provide a satisfactory answer to Foucault's observation of religious subversion of authority, nor can they illuminate the process of transformation of conditions sustaining social reality in Iran.

To answer these questions, I will approach the analysis of political subjectivity and the construction of the ideological order in Iran with the help of the Lacanian understanding of the unconscious structures introduced in the Methodology chapter. As discussed there, Lacan introduced a notion of subjectivity that is not reduced to individuality, but opens a new way to understand objectivity. It allows for the confluence between psychoanalysis and socio-political inquiries on a new level of social reality that conflates the subjective and objective dimensions (Stavrakakis 1999, 2-4). The political discovery of the unconscious elucidates the impossibility of reducing the subject to a completely conscious rationality, which has been a platform on which philosophical, legal, political and economic theories grounded and idealised modern subjectivity. Such

approach shifts the perspective of inquiry to the libidinal constitution of ideology and analyses the way ideology mediates its inherent contradictions. I will approach the construction of the ideological order in Iran by discerning the way ideology intervenes in the unconscious libidinal constitution of the subject to negotiate its inherent gaps. This will allow me to analyse the logic of its mechanisms that sustain the libidinal matrix of the socio-symbolic order. Such approach reveals not only the disintegration of the monarchical ideological order, but also the construction of a radically different ideological matrix.

The analysis of the two chapters following the empirical inquiry below elucidates how the fusion of religious and national structures in Iran formed a new political subjectivity. Moving beyond the empirical dimension of social reality allows for the analysis of conditions enabling the experience of reality through subjectivity. Lacanian libidinal analysis of the unconscious subjectivity is particularly useful on this point, since it does not approach the content of a specific culture or era, but rather intervenes in the subjective frame that shapes that content. That is to say, it bypasses the content of particular subjectivity and analyses the consequences derived from its structural necessity. What Lacan therefore offers us is an apparatus with which we can look at subjectivity and analyse its relation to the object, such as religion and nationhood. I will utilise his theory to address the complex relations between subjectivity and the symbolic structures in contemporary Iran.

I.II. Historical background of the Islamic Republic

I.II.I. Shi'a theology and its development in Iran

The following empirical introduction elucidates the development of socio-historical conditions analysed in the next two chapters. Part I of the thesis devotes particular attention to the conditions that led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, while Part II deals with the inception and organisation of the state. I will therefore engage with religious, social and political circumstances that influenced the unfolding of the 1979 revolution. As Ann Lambton (2004, 145) wrote, it is in fact impossible to understand the attitude of contemporary Iranian society without the consideration of the Shi'a doctrines towards the holders of political authority, the socio-political changes in the 19th century, as well as the intrusion of global powers in the country. The 1979

revolution is perhaps only the most well-known event in a series of revolts and revolutions inspired by the Islamic movement.[51] In the particular example of Iran, Nikki Keddie (2004, 616-617) argues that political Shi'a doctrines with their specific cultural views have led Iran to unusually large-scale revolts and revolutions over the last hundred years. Surprising to some, Iran today stands at the forefront of rebellious nations of the 20th century. The continuous revolts and rebellions,[52] such as the famous Tobacco protest (1891-1892),[53] the Constitutional revolution (1905-1911)[54] and the 1979 Islamic revolution, were mass uprisings aimed at the replacement of social, political and economic foundations, which would liberate Iran from foreign control. Different in their outlooks and results, these events were provided with popular support through religious institutions. Needless to say, various Iranian movements need to be located within the understanding of their specific socio-historic conditions. For the purpose of this research, I will limit the inquiry to those aspects of political theology that played a pivotal role in the 1979 revolution, particularly those that shaped the unconscious relation to political authority.

What is therefore so peculiar about the Shi'a political theology? To approach this question, we must first look at the historical conditions at the inception of Shi'a Islam. Shi'a and Sunni faiths represent the two main factions of Islam and simultaneously

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[51] See Keddie 2003 for religiously inspired rebellions from 17th century onwards; Keddie 2004 for revolts in Iran.

[52] There were continuous rebellions such as those of the Baha'i sect, the reformist revolts in the provinces of Gilan, Azerbaijan and Khorasan after World War I, the rebellions in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan after World War II, the mass-supported oil nationalisation under Mohammad Mossadeq (1951-1953), and the popular anti-government revolts in the 1960's. See Mottahedeh 2008; Keddie 2004 and 2006; Poulson 2006; Katouzian 2003.

[53] The mass rebellion dubbed the Tobacco protest in 1891 was a response to a British tobacco concession given by the weak Qajar dynasty (1796-1925). This nationwide uprising linked different strata of society against the dynasty and reached its peak when the grand ayatollah Shirazi issued a decree declaring the usage of tobacco tantamount to the desecration of their most sacred Imam. The protests against the Shah intensified, the trade was brought to a halt and even the members of the royal court refrained from tobacco use. The Shah was forced to cancel the concession in what is seen as a prelude to the Constitutional revolution in 1905. For further reading, see Abrahamian 2008, chapter 2; Keddie 2004; Poulson 2006, chapter 7; Kazemi 2014.

[54] The Constitutional revolution marks a series of secular and modernist movements that gained popular support *via* religious institutions, despite the latter being divided on theological and political issues of the matter. The events saw the demise of the Qajar dynasty and produced a written constitution, installed a parliament and changed the institutional outlook of the monarchy. The movement was suppressed in 1911, followed by years of political and social uncertainty. A 1921 uprising led by Reza Khan brought down the foreign backed Qajar dynasty and installed the Pahlavi monarchy in 1925. See Ansari 2016 and 2007, chapter 1; Arjomand 1988, chapter 2; Poulson 2006, chapter 8; Jahanbegloo 2013, chapter 3; Keddie 2012; Farzaneh 2015.

designate the split within Islam.[55] After Mohammad's death in 632, a dispute for his succession occurred between the supporters of Imam Ali, the rightful successor according to Shi'a, and the founding forces of the Sunni Umayyad dynasty. Ali's murder in this dispute eventually secured the Sunni's claim to Authority. He became the symbol of suffering under an oppressive Authority that robbed him of the right to rule. Ali's son Hussein later led a rebellion against the Sunni authority, but was betrayed, outnumbered and consequently killed in the battle at Karbala in 680. This became a pivotal event in Shi'a history, since Shi'a interpreted Hussein's rebellion as a righteous stand against a formal tyrannical Authority, with his death shroud in the aura of martyrdom. Hussein's martyrdom additionally solidified the Shi'a belief that the line of successors most qualified to hold Authority follows a line of succession from Ali. Shi'a regard Ali as the first Imam and the Twelver Shi'a recognise the next 12 Imams as the rightful successors to the Prophet.[56] The 12th Imam went into occultation and will one day return to fill the Earth with justice, which is a concept with enormous political consequences for Iran. According to the Shi'a doctrines, the Hidden Imam never really died and continues to exercise control as a guide of humanity (Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 31-32; Arjomand 1988, 11-13; Dabashi 2011, 57-63; Keddie 2006, 6; Nasr 2006, 35-41).

The Karbala tragedy marks the birthplace of Shi'a Islam and simultaneously designates the split within Islam. Shi'a ethos relies on this split for its religious, social and political discourse, as well as popular culture in practice and is therefore an important source of national discourse in Iran. Shi'a religious eulogy revolves around Hussein's martyrdom and the idealised reign of Ali, the stories of which are reinterpreted through social discourses and religious rituals. The Sunni authority that killed both Imams as well as many of their successors is by definition tyrannical and should therefore be perpetually resisted. In fact, any government or Authority in the absence of the 12th Imam is ultimately unjust for the Shi'a and could be accused of tyranny even if it is of Shi'a origin. Although the Shi'a clergy has cooperated with the holders of Authority for their

[55] For a detailed description of the Sunni-Shi'a split at Karbala, see Momen 1985, chapters 2 and 3; Dabashi 2017, chapter 6; 2011, chapter 1 and 2; Hazleton 2010; Nasr 2006.

[56] Twelver Shi'a is most widely practised branch of Shi'ism and represents the state religion in Iran. For Twelver and other branches related to Shi'a Islam, see Shepard 2009, chapter 8; Keddie 2006, chapter 1; Dabashi 2011, chapter 1; Momen 1985, chapter 3.

own agendas, they refused to accept political or moral responsibility for an unjust government.[57] The obedience to the government, despite being considered illegitimate, was common, as it offered security and stability. However, even the widespread obedience to the ruler did in no way legitimise the ruler's authority, which produced ambivalent attitudes to those in power. The religious class views itself as the deputies of the 12th Imam not the ruler, who has become irrelevant to some extent. The Shi'a clergy has therefore always kept itself at a safe distance in relation to political authority. That in turn provided the clergy with the ability to wield significant symbolic power that could be utilised in their interest. It also produced a delicate balance of power, where the feeling of tyranny perceived as threatening to the Islamic way of life could rally popular support against political authority, as was the case in the above-mentioned rebellions and revolutions (Arjomand 2003, 351; Lambton 2004, 148-149; Momen 1985, 33; Mottahedeh 2008, 61-62).

Interestingly enough, Shi'ism was introduced to the territory of modern Iran only at the beginning of the 15th century with the rise of the Safavid dynasty.[58] Although Islam reached Persia (Iran) with the fall of the Sasanian Empire in 651, Iranians have maintained their language and culture, and adapted them to Islamic norms. While Iran was certainly Islamised, it was not 'Arabised' and came to form a separate, distinctly different identity apropos its neighbours. It was only with the establishment of the Safavid dynasty in 1501 that the majority Sunni Iran converted into a bastion of Shi'a Islam. The dynasty transformed the Iranian religious framework, which also influenced its relations with the neighbouring countries (Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 52-56; Keddie 2006, 8-11). Just the chronological point of view implies that Iranians have spent more time being Sunni rather than Shi'a. That presupposes a big gap in identity must have been radically filled in, against and through which Iranians today recognise themselves as a modern nation. In order to establish and solidify Shi'a identity through national context, its myth of origin must have been reinterpreted and manipulated, while some parts of Iranian identity must have been excluded to form another.

[57] Shi'a were allowed to cooperate with the ruling authority if it served social stability (Lambton 2004, 146-147). The believer was allowed to wear a public mask called *taqiyah* or *kitman*. How this idea might apply to modern totalitarianisms was interpreted by Czesław Miłosz in *The Captive Mind* (2001).

[58] For reading on the Safavid dynasty, see Momen 1985, chapter 6; Turner 2000; Newman 2006.

The Safavid dynasty supported the Shi'a efforts and claimed their legitimacy through religious dogmas. The gradual demise of the Safavid dynasty in 1736 caused political and social instability before the consolidation of the Qajar dynasty in 1796. This period forced the Shi'a establishment to accumulate their own resources independently from the state.[59] In the 18th century, Persia was governed through a decentralised political structure with powerful tribal chiefs, mullahs and merchants. It lacked an efficient central administration and bureaucracy, which rendered the Qajar rule (1796-1925) from Tehran ineffective. One of the primary factors in the struggle against centralisation of the state's authority was the prominent and independent position of the Shi'a top scholars (the *ulama*) and the extensive network of religious institutions in Iranian society. Since the early Qajar dynasty did not legitimate its authority through religious doctrines, the question of religious authority in the absence of the Hidden Imam was reopened. It provided the *ulama* with the exclusive right to deliver interpretations of legal issues and religious practice. Further divisions between the clergy and the government emerged, alienating society from the already weak central bureaucracy. As the previously close relation between Shi'a Islam and the state ended, the religious establishment was able to function independently from the government through the extensive support of the population, but could not act as a unified body due to their amorphous structure. In the 19th century, religious institutions adopted a doctrine through which all Shi'a Muslims were meant to accept the rulings of the highest representatives of the clergy. The Shi'a establishment declared those preferred and superior to the rulings of the state. The highest representatives of the religious establishment became known as ayatollahs – the eyes of God (Abrahamian 2008, 14-15; Arjomand 1988, 14-15; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 110-111).

At the beginning of the 19th century, the weak Qajar shahs faced military defeats against the Russian Empire. The dynasty sought the advanced military technology of Western Europe in return for economic concessions. Those impoverished large parts of the population, whereupon the unchallenged Shi'a establishment translated the national discontent through economic exploitation by foreign powers. That made the clergy an important socio-political class next to the army, merchants and scarce bureaucrats. The

[59] For reading on the Qajar dynasty, see Keddie 2012; Amanat 2008; Momen 1985, chapter 6; Abrahamian 2008, chapter 1.

government also depended on the religious establishment to deliver a variety of public services such as judicial rulings, provide administrational documents, education, marriages and funerals, as well as shelter for orphans and widows. Their prestige derived from religious learning and their support for the population. That meant religious figures could easily become the leaders of a popular rebellion and were therefore treated by the rulers with respect. The Shi'a *ulama* also wielded a great degree of economic and social influence, connecting them to the powerful *bazaar* merchants that exceeded those of the Sunni tradition. The Shi'a establishment in the 19th century was therefore not limited to education, but exercised the authority to intervene in political acts with religious interpretations, especially by keeping their grip on judicial rein of society. Such autonomy was possible due to the clergy's economic independence from the government through the collection of payments, which the government was unable to collect as taxes. This enabled the clergy to extend its influence in Iranian society and to present itself as the protector of the population against the increasingly corrupt and impious governments (Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 113, 117; Lambton 2004, 158-159, 163; Keddie 2004, 618).

The Qajar Shahs became heavily depended on foreign loans to sustain their rule. By the end of the 18th century, Persia was considered an important sphere of influence by the British, French and Russian empires. The country was drawn into the global economy as an exporter of raw materials and provided a buffer zone between empires. A lot of energy was devoted by the Persians to play one power against the other, while resisting political, economic and social change brought by those exchanges. Foreign influences and interventions materialised in the lasting lack of trust and produced nationalism that was articulated through religious discourse. This was possible because religious interests transcended all social, cultural and political classes, despite the existing hierarchy among them. Even as the Western methods were gradually applied to Persia, patriotism remained largely a religious sentiment. When the tendencies among intellectuals towards modernisation grew stronger in the 19th century, the religious classes again changed their stance and embraced modernisation in order to resist foreign intrusion from within. Increased foreign trade along with new patterns of exchange and consumption gradually came to influence social change, accompanied with the fear of political shifts. A recurring alliance formed between some parts of the clergy and the merchants on the one hand, and secular intellectuals and radicals on the other. Those

alliances were based on a commonly perceived enemy, embodied in the ruling regime and its support for the foreign exploiter. Anti-imperial sentiment and resistance to foreign domination produced more rebellions and revolutions in Iran than in any other Middle Eastern country, with the possible exception of Afghanistan. Economic, political and religious spheres were thus intertwined, even though different groups emphasised different solutions to commonly perceived threats (Arjomand 2003, 350-351; 1988, 13-15; Lambton 2004, 149-150, 156; Keddie 2004, 619-621).

I.II.II. Pahlavi monarchy and the build-up of discontent till 1979

The Qajars Shahs governed Persia through political manipulation and social divisions, rather than through strong bureaucratic institutions, coercion, or grand appeals to divinity and history. The dynasty's demise at the beginning of the 20th century triggered a series of social and political rebellions between 1905 and 1911 known as the Constitutional revolution. This period marks a series of concessions by the Qajar dynasty, which produced a written constitution, changed the institutional organisation of the monarchy and installed a parliament (*Majlis*) that soon gained in power. In its aftermath and the spreading chaos of the revolution in Russia, colonel Reza Khan, the father of the 1979 deposed Mohammad Reza Khan, established an authoritarian rule based on personal domination. After the consolidation of power and subjugation of different tribal leaders, his self-coronation in 1925 established a short-lived Pahlavi monarchy.[60] Reza Khan at first needed the clerical establishment to support his fight against the wayward tribal chiefs, but later sought to diminish their role with projects of modernisation and institutional reorganisation. He reduced the powers of the religious establishment by expanding secular legal and educational institutions. The growing state apparatus nonetheless left the ayatollahs in possession of endowments and an influential network of religious schools, which ensured that much of their social influence remained intact (Jahanbegloo 2013, 39-42; Ansari 2007, 33-37; Arjomand 2003, 352-353; Owen 1992, 29; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 187-189).

The first Pahlavi Shah was compelled to abdicate his throne in favour of his son Mohammad Reza Khan in 1941, when the Allied forces forcibly entered Iran. The young Shah proceeded to build the state on three main pillars: a massive army, a large

[60] For reading on the establishment and consolidation the Pahlavi monarchy, see Keddie 2012; Ansari 2007, chapters 2 and 3; Cronin 1997; Abrahamian 2008, chapter 3; Jahanbegloo 2013, chapter 4.

bureaucratic apparatus, and a strong patronage court system. During the Cold War, the Pahlavi regime received substantial support from the USA, while the country was oscillating between US military advisers, British diplomacy and Soviet influences. The Shah tried to build his image by advocating social reform and democracy, but envisioned them on his own terms. His rule was marked by political repression and economic instability, which produced mass protest in favour of democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq.[61] Mossadeq was elected in 1951 and attempted to nationalise the oil industry, redistribute the oil wealth and wrestle political power away from the monarchy. Particularly the nationalisation of the oil industry ran contrary to British interests, whose severe international diplomatic and economic offensive left Mossadeq with a crumbling economy, consequently plummeting his popular support. In 1953, the CIA with British help organised a coup to divert the country from perceived Soviet influence, regain the access to oil supplies and consequently reinforce the Shah's reign (Arjomand 2003, 352; Keddie 2006, 124-131; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 289-292).

Following Mossadeq's arrest, the Shah moved to dominate the parliament through political appointments and amended the constitution to appoint prime ministers. He also oversaw the infamous intelligence agency SAVAK, as well as the judiciary and the budget. The state apparatus was staffed with his placemen in the army, bureaucracy and the courts. Along with political and institutional changes, the Shah tried to harvest popular support with his grandiose plans to modernise Iran through what he called the *White revolution* in 1963.[62] Despite the improvements in infrastructure, industrialisation and social reform, the long-term plans largely failed, social inequalities widened and what was designed to pre-empt a 'Red revolution' instead paved the way for the Islamic revolution. The Shah's rule was further marked by fluctuating oil prices, deepening social disparities and foreign dependence, accompanied by the mismanagement of the economy and political repression. Those factors sparked up new mass protests that culminated in 1963, when a relatively unknown cleric ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

[61] For an account of the Mossadeq period, see Kinzer 2008; Katouzian 2009; Abrahamian 2013.

[62] The *White revolution* was Shah's failed attempt to harvest popular support by attempting mass industrialisation and reforming the economy, education, land and health systems. While it brought modernisation to Iran, it was badly managed and left most of the population falling into ever bigger social and economic disparities. See Ansari 2007, chapter 6; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 295-299; Keddie 2006, chapter 7; Abrahamian 2008, chapter 5.

began to preach against the regime and its US ally.[63] These revolts once again used religious eulogy to mobilise the masses by applying Islamic principles to contemporary socio-political conditions and revealed a deep frustration with the ongoing foreign economic and political intrusions (Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 293-299; Ansari 2007, 123-127; Arjomand 2003, 354-355; Jahangebloo 2013, 50-52, 55; Abrahamian 2008, 123, 128, 140).

Shah's reign throughout the 1960's and 1970's was accompanied by lavish ceremonial and army spending, widespread political repression, corruption and an unstable economy. The uneven income distribution and political restrictions had only intensified through the years, despite some advances in women's rights, education and industrialisation. Specific policies to establish a modern Iranian identity within the Western framework additionally alienated the monarchy from large sections of the population.[64] The Shah also sought to limit the clergy's power by closing religious schools, replacing the Islamic calendar and advocating the monarchy's interpretation of religion through 'Religious Corps.' The discontent with the Shah's rapid social changes and mismanaged economy grew within all strata of society and found its expression in religious discourse. The detested monarchy sought to reduce the influence of the religious establishment by glorifying its own achievements based on pre-Islamic empires, virtually ignoring the country's rich Islamic identity and history. Such measures antagonised both the traditional *bazaar* merchants and the clergy, once again forming a centuries old alliance. Meanwhile, the urban middle classes and students from secular universities were battered by high inflation along with an uncertain economic future, and were the first to voice their discontent. As the widespread exasperation with the monarchy began take hold by the end of the 1970's, the urban middle classes were quickly joined by the traditional sectors of society (Owen 1992, 119-120; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 424-425; Mottahedeh 2008, 30; Arjomand 2003, 356).

As in the case of the Tobacco protest of 1891, the 1905 Constitutional revolution, the oil nationalisation under Mossadeq in 1951, and the demonstrations fuelled by Khomeini

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[63] The protests were supressed in June 1963 and Khomeini was exiled to Turkey (Arjomand 2003, 356).

[64] Restrictions on religious clothing were already put in place by the Shah's father. The Shah additionally tried to locate Iranian identity within the Western, European framework by advocating Western clothes and styles. The policy backfired and instead pointed to the foreign within (Mottahedeh 2008, 30; Arjomand 2003, 355).

and his arrest in 1963, Iranians again rebelled against their political rulers. By the late 1970's, the perception of the enemy had shifted from the West to the Pahlavi dynasty, which was seen merely as a Western tool that exploits the Iranian nation. The latter began its alienated search for identity and returned to 'authentic' Iranian and Islamic values through a variety of popular religious and secular writings.[65] Like in previous revolts and revolutions, religious discourse mobilised the masses resisting the unjust political authority. Religious eulogy and rituals were utilised to identify the Pahlavi monarchy with daily oppression and censorship.[66] The religious establishment offered what seemed to be an apolitical solution for appeasing national anxiety in the context of religion. The merchant and religious classes both historically denounced any Western involvement for their own interests, adding to Iranian fervour and embedding Shi'a doctrines with the ones of nationalism. The uneasy 1979 coalition between these groups and the liberals' desires for Westernisation in Iranian context formed the recurring alliances underlying previous Iranian revolutionary movements (Bakhash 1985, 14-15, 45-47; Keddie 2004, 621, 628-630).

Many movements were created and revived in the mounting opposition to the Shah, the most influential of which were the nationalist Freedom Movement and the militant wing of the clergy led by ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.[67] The former acknowledged the importance of religion and saw Islam itself as a reformist movement but insisted on the separation of religion and the state, while accepting a diminished role of the monarchy. The religious establishment was itself divided at this point in three camps and did not have a firm plan of action against the Shah's regime. There was a large section of the leading *ulama* believing that it is not the clergy's place to partake in political activities. A second group of moderate reformers were generally supporting 'Ali Shari'ati's ideas, who gave the Revolution its intellectual foundations through a fusion of Che Guevara,

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[65] Increasingly influential progressive interpretation of indigenous Islamic thought was made possible by a number of leftists embedded in different factions of the Islamic revival, such as Mehdi Bazargan, 'Ali Shari'ati, and ayatollahs Na'ini, Shariatmadari and Taleqani; a more conservative outlook was offered by Khomeini. For the roles of different ideologues in the establishment of the Islamic Republic, see introduction to Part II; Rahnema 2005; Dabashi 2006.

[66] For further analysis on the influence of religious rituals, see chapter 3.

[67] The Freedom Movement is the continuation of Mossadeq's National Front. It was established by Mehdi Bazargan, who was shortly the first Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic and was joined by important ideologues such as 'Ali Shari'ati (Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 425-426).

Herbert Marcuse, Frantz Fanon, Karl Marx and Islam.[68] The third group led by Khomeini had a more militant and radical outlook, opposing the monarchy and calling for a creation of an Islamic state. Khomeini managed to provide a consensus among several factions of the uprising through skilful blending of socio-political discourses, populist rhetoric and organised militias.[69] His popular discourse focused on anti-imperialism and social justice, addressed to the people as the agent of liberation. Khomeini connected the ruling monarchy and its exploitation of society with the destruction of Iranian Islamic identity through its US and Western allies. This provided a way for popular nationalism to identify Islam as the common denominator in the fight against the estranged, foreign-backed social spheres. Religion also offered Khomeini a narrative that surpassed generations and classes by evoking a heritage of religious protests based on anti-imperial sentiments (Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 297-299, 424-427; Owen 1992, 121; Arjomand 2003, 356).

It must be noted that in the turmoil of the Islamic revolution, Khomeini's authoritarian version of political Islam did not emerge as a generalisation of collective wills or desires, but as a result of Khomeini's uncompromising stance on the monarchy and foreign intervention. He successfully outmanoeuvred an explosion of competing political ideas by channelling popular discontent through a divine solution and masterfully using religious rituals such as the Karbala eulogy and the traditional 40 days of mourning. By inviting Iranians to mourn the protest victims on the 40th day in mosques, the religious establishment attracted more followers, while providing the victims with an aura of martyrdom. Mourning gatherings provoked anger over deaths, sparked new protests leading to new deaths and more mourning, which firmly placed different movements of the Revolution in religious framework. Such development provided the ayatollahs with implicit authority to guide and direct the protests, where Khomeini's political project came to occupy the centre stage by advocating for the establishment of the Islamic Republic (Keddie 2004, 631; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 428).

[68] Shari'ati was one of the most important ideologues of the Revolution. See for example Shari'ati 1979; 1980; 1981. For reading on Shari'ati, see Rahnema 2005, chapter 9; Dabashi 2006, chapter 2; Keddie 2006, chapter 8.

[69] See Part II for political development and analysis of the Islamic Republic.

While the religious establishment was divided on both the 1905 Constitutional revolution and the 1979 Islamic revolution, the former resulted in a Western-style constitution and form of government, while the latter resulted in the Islamic Republic despite society's Western foundations in education, judiciary, government and the economy. The prevalence of more traditional Islamic views in the 1979 revolution in contrast to 1905 Constitutional revolution can be discerned in the paradoxical reaction to a rapid growth of exploitative Western influences and new forms of imperialism. The desire to return to Islam in the face of unjust and foreign backed authority was not new to Iran. It had been gaining in strength in this particular form since the 60's onwards through various revolutionary discourses and movements. What most of these movements have in common is the acceptance of technological modernism, but simultaneous rejection of secularism. The independent power, wealth and socio-political position of the Shi'a establishment in Iran allowed them to eventually become the first leaders of a 20th century religious revolution (Keddie 2004, 628, 632).

The 1979 Islamic revolution has been dubbed as 'a cataclysmic event' that ended 2500 years of monarchical rule in Iran. On the social level, the Revolution emerged as an impossible political alliance against the Shah between the conservative clergy, liberals longing for Westernisation in Iranian context, the communist members of the Tudeh party, nationalist Mossadeq's Freedom Movement, Islamo-socialist militant MEK party, powerful *bazaar* merchants, rural classes, and countless unaffiliated subjects who overnight became political citizens in a country without political freedom.[70] Khomeinists of course had opposition to their vision of the state not just from the Western-orientated liberals or Marxists, but also from within the clergy. In the socio-political turmoil of the Revolution that lasted till 1982, the radical part of the clergy led by Khomeini quelled other emerging organisations and threats of secularism by establishing a variety of institutions parallel to the first post-revolutionary government.[71] They formed a military wing called the Revolutionary Guards, which played an important role in consolidating Khomeini's clerical hegemony through post-revolutionary terror and is now one of the most important economic pillars of the

[70] For an account of different political factions in the Revolution, see for example Keddie 2006, chapter 9.

[71] For the political development of the Islamic Republic, see introduction to Part II.

state.[72] Revolutionary tribunals passed quick sentences on former regime supporters, political opposition and monarchy's army officers. Khomeini's own short lived religious party had an unprecedented access to Iranian social fabric through mosques and engaged in heated debates on the constitutional meaning of the Islamic Republic. It might be argued that while the inception of the Islamic Republic had political appeal, it might not had the cultural support of the urban middle classes (Abrahamian 2008, 162-164; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 423, 431-432; Keddie 2006, 241-242; Gheisari and Nasr 2006, 125).

The 1979 Islamic revolution has transformed the social, cultural, legal and political foundations in Iran and established an entirely new social order. It has abruptly changed the conditions sustaining social reality from a Western-style monarchy to an Islamic Republic. How precisely did the shift of these conditions occur and what sustains them? What made this transition possible and how did the construction of a radically different symbolic order take place? Are we also any closer to address Foucault's witty observation between the manifestation of the Revolution in Iran and the subjects caught in it, or the hidden religious mechanism of resistance? As much as the above empirical explorations are indispensable in illuminating the socio-historic background that led to the formation of the Islamic Republic, they still cannot seem to adequately address the questions of its ideological inception posed at the beginning. In the search for answers, the following two chapters therefore aim to deploy the Lacanian approach established in the Methodology chapter. Chapter three will analyse how subjectivity is imbedded in the ideological order in Iran, while chapter four elucidates how that order was constructed on the level of an unconscious agency.

[72] The political economy in Iran is analysed in Part III.

3. Religion and Nationhood

This chapter elucidates the unconscious role of religious practices and rituals embedded in the framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The way these rituals shape political subjectivity cannot be approached solely by historicist explorations. Freud had already pointed out that the processes of the unconscious "are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all" (Freud 1989, 582). While time and performativity of religious rituals belong to consciousness, they remain anchored into the unconscious by what I have referred to as the Pascalian repetition.[73] As Pascal pointed out, the subject acquires belief through repetition and justifies it by citing reasons that remain blind to their unconscious libidinal attachments, which capture the subject retroactively (Pascal 2006, 216; Žižek 2008b, 34-35). In the Iranian context of my research, those rituals conflate religious and national identity in the framework of the state. I will therefore devote particular attention to the subject's unconscious relation towards political authority caused by the rituals in question. Since religious eulogy and rituals outdate the inception of the Islamic Republic, I will discern how those rituals shape subjectivity by making use of the Pascalian notion of 'repetition' and Freud's concept of unconscious atemporality.

In terms of ideological critique, Freud's ahistorical unconsciousness already implies a difference between non-linear temporality and its ideological counterpart, which is based on the logical continuity of time and therefore history. But how are we to distinguish between the understanding of history as a logical causality of events and its ahistorical kernel? This difference was most notably addressed by Walter Benjamin in his essay *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1992), where he famously delineated them through the notions of historicity and historicism. This distinction also inspired Slavoj Žižek (see 2000; 2003; 2008b, chapter 3), who, as I will clarify below, interpreted these notions in terms of ideological critique. For both Žižek and Benjamin, historicism is defined as a coherent continuity of events that are, at least in theory, able to establish a narrative sustained by empirically verifiable causality. This allows for a linear representation of history as a consistent, homogenous unit. Historicism therefore

[73] See Methodology chapter for an analysis of the Pascalian repetition; Pascal 2006; Žižek 2008b, chapter 1.

deals with historical connections that relate to a given ideological field of meaning. That is to say, historicism grasps a certain socio-historical context from a position that is already immersed in ideology. As Žižek notes (2003, 160), "what is unthinkable within this horizon of linear historical evolution is the notion of a choice/act that retroactively opens up its own possibility."

Historicity, on the other hand, approaches history through a non-linear understanding that debunks ideological causality and illuminates historical contingency. In Benjamin's view, historicity is the ahistorical counterpart of history, standing for what had to be excluded from the logical causality of historical events in order to create a homogenous historical totality (1992, 247-248).[74] Such concept appeals to Žižek and his psychoanalytic critique of ideology, where history can be understood as by definition undermined by a series of gaps, deadlocks or interruptions that potentially disrupt and antagonise the socio-symbolic order, thus allowing for its reconfiguration.[75] This notion is therefore particularly useful for the analysis of ideology, since it identifies and isolates a certain 'failure' against which historical continuity is established. Such view of historical contingency directly echoes the Lacanian premise that society is based on its repressed traumatic kernel.[76] Historicity engages with the past by identifying disturbing elements that might disrupt linear historical causality. By so doing, it critiques the ideological understanding of a given historical constellation. In other words, when states, nations or social groups try to explain history's contingency with historicism, they in fact obfuscate historicity through ideology by presenting a historical sequence of events as non-ideological. Historical contingency can therefore be particularly useful to analyse the ideological closure of a certain socio-historical epoch (Žižek 2000, 111-112).

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[74] For Benjamin, history is depended on a mode of reading and he proposed the concept of *Jetztzeit*, 'the time of the now,' to describe a notion of time that is ripe with revolutionary possibility, time that has been detached from the continuum of history. Historical progress for him is not a homogenous structure or an empty passage of time, but it is filled with the dialectics of *Jetztzeit*, which Benjamin posits against teleological progression (Benjamin 1992, 252-255). We could argue that the 1979 Islamic revolution represents precisely such an interruption of historical causality that enabled a construction of a new socio-symbolic order.

[75] Žižek's wager is that history is defined by the notion of death drive as the non-narrative kernel of ideology (see particularly Žižek 2008b, chapter 3). How such interruption of historical continuity (de)constructs a socio-symbolic order is analysed in chapter 4 on the example of the Islamic revolution.

[76] See Methodology chapter for the analysis of ideological totality.

The logical causality underlying the understanding of historicism represents itself as objective through chronological distance, usually considered as a protective measure against ideological dynamics. However, as Benjamin and Žižek demonstrate, historicist analysis is undertaken through a certain understanding of history that is already ideological. On this point, historical contingency can help us to analyse social phenomena *qua* symbolic structures without stepping into the empirical traps of historicism. For instance, it allows for the analysis of religious rituals by exploring how their historicist interpretations are dialectically tied to the unconscious processes highlighted by Freud and Lacan. Such approach can reveal the gaps in the ideological structure in Iran by looking at the relation between a specific socio-historic context of the Islamic Republic and the way its contradictions are mediated by ideology. I will therefore identify the gaps in the ideological fantasy in Iran and analyse the way ideology creates a consistent experience of social reality for the engaged subjectivity.[77]

3.1. Psychoanalysis and Religion

Let us first discern how the psychoanalytic method approaches religion and how the latter shapes political subjectivity. The distinct features of the Iranian political subjectivity lie in its religious aspects, since the socio-symbolic order also gains its meaning through religious framework. Different authors within psychoanalytic theory have developed a variety of approaches for the analysis of religion. The most recognised analysis was established by Freud who claimed that religion provides an illusion for the subject, while Carl Gustav Jung tackled religion through his notions of collective unconscious and archetypes.[78] Both Freudian and Jungian models, however, are explained in terms of inherent forces as either wish fulfilments or teleological

[77] A successful ideology conceals itself in the totality of the socio-symbolic edifice that is sustained through ideological fantasy. Lacan developed the notion of fantasy from Freud in Seminar IV (1998) and devotes Seminar XIV (2002) to this concept. See Methodology subchapter 2.1. for a theoretical explanation and further reading; for the construction of fantasy in Iran, see chapter 4; for its political function and libidinal sustainability in Iran, see chapters 5 and 6.

[78] For Freud, religion is an illusion produced by infantile wish fulfilment in need of a benevolent father figure, coupled with a regressive subtraction of external reality. Jung, on the other hand, has suggested that religion emerges as a side product of innate psychological integration, but neglects the individual development of subject's relations within which the quest for meaning and ethical transformation occurs. See Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (2009), *The Future of an Illusion* (2008), *Moses and Monotheism* (2013); for its development, see Miller 2003; see Jung's *Psychology and Religion: West and East* (2014), *Civilisation in Transition* (1970); for the comparison of Freud's and Jung's ideas, see DiCenso 1994; Palmer 1997.

manifestations of archetypal structures. These views presuppose that religion can be explained within a self-contained system, which controls its meaning and can be analysed by reading religious texts, where symbolism can be traced back to recurring structures. In this respect, Lacan's change of perspective is based on the subversion of such originary paradigms, which merely deal with the analysis of religious symbolism. Instead, his analysis of religion presupposes a subject located both inside and outside of the symbolic significations in question (DiCenso 1994, 45, 47; Lacan 2006a, 192).

While Lacan shares Freud's view of religion as a sort of collective schizophrenia, he does not agree with Freud's suggestion that science will save man from the illusion of religion. In his *Triumph of Religion* (2013), Lacan pointed to the omnipresent and increasingly convoluted discourse of science that causes frustration and anxiety for the subject, who then tends to find relief, whether consciously or unconsciously, in religious belief (Lacan 2013, 64-67, 77).[79] In this respect, Lacan added a twist to Nietzsche's idea that modern man believes God is dead by reminding us that God was dead from the very beginning, which bestowed a symbolic debt upon the subject (ibid, 24-25). In the words of Alenka Zupančič (2000, 255): "The fact is that not only do we know that 'God is dead' (that the Other does not exist), He knows it too."[80] A careful reading of the above implies that the ideological subject suspends its knowledge about the non-existence of the Other, which is why we cannot throw the signifier 'God' in the dustbins of history. The subject knows that God is dead, but refuses to believe it, or to say it differently, modern man believes he knows God is dead, but has forgot to inform God about it.[81] Since the unconscious itself did not assume the truth of the Other's death, the subject acknowledges his existence through suspension. The whole point is that the

[79] Lacan develops a critique of the epistemological structure of scientific objectivity by pointing to the positivist model of modern science, which encourages modern man to "forget his subjectivity" (2006a, 233). Lacan suggested science established a particular monopoly in its relation to truth as its exclusive property. Equally, science's relation to knowledge (*savoir*) forces all search for knowledge to follow only rational reasoning. These features of modern science promote a particular "subject of science," a platform on which legal, political, and economic sciences have been developed (Evans 2006, 175-177). See also Lacan's essay *Science and Truth* in Lacan 2006a; Lacan 2013; Glynos and Stavrakakis 2002.

[80] See Methodology chapter for a theoretical explanation of the big Other; chapter 4 for its emergence in ideology in Iran; chapter 5 for its political role in the ideological construction in Iran; chapter 6 for its libidinal role in sustaining the fantasy.

[81] This structure bares the same logic as the old Lacanian joke about the patient who thought he was a grain of corn. After treatment the patient believed he was not grain of corn, but was afraid to walk outside: "I know I'm not a grain of corn, but does the chicken know it?" The question here points to the patient's suspension of his knowledge on the chicken's (the Other's) inexistence. See Žižek 2014b, 67-69.

Other does not need to be believed in to exist – a point on which I will elaborate in chapter five. The true Lacanian formula is therefore not 'God is dead,' but 'God is unconscious' (Lacan 1994, 59). In contrast to Freud, religion is not the content of an infantile desire, but a symbolic structure filling subjectivity, which produces consequences in social reality. While religion occupies a position of meaning in subjectivity, psychoanalysis deals with "the extraction of the subject outside meaning" (Miller 2003, 6). By analysing the subject outside of religious meaning, we can observe how religious structures fill the gaps in fantasy through the engaged subjectivity.

What Lacan offers us is the insight into the structural position of religion based on its language and symbolism through engaged subjectivity. Religion for him provides the means to the subject "for posing questions of his existence in the world" and "a mode of subsistence of the subject who interrogates himself" (Lacan 1994, 265). Such approach provides an insight into the subjects' ethical stance and participation in their symbolic structures, rather than explaining religious symbolism. Religion as a mode of being includes symbolic functions and practices that provide identity to the subject through its worldviews. While these must be understood from the point of their historical and cultural particularities, it is possible to discern atemporal structures within them. Religious symbolism is an expression of the subject's meaning and can provide a framework for the negotiation of subjectivity (DiCenso 1994, 45-46, 63-64). I will take Iran in its particular Islamic conception as the starting point for this inquiry, since religious framework has drastically transformed the country and constitutes ideology in Iran today.

3.1.1. The constitutive Gap and the Karbala matrix

The literature on the Iranian state in connection to its branch of Shi'a Islam mostly focuses on historical development of specific religious doctrines and the way they influenced the inception of the Islamic Republic. It is in fact impossible to understand the attitude of the contemporary Iranian nation without the consideration of Shi'a doctrines towards political rulers, the socio-political changes in the 19th century, as well as the intrusion of global powers in the country. The introduction and development of Shi'a concepts changed the ethos of society and the attitude towards the holders of

political authority (Lambton 2004, 145-146).[82] Keddie (2004, 616-617) approached the turbulent history of Shi'a political theology by arguing that its specific doctrines have led the country to unusually large scale revolts and revolutions over the last century, such as the Tobacco protest (1891), the Constitutional revolution (1905) and the Islamic revolution (1979), all bearing the marks of religious mobilisation. Iran today stands at the forefront of rebellious and revolutionary countries of the 20th century. As Mottahedeh (2008), Dabashi (2006, 2011) and Varzi (2011) also pointed out, Iranian history is imbued with revolts against political authority inspired by religious discourse. These authors explore the peculiar Shi'a rebellions in different frameworks through historical events or figures and have found answers for their arguments in specific socio-historic reasoning. However, I claim that it is possible to discern an unconscious connection between Shi'a doctrines and continuous revolts against political authority in their works and examples. A closer observation reveals an elementary common denominator in the above scholars' arguments and analyses, which points to the traumatic split within Islam. Their empirical observations elucidate an underlying structure enabling a resistance to political authority, which has been repressed into the unconscious through the repetition of religious rituals and now produces consequences in social reality.

Religion inevitably shapes political subjectivity and the advent of Islam represents an event that opened up the subject's symbolic structures for negotiation with newly acquired identity and world views. These symbolic structures are sustained by the reference to the Islamic subjective position of enunciation, which identifies the old symbolic frameworks as false. The Islamic religious framework intervened in the subjective libidinal economy and with it in the politics of enjoyment of its subjects.[83] On an unconscious level, religion does not so much represent a system of rules, but rather a matrix which constitutes the intelligibility of the newly established frame. Religious framework also limits the subject's horizon by determining which content is included or excluded from its reality (Zimeri 2008, 6-7). The events around Karbala, which led to the split within Islam, mark the birthplace of its Sunni and Shi'a branches and provide the framework for identity. Shi'a religion relies on this split for its

[82] See the Introduction to Part I for further reading on political Shi'a theology and historical events.

[83] See Methodology chapter for the analysis of unconscious enjoyment; chapter 6 for its role in sustaining the fantasy in Iran.

religious, social, political and cultural practices, which also makes it an important source of national discourse in Iran (Momen 1985, 33; Mottahedeh 2008, 61).

The events around Karbala influenced particularly Shi'a relations to political authority, shaped under the Shi'a subjugation to Sunni domination. Hamid Dabashi sought to discern the unconscious factors enabling a perpetual resistance to Authority in his book *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (2011). Despite Dabashi's superficial and confusing theoretical engagement, he pointed to Iranian Shi'ism as a deferred resistance to Authority, which collapses into a youthful revolutionary faith (2011, 14, 22, 86).[84] He identified the events at Karbala as the founding act of Shi'a religion and approached the mechanism enabling a perpetual revolt against Authority. As Momen and Mottahedeh imply above, Shi'ism emerged out of the traumatic split within Islam at Karbala and relies on this split for consistency. What I will define as the Karbala matrix designates an unconscious mechanism that channels the central Shi'a trauma into the production of identity. One of its most important aspects is precisely the unconscious resistance to the unjust Authority through the repetition of a variety of rituals, which stand for the function of the Pascalian automaton.[85] According to Shi'a doctrines, any Authority is merely a temporal supplement in the absence of the 12th Imam and is therefore always unjust.[86] At the level of ideological Doctrine, the events at Karbala are retold and reinterpreted in order to give meaning to the present that is already ideological. How precisely does the Karbala matrix function?

I will utilise Benjamin's notion of historicity to analyse how the Karbala story detached from its historical grounding acquires new meanings through the dialectics of time and space. It reinterprets the historical trauma and produces a split through the body of the

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[84] In his otherwise illuminating book, Dabashi simply adapted Freud's analysis of religion and the theory of subjectivity to his empirical understanding of the events in Iran. He quickly became the victim of the Freudian father, which produced dubious theoretical conclusions. For the development of Freud's Father, see Miller 2003.

[85] One of the most famous rituals is called 'ta'ziyeh,' a passion play reconstructing the events around Karbala, which can serve to equate the historical struggle against an unjust Authority with contemporary socio-political circumstances. Together with other religious rituals, it serves to mobilise Shi'a believers and has also enchanted Western observers such as the notorious Arthur de Gobineau and Michel Foucault. See chapter 4; Mottahedeh 2008; Afray and Anderson 2005.

[86] Shi'a identify a higher Authority beyond that of the state, which separated religious and state authority. Shi'a establishment managed to distance itself from the state, which resulted in a potentially great force of subversion, since they could count on wide social support. See the Introduction to Part I for further reading on Shi'a theology; see additionally Lambton 2004; Arjomand 1988, chapter 1; Momen 1985.

nation, since Imam Hossein arises only to be symbolically castrated by the Authority. By casting the Shi'a in the mould of the traumatic past, the Karbala eulogy calls for revolutionary and redemptive action, where any Authority can be made consubstantial with the tyranny of the Sunni authority that killed the Imams. From the perspective of the traumatic inception onwards, the unconscious construction of the world has therefore always been out of joint for the Shi'a. They see it as their mission to set things right with the help of the 12th Imam, which simultaneously places them at the centre of the world. The historical reinterpretation of the events at Karbala provides the framework for popular revolts in a national context, as it appeals to national conscience by promising ultimate redemption from the unjust Authority (Mottahedeh 2008, 136-137). The utilisation of the Karbala matrix can perhaps be best observed in the turmoil of the Islamic revolution, when Khomeini played on the Karbala eulogy to derive his legitimacy and practically nationalised Shi'ism.[87]

The unconscious Karbala matrix reveals that the aftermath of the murders of Shi'a Imams brought contempt instead of obedience, where the opposition to Authority derives from heroic subjugation. The analyses of the historical events of the above-mentioned authors show that even if the challengers of Authority come to successfully occupy its place, the Karbala matrix remains active and identifies them as the illegitimate usurpers of power. That constitutes a paradox, which perpetuates the switching of signifiers invested in Authority and provides one of the most intriguing characteristics of Shi'a theology. In political terms, the Shi'a find themselves in a constant state of deferred revolutionary resistance. At the heart of Shi'ism therefore remains a double trauma: a trauma of denial of power to Imam Ali and a trauma of the betrayal of Imam Hussein, which enable the necessary revolt, the paradoxical subversion of the signifiers holding Authority in place (Dabashi 2011, 22-23). In essence, the Karbala matrix provides a categorical confrontation with the signifiers forming the meaning of a given socio-historical order. It provides a mechanism that can trigger a signification of new contents through a new formal metaphor.[88] The Karbala matrix also reveals the dialectics of Iranian Shi'ism structured around the primordial

[87] Khomeini played on the popularity and expectation of the Hidden Imam by demystifying the term Imam and allowing it to be attributed to his name. That provided Khomeini with implicit political authority as the shadow of the 12th Imam (Varzi 2006, 37-38).

[88] I will address the emergence of the Master Signifier in Iranian fantasy in chapter 4.

gap. The resignification of revolutionary defiance through the available socio-political content can thus be achieved *via* a stable ahistorical reference point, as Benjamin's notion of historicity implies. That leads to a perpetual re-inscription of signifiers invested in Authority through the same matrix.

The unconscious Karbala matrix therefore offers a mechanism for the substitution of Authority to any socio-political actor through religious rituals.[89] This substitution can be evoked on the background of the insurmountable gaps between Islam as the body of religious doctrines and people living in a modern state (Zimeri 2008, 5).[90] The continuous resistance to Authority through the unconscious Karbala matrix then inevitably poses the opposite question of obedience to religious authority.[91] The example of the Islamic Republic is particularly interesting in the current ideological constellation, where religious authority is embodied in the authority of the state. As the resistance to the latter is rooted in the unconscious, so is the structure of subtle obedience to religious authority. Religious institutions draw their authority from the subject's faith, namely through the injunction that it deserves the subject's obedience because it is good and just. What should not be overlooked from a psychoanalytic angle is that religious obedience is already mediated through subjectivity and is as such a result of the subject's unconscious libidinal investments. A belief is not just a matter of 'inner' mental state but is materialised through the activity of the unconscious fantasy, which regulates social reality (Žižek 2001, 109-110; 2008b, 34-35). The Iranian Regime therefore solidifies the unconscious belief in the ideological order through religious rituals embedded in the framework of the state. On the other hand, its position of Authority is unstable precisely due to these very rituals, since their performativity can

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[89] These dynamics can be observed through historical figures and movements in their fight against Authority, like Jamal al-Afghani, Jalal al-e-Ahmad and 'Ali Shari'ati, or the Babi and Khomeini movements. See Dabashi 2006, 2011; Varzi 2011; Mottahedeh 2008.

[90] Bassam Tibi has described the same tension in relation to the divine concept of reality and reality itself, reflected in the tension between Shari'a law as the model for reality and popular Islam in practice. Discrepancies emerge between religious dogmas and practices, which according to the religious doctrines should be one and the same. According to Tibi, a crucial point for analysis is to focus on what the community is doing, not what they are saying or thinking (2001, 45). The gap between Shari'a and state law has been resolved in Iran in the favour of the latter already by ayatollah Khomeini. In his famous letter to the then-president Khamenei, he stated that Shari'a law must refer to the law of the state, since achieving a higher interest of the Islamic Republic also advances Islam itself (Roy 2004, 644-645).

[91] The libidinal investments into the obedience of religious authority were analysed in the Methodology chapter.

evoke the substitution of signifiers through the Karbala matrix. The question remains how those practices advance the construction of the Iranian nationhood through religious framework. How is religious framework fused in the national one?

3.2. Nationhood and tautology

It can be argued that every social or national construction bases its identity on some perceived authentic uniqueness. These unique features permeate the identity of political subjectivity and are simultaneously reflected in the common perception of the Nation. Inevitably, these features provide the glue that keeps such social construction together. The understanding of nationhood in Iran changed with the 1979 Islamic revolution, which introduced the possibility of ontological transformation in the Nation's ideological matrix and redefined its identity.[92] The Pahlavi monarchy promoted history, land, and culture as the defining characteristics of Iranian nationhood, which the Revolution reinvented in religious framework. In the construction of the new socio-symbolic order, the Revolution incorporated the Persian grandeur of the past with the 'authentic Islamic roots.' They come together to tell the story of heroism and injustice, producing an unlikely fusion in a national context. Interestingly, this seemingly contradictory fusion can in fact lend religious authenticity its rationale by deriving it from Persian narrative of descent.[93] The greatest legacy of the Islamic revolution lies precisely in connecting Iranians with Shi'ism in the place of 'Persianisation,' wisely taken over from the Shah's ethno-nationalist discourse as a form of integrative force (Ansari 2013, 7; Mottahedeh 2008, 147; Roy 2004, 653). Such particular fusion therefore enables an ideological reading of history and creates reference points for national identification. How precisely did the national framework in Iran acquire a new identity?

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[92] See chapter 4 for the analysis of the ontological changes to the ideological structure brought by the 1979 Islamic revolution.

[93] Ali Ansari suggests that the point of Iranian collective emancipatory identification lies in a certain epoch or figure, often found in the myth of Cyrus the Great. We can argue that the social order resorts to myths and history through a variety of rituals as a basis for ethical and national identification. According to Ansari, Iran's self-image comes into being through mythical discourse, which provides the framework for identity according to contemporary socio-symbolic reality. This identification faced its biggest challenge not with the Arab incursion, but with the shock of scientific Western modernity (2013, 5, 7, 9, 13, 15).

The first thing we should point out about the construction of the new socio-symbolic order in Iran is that the political project of the Islamic revolution was based on a tautological 'return to tradition.' In the 'search for tradition,' the very concept of the Nation was reinvented in a religious framework that practically nationalised Shi'ism by embedding it in the state. The construction of the Nation through a variety of rituals further stipulates a particular self-alienation, producing fantasy space for ideology. If we translate this in terms of national identity, we see that any national revival is based on its circular fantasy constructions, its myths. National revival constitutes itself through certain external limits, like a resistance to certain oppression, be it in the form of a conqueror, a coloniser, or the monarchy in Iranian case.[94] This resistance renders the revival possible under the idea of salvaging the remains of previous traditions. National revival deliberately overlooks that prior to this experience, the tradition in question has not existed in this specific form (Žižek 1993, 116-117). To paraphrase Hegel (1969, 402), its fight is a defence of something which comes to be only through being experienced as lost or endangered. In that sense, the Revolution identified the Islamic identity as being under threat from the monarchy.

National struggle lends legitimacy to the reinvented tradition and simultaneously structures ideological legitimisation of the new national order by presenting itself as the materialisation of that tradition. It therefore conceals the process of inventing its own tradition by establishing a myth of origin, which starts to represent the goal through resistance. In this sense, national identity is constructed through the fundamental paradox of 'rediscovering tradition,' where a Nation finds a sense of identity by discovering itself as already present in its tradition (Žižek 2008d, 213-214). This gesture is experienced as a 'return to its true roots' and is paradoxically possible only when the conditions for such experience have ceased to exist. Since the actual return to tradition is impossible, the complementary relationship between tradition and modernity serves as a shock-absorber for the process of modernisation (Žižek 1993, 148, 225). We could argue that the political Islamic movement with its tautological 'return to tradition' represents a desperate attempt to avoid the structural imbalance of global capitalism. Industrialisation abruptly entered Iran in the early 1960's under the Pahlavi monarchy,

[94] See for example Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986).

which led the majority of the population descending into ever bigger disparities introduced by global capitalism.[95]

The proponents of the political Islamic movement claimed to fight against modern western imperialism, which they translated into the attack on Islamic identity *via* the monarchy. By rediscovering their 'authentic roots,' they offered a counterweight to Western economic exploitation and a way to master this imbalance. We should therefore avoid the orientalist trap of conceiving Iran as some pre-modern, theocratic national construction limping behind 'modernity,' since it has developed effective mechanisms to drown the anxiety of capitalist modernity, as we shall see (see Žižek 2000, 114; 1993, 148; 2008d, 20). The national-religious structure therefore presents a unique characteristic of Iranian political identity. It forms the point from which progress emanates in their eyes and as such serves as the very epitome of their uniqueness. The Iranian tautological return to 'Islamic tradition' simultaneously serves as the foundation of their future and reveals the construction of the Master Signifier.[96] The libidinal connection to the Iranian reinvented tradition serves as a catalyst of their progress and establishes a framework for further development. What this tautology resulted in is an ultimately perverted instrument of modernisation, which remained within the same capitalistic logic.[97] This return, rather, tries to justify the acceptance of modernity on the basis of some conceptualisations of what tradition should be. Such tautology seems to have created powerful fantasies that sustain the idea of a divine Nation. What is the lure that glues such social order together?

3.2.1. The enjoyment of the Nation-Thing

Any national construction establishes and differentiates its identity by locating it in a set of unique features. National awareness is based on those external features that separate it from other nations. The struggle to construct an authentic national identity therefore evokes a sort of narcissistic crisis, to paraphrase Julia Kristeva. This narcissism is associated with an emerging desire for a well-defined Nation and, more to the point, a

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[95] In 1963, the Shah of Iran rushed to industrialise the country in a project he called the *White revolution* to legitimise his reign. See Introduction to Part I and chapter 5 for further reading.

[96] The tautological 'return of the Thing to itself' is what Lacan designated as *point de capiton,* the 'quilting point' at which the signifier falls into the signified and holds the meaning of the ideological order together (Žižek 1993, 148). See chapter 4 for the emergence of a new Master Signifier in Iran; see Methodology chapter for its theoretical explanation.

[97] See chapter 6 for the analysis of perversion; chapter 7 for the analysis of Iranian political economy.

clear definition of the Nation's unique features (Kristeva 1982, 14). National identification is also an exemplary case of how external features are reflected into an internal limit, as we have observed in the tautological reinvention of tradition. In defining what a subject of the Iranian nation is, we arrive at the internal limit of 'Iranianness,' an unattainable point which in fact only prevents the subjects from achieving their supposed full identity (see Žižek 2008d, 110). The construction of the national narrative is then not a question of historical memory, but an unconscious relation with, and simultaneous exclusion of, the trauma surrounding the fantasy of the socio-symbolic order.

As Lacan suggested, an identity is constructed through the complex interrelations of three registers (Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real), where a temporal closure can be achieved through a series of identifications.[98] Translated into the framework of national identity, the latter becomes sustainable when it can provide the subject with a consistent experience of its meaning. Consequently, such construction is sustained as long as the subjects support it through unconscious libidinal investments. In this sense, the Islamic revolution served to free the subjects from identifications with the Pahlavi monarchy and presupposed a new symbolic network of signifiers as the foundation for nationhood. As Homi Bhabha noted (1994, 159-160), the collective identification occurs "all at once" as a retroactive gesture, where the Nation calls itself into being. The birth of a Nation is based on "a strange forgetting of the history of the nation's past," namely the violence involved in establishing the national structure.

Bhabha's obligation to forget echoes what Lacan called the "forced choice" in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (1994) and in *The logic of phantasy* (2002), which elucidates how the subject is included into the socio-symbolic order.[99] Belonging to a specific socio-symbolic order obliges the subjects to make an empty symbolic gesture that marks the gap between the public symbolic space and the fantasmatic kernel of the subject. Since the Lacanian subject is mediated by the Other, this

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[98] See Evans 2006 for further explanation and literature on the three orders.

[99] Lacan approached the paradox of the forced choice by presenting it as a no-choice in *Seminar XI* (1994). He illustrated the lack of real choice through an example of mugging: *"Your money or your life*! If I choose the money, I lose both. If I choose life, I have life without the money, namely, a life deprived of something" (Lacan 1994, 212). The subject in this example therefore does not have a choice to choose the option with money, as he will be either way deprived of it. See also Lacan 2002; Žižek 2008d, chapter 4.

mediation also implies a certain symbolic castration or exclusion that allows the subject to enter the common socio-symbolic edifice (Vighi 2012, 104-105; Žižek 2008a, 36-40; 2008d, 146-148).[100] The mechanism of the forced choice points precisely to the disavowal of the traumatic knowledge enabling the subject to belong to the socio-symbolic order he identifies with. This mechanism marks a traumatic experience, which becomes the reference point for national identity. The more traumatic the forced choice, the more it ties the subject to the ideological order. We can again observe the ideological closure through Benjamin's notion of historicity, which reveals how the meaning of the past culminates with the understanding of the present and excludes a certain traumatic element to provide the national fantasy with a consistent experience of its appearance (see Bhabha 1994, 160-161).

How precisely does a national fantasy glue the subject to the social order? As Pascal (2006, 216) pointed out, material rituals also presuppose the function of unconscious ideological beliefs, so a Nation cannot be simply reduced to authentic ethnic rituals, collapsing into specific ways of life. The strength of a given ideological fantasy is not only a culmination of its discursive practices, nor can it be reduced to the point of symbolic identifications. These identifications and material practices bond a community together through the underlying organisation of unconscious enjoyment, embodied in the unique way a community organises its rituals and practices. The inexplicable knot of unconscious enjoyment is the last support of any ideology and provides it with its libidinal consistency.[101] National fantasy is kept together by its relation towards the Nation *qua* Thing, a relation of a Nation towards its kernel of enjoyment.[102] The practices materialising the Nation-Thing in its positive ontological consistency must therefore be sustained by ideological enjoyment that glues the subject to the ideological order. A Nation exists only insofar it continuously materialises its specific enjoyment in a set of social rituals and practices. In this sense, nationalism marks the eruption of enjoyment in the social edifice, where the Cause for interpellation into such social

[100] This act of inclusion could also fail and produce a new type of subjectivisation and knowledge in the order of meaning with a series of new elusive objects, which was the case in the Islamic revolution.

[101] See Methodology chapter for the explanation of ideological enjoyment; see chapter 6 for its analysis in Iran.

[102] The concept of the Thing (*das Ding*) is central to Lacan's 1959-1960 Seminar VII (1992). Despite abandoning the notion, it provided the essential features for the theoretical development of *objet a* in the order of the Real from 1963 onwards. For the use of the Thing in the framework of the Nation, see Žižek 1993, chapters 4 and 6.

structure is embodied in the way Iranian community organises its particular enjoyment.[103] The stronger the dynamics of interpellation, the more compulsive the enjoyment gluing the subject to the social order (Žižek 1993, 201-202, 208).

This underlying structure of ideological enjoyment is determined by a series of contradictory properties, namely the Iranian incomprehensible 'way of life,' something presumably understandable only to the subject of the community in question. The libidinal attachment to the Nation's 'unique way of life,' to the preservation of the Thing, points to 'something more' that is pertinent to their rituals, which is simultaneously reflected in the dimension of the subject (Žižek 1993, 201). The dimension of the subject 'that is more than himself' is what Lacan calls the *objet petit a* and represents the lure subjects follow through fantasy narration.[104] The distinguished dimension of the Iranian national construction can be located in its relation to a religious kernel, which I will analyse in more detail in chapter four. This relation reflects both the political subjectivity and the socio-symbolic order, which is ultimately sustained by the subject's enjoyment of the Nation-Thing. The role of ideology in this process is to offer the subject a Cause for interpellation into such order. The ideological Cause in Iran is thus reflected in the Nation-Thing, namely the divine characteristics permeating the socio-symbolic order and the political subjectivity. An Iranian subject can therefore only relate to the Thing if he accepted the forced choice to belong to the socio-symbolic order and shares the belief in the Nation-Thing with other subjects of ideology.

The collective, national Thing exists only because its members transpose the belief in the Thing onto each other and presuppose that other members of the community believe in it. This paradoxical structure therefore exists as long as the members of the community collectively sustain the belief in it, since the Thing is the product of this belief itself (Žižek 1993, 201-202). A subject itself does not need to believe in the Nation-Thing directly, he only needs to believe that other subjects believe in it.[105] The transference of this belief sustains the network of written and unwritten rules of the

[103] For the analysis of interpellation as the unconscious subjection of the subject to the hegemonic social order in Iran, see subchapters 5.1. and 6.2.

[104] See Methodology chapter for an analysis of *objet a*; chapter 4 for its emergence in Iranian fantasy; chapter 5 for its political role; chapter 6 for its libidinal role.

[105] See chapter 5 for the analysis of transference of belief through the Other in Iran.

social order. A consistent socio-symbolic order is underlined by the relation to the enjoyment of the Nation-Thing, which is also vital for the continuity of ideology in Iran. The materialisation of the Thing through a variety of rituals provides the Nation with its consistency as an empirical phenomenon. What should not be overlooked is that the Thing is also marked by the *objet a* in its subversive potential, which exposes the lack in the symbolic structure and disturbs the entire ideological construction. In the quest to achieve a full national identity, the Islamic Republic decided to purge itself of any Western influence, which it finds threatening to its ideological enjoyment structured around the Nation-Thing. Any intrusion into the particular way this enjoyment structures the Nation-Thing is experienced as a theft of enjoyment. Such view reveals that it is the logic of enjoyment that is threatened, not the nation's particular values or identity. The real threat to the Iranian ideological construction is therefore not cultural or ideological intrusions from the West; the limit to the ideological order lies within the ideological fantasy itself.

Revolutionary action in 1979 therefore represents a performative gesture in the re-signification of the Nation with new objects of desire, fusing them together. It announced the deconstruction of monarchic fantasy by the refusal of the subjects to continue making the forced choice, the inclusion into its socio-symbolic order. In these terms, the fall of the Shah was triggered by a short-circuit in the transference of belief in the Nation-Thing among the subjects of the monarchy.[106] The Revolution announced a shift in the conditions sustaining the social order and brought forward new objects of desire that triggered a new fantasy. In the next chapter, I will analyse the ontological shifts that enabled the (de)construction of the socio-symbolic order and reveal the new modalities of the ideological matrix sustaining the social reality in Iran today.

[106] The Shah's accumulation and consumption of the nation's wealth was tolerated as long as the monarchy was perceived as 'what is in Iranians more than Iranians,' namely a transferential relationship towards the Leader and his wealth as 'their own.' The transference was over when the Shah lost his charisma and changed from the embodiment of the nation's substance to the parasite of the nation's body (see Žižek 1993, 280-281, n5).

4. Islamic revolution and the (de)construction of fantasy

4.1. Islamic revolution as Event

The 1979 Islamic revolution represented a radical shift in the conditions sustaining social reality in Iran and drastically changed the political, social, economic and legal foundations of the state. To approach the analysis of these new conditions, it is vital to differentiate between their ontological status and their violent ontic manifestations. This differentiation allows me to move the critical perspective of the inquiry from the ethical evaluation of the revolutionary process to the analysis of the ontological break with the existing monarchical ideological order. I will approach the ontological shifts within the ideological matrix in Iran with the help of Alain Badiou's notion of the Event.[107] I will make use of Badiou's Event by reading it within the Lacanian understanding of subjectivity, which enables me to approach the Islamic revolution as a re-emergence of the subject through a break with the established chain of symbolic conditions.

Let us first discern how Badiou conceives the notion of Event, before adding the Lacanian twist to it. Badiou differentiates between the ontological horizon of the Event and its manifestation in empirical reality; between events in their causality at the level of social reality and the Event in its ontological dimension. That makes his theory particularly useful to approach the Revolution's inherent structural violence, as it allows me to analyse the traumatic dissolution of the monarchical fantasy. Badiou repeatedly claimed that the Event is in principle unfounded, meaning that ontological changes by definition cannot be predicted within a given ideological matrix. In this respect, the Event for Badiou is external to the situation for which it occurs, as it announces fundamental, yet unpredictable changes to the ideological matrix sustaining a given reality (Badiou 2012a, 364). Crucially, he conceives the Event as an exceptional occurrence that intervenes into the symbolic order from the outside, and he conditions the emergence of the Event on the subject's *'fidelity'* to it. For Badiou, the subject is the agent who intervenes to actualise the Event, i.e. to turn it into a historically specific and concrete experience. As the Event anticipates new conditions sustaining the socio-

[107] For reading on the theory of the Event, see Badiou 2007; Badiou and Tarby 2013; Pluth 2010, chapters 2 and 3. For a critical engagement with the notion of the Event, see Žižek 2008c, Part II; Zupančič 2000, chapter 8; Vighi and Feldner 2007, chapter 14.

symbolic edifice, it also brings the subject into existence, meaning that the subject emerges after the Event itself. Following this logic, the Event would appear to be outside subjectivity; however, simultaneously, it can only emerge through the subject's performativity, which brings it into existence. In Badiou's terms, then, we would seem to be condemned to a circular logic between the subject and the Event, where the subject is unable to account for the emergence of the Event (Badiou 2007, 174-175, 233-235, 239, 433; Žižek 2008c, 148-149).

This deadlock can be resolved with the Lacanian understanding of subjectivity by adding a slight, albeit crucial theoretical twist to Badiou's reading. According to Lacan, the subject is essentially defined by its encounter with the Real as the impossible (Lacan 1994, 167), not simply by Badiou's fidelity to this encounter. By separating the Event from the domain of the subject, Badiou overlooks the crucial role of the negativity of the Real as the founding feature of the Event. A Lacanian reading, on the other hand, emphasises precisely that subjectivity depends on the ontological overlap between the subject and the Real. The Event in this sense can be understood as the subject's angst-ridden encounter with the Lacanian Real, opening up the possibility of transforming the existing socio-symbolic order of meaning by endorsing the radical negativity of the drive.[108] The impossible Real thus emerges within the ideological field as a radical rupture, a break. Read from the Lacanian standpoint, the Event can be defined as the tension between the Symbolic order and the impossible Real as the constitutive symptomatic feature of the Symbolic itself. That is to say, the Event is not external to the Symbolic order, but, on the contrary, constitutes the Symbolic through its symbiotic relationship with the Real, since the Symbolic and the Real are mediated precisely through their ontological tensions. The Event announces the suspension of the conditions sustaining reality and opens up the possibility of re-inscription of new signifiers forming the ideological meaning. The fact that it happens does not refute its basic impossibility; the encounter with the Real happens exactly as an impossibility that reconfigures fantasy's founding principles. In this regard, we should also not overlook that the Real in Lacan by definition represents an impossible, traumatic dimension,

[108] The economy of the drive transforms the meaning of signifiers constituting a symbolic construction and is decisive for the articulation of the subject's relation to enjoyment (Zupančič 2000, 235). For an explanation of the drive, see Lacan 1994, particularly Part III; the essay *The position of the Unconscious* in Lacan 2006a.

which cannot be included in the social edifice as an empirical fact. However, as we can see, the impossibility of the Real can have effects in the domain of the possible by providing the revolutionary subject with the radical freedom to act, to reformulate its foundation of existence (Vighi and Feldner 2007, 169-171, 177-178; Zupančič 2000, 235).

As the above suggests, the Lacanian dimension of the Real is located within the horizon of the Event determining ontological shifts in the socio-symbolic structure, not at the level of immediate and violent manifestations of revolutionary social reality. In terms of my analysis of the Islamic revolution, it could be argued that the Revolution represented an ontological break with the conditions that sustained the monarchical social reality in Iran. It marked the gap between the ideological construction of the monarchy and the Islamic Republic, through which a new fantasy emerged. The Revolution as Event was a contingent rupture in the social edifice, opened precisely by the impossibility of the Real, which also separated ordinary individuals in Iran from their symbolic structure.[109] At the level of social reality, we can observe how the echoes of the trauma inherent in the Event served as a twisted fidelity to the Event itself. In this sense, repression, chauvinism, terror and manipulation served to realise the Event, moving it beyond pragmatic power struggle (Žižek 2008f, 33). However, we should draw a line between the ontological violence of the Event and the empirical violence in social reality as a strategy for bringing about the Event, of forcing the encounter with the Real.[110] In this regard, revolutionary violence is the reproduction of the Event's traumatic effect in the subject's immediate reality and is used as a political strategy in an effort to actualise the Event (Zupančič 2000, 235-236).[111] The Event therefore opened the possibility to

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[109] Badiou made a similar analysis in the context of the Arab Spring on the example of the revolutionary events in Egypt. See Badiou 2012b.

[110] The difference between the structural violence of the Event and its reproduction in social reality can also be explained with Walter Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* (1986), where he distinguished between divine and mythical violence. In Badiou's terms, divine violence belongs to the ontological horizon of the Event that brought down the ideological order of the monarchy, while mythical violence belongs to the revolutionaries and the new state to establish and enforce its laws (Benjamin 1986, 297-298, 300; Žižek 2008e, 198-201).

[111] Zupančič suggests a reading of the Event's echoes in social reality as a political strategy to force the encounter with the Real through an ethical dimension. By reproducing the Event's structural violence in the social edifice, the clerical faction of the Revolution produced the equivalence of a 'Supreme Good,' a 'historical Necessity' that must be realised at all costs. All revolutionary projects are ultimately based on the elimination of tradition and the emergence of a new society or a supreme Good (Zupančič 2000, 236, 238; Žižek 2008d, 260-261).

restructure the phenomenological level of social reality in Iran. We should not overlook that the Iranian social reality is already a mediation of its inherent tensions, which produce concrete consequences. The aspiration to abolish this traumatism from the new socio-symbolic order rather than channelling it points to certain totalitarian features.[112]

The revolutionary process of 1979 therefore designates the disintegration of the libidinal support for monarchical ideological fantasy and the formation of a new socio-symbolic order with a new subjectivity. Ryszard Kapuściński spotted the precise moment of this radical fissure in the symbolic construction, the proverbial beginning of the end, which opened the gap that enabled a construction of a new fantasy. He witnessed a moment that suspended the symbolic efficiency of the monarchy, when one policeman walked from his post towards a single protester at the edge of the crowd and ordered the man to go home. The man looks wary, but insolently at the unformed authority and does not move. The looks on the faces of the crowd around him are the same, when the police officer finally gives up on asserting his authority. The two men are now mutually indifferent, useless to each other (2006, 109-110). The news spread quickly and the whole symbolic network of signifiers holding the Authority of the monarchy in place was suspended. The Revolution was now a fact, but still demanded thousands of lives and years of post-revolutionary terror before the Islamic Republic took the shape as we know today.[113] This radical rupture in the social edifice enabled an emergence of a whole plethora of competing ideologies, discerned in numerous political factions, confusing reorganisation of the social body, people's committees engaging in vigorous political debates and growing parallel institutions to that of the government.[114] The clergy retroactively appropriated the ontological horizon of the Event by reproducing its echoes in a political struggle of strategic interests.

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[112] I will analyse totalitarian features in terms of interpellation into the Iranian socio-symbolic order in chapter 5.

[113] Hegel made an interesting remark on this point that the antagonism of civil society cannot be suppressed without a fall into totalitarian terror and only afterwards can the state limit its disastrous effects. Hegel's critique of the French revolutionary terror in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977) points to it precisely as a necessary moment for the construction of a new order (Žižek 2008b, xxviii). For the analysis of the revolutionary violence, see also Žižek 2007a; 2008e; 2008d, chapter 6; Benjamin 1986.

[114] See introduction to Part II for the description of events.

4.2. The divine dimension of desire and *objet a*

The clerical establishment with Khomeini at its helm quickly appropriated the Revolution by identifying and drowning the national anxiety in the safe boundaries of religion and consequently in the Islamic government. As other revolutionary projects, the Islamic revolution was based on a new form of social sublimation, this time delivered from the corruption of the past. We can spot here the contours of the perverted Sadeian fantasy prioritising destruction over creation, insofar as the intent was to eliminate the corrupt and imperial tradition of the Pahlavi monarchy in the name of a new immaculate society.[115] The revolutionary subject set itself a task to deliver the Nation from the chains of the old society through revolutionary violence as the echo of the Event in social reality. Since the Event displaces the subject from the symbolic network of established meaning, it necessarily also reformulates the desire that triggers a new fantasy (Zupančič 2000, 236; Žižek 2008d, 261-262).[116]

The re-articulation of desire was set off by the metonymy of signifiers holding the Authority of the Pahlavi monarchy in place *via* the Karbala matrix.[117] On the level of ideological Ritual, the Karbala matrix fused the temporary socio-political discontent with the unconscious subversion of Authority through religious practices. Through these rituals, the Pahlavi monarchy was accused of supporting the imperial exploitation of the Nation. It became the embodiment of the Sunni authority responsible for the Shi'a subjugation, which eventually triggered the disintegration of monarchical fantasy. Khomeini used religious eulogy to collapse the structure of religion with the one of the Nation. Their overlap structured the ideological enjoyment around a new Nation-Thing, opened up by the traumatic Event.[118] As Roy (2004, 653) noticed, the greatest legacy of

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[115] I will analyse the Sadean perversion through Lacan's famous text *Kant avec Sade* in the framework of Authority and libidinal sustainability of fantasy in chapter 6.

[116] Desire triggers a new fantasy and attaches itself to an object that the subjects follow through the fantasy narration. The function of desire is not to bring satisfaction, but to ceaselessly reproduce by attaching itself to new objects that sustain the fantasy frame. See Methodology chapter.

[117] Metonymy concerns the ways in which signifiers can be combined or linked into a single signifying chain, whereas metaphor concerns the ways in which a signifier in one signifying chain may be substituted for a signifier in another chain. Together, metaphor and metonymy constitute the way in which signification is produced. Metaphor is therefore situated at the point where meaning is produced in non-meaning, giving rise to a new Master Signifier. This constant resignification reveals the metonymic slippage, where the symptom is hidden in the metaphor and desire is metonymy (Lacan 2006a, 421-423, 439).

[118] See chapter 3 for the analysis of the Nation-Thing.

the Revolution is to connect Iranians with Shi'ism in the place of 'Persianisation.' The fusion of Shi'a traumatism with the notion of a grandiose Persian nation with over 2500 years of monarchical history produced a new desire for a divine Shi'a Nation. This desire was then further mediated by revolutionary language, which pushed desire beyond its proper limits to some infinitive that can never be fully satisfied.

The prioritisation of desire for a divine Shi'a Nation pushed by the clerical establishment was instigated by the perceived necessity to provide an answer to the anxiety of modernity, which translated into a political project for the Islamic Republic. The intangible goal of the Revolution was quickly reduced to the objective for an Islamic government, where nationalistic dynamics were interpreted through the frame of the Islamic Republic and its opposition into national traitors (see Khomeini 1981a; 1981b). This desire is therefore sustained and channelled through religious institutions embedded in the state structure.[119] As pointed out in the Methodology chapter, religious institutions do not prohibit desire, but paradoxically function as desire's very guarantee. Their main task is to regulate *jouissance* within the framework of religious Authority, where the transgressions of desire do not pose any serious threats to Authority but can conversely reinforce it.[120] A pure prohibition would only amplify *jouissance* and undermine the symbolic Authority by shifting the libidinal economy of the subject from desire to drive (Žižek 2008c, 361). Channelling, rather than prohibiting desire does not undermine religious authority in Iran and produces enjoyment upon the seemingly consistent social order.

Khomeini conceived religion as a medium through which the yet unborn Nation could organise its own inception. He therefore politicised a discourse where the new desire giving momentum to the Revolution was inextricably linked to the establishment of an Islamic government. The destruction of the old social order and the extraction of a sublime Nation from within the people marks the revolutionary violence in social

[119] See the introduction to Part II and chapter 5 for the socio-political analysis of the state structure.

[120] For example, religious Authority was reinforced through martyrdom, an important ideological mechanism used as a political and military strategy during the Revolution and the war with Iraq. As Zupančič suggests, the coordinates of desire implode the meaning and goal of life in the opportunity to die, in martyrdom. Death becomes the imperative and the agent of force within itself by translating the ontological rupture of the Event into a strategy to force its realisation. In other words, while death may represent the inevitable price subjects could pay for the forced choice, it can also represent a direct aim (Zupančič 2000, 236-237).

reality. In other words, by destroying the old social order of the monarchy, a Nation would re-emerge through the extraction of a pure, sublime object from the corrupted social body (Žižek 2008d, 262).[121] As a master of public rhetoric, Khomeini pointed out to the revolutionary Iranian subject the sublime dimension of the Iranian nation by addressing its religious kernel. This religious dimension was then retroactively recognised as the cause of desire for a new divine Nation. Khomeini managed to manipulate the objects of desire for his political project, which enabled an imaginary identification among the subjects in the new socio-symbolic order. In the very (im)possibility of such a divine social order lays the impossible object of Iranian political subjectivity, namely the divine Shi'a kernel. Importantly, this dimension also marks new objects entering the fantasy frame. The subjects follow these objects of desire through the fantasy narration, which conversely sustain the fantasy structure.

The desire for a divine Shi'a Nation thus triggered a new ideological fantasy, which now mediates between the symbolic structure and the objects in reality. Since these objects embody the desire for the Shi'a Nation, they oscillate between different positive objects that fit the national-religious disposition of subjectivity. As the new fantasy is equally lacking by definition, it must be sutured by an object that allows for a consistent libidinal experience of the ideological edifice. The socio-symbolic order is therefore always stained by this particular object through which reality is subjectivised (Žižek 2008a, 105, 276). In this respect, we should add that while *objet a* fills the gap in the symbolic structure, it simultaneously also distorts the perception of reality by exposing the lack in fantasy construction, which I will address in more detail in Part II of the thesis.

Religion therefore provides the framework within which Iranian subjects identify the objects of fantasy as the cause of their desire. This divine dimension permeates both the ideological subject and the socio-symbolic order in Iran. The object of fantasy represents a certain excess, namely 'that what is in the subject more than himself,' pointing to its divine Shi'a kernel. It endows the subject with inexplicable features, supposedly unique to the Iranian nation. These extraordinary features make them greater

[121] The sublime object of ideology is the fascinating object of desire the subjects seek but are never able to attain. *Objet a* plays an important socio-political role by filling the gaps in the symbolic structure, while simultaneously representing its impasse. See Methodology chapter.

than their individual characteristics and enable the structuring of national identity. *Objet a* therefore provides the minimum of identity to the subjects caught in the ideological order as a mediator of a relationship between two interacting subjects and the big Other (Žižek 2008a, 10; 2008d, 148).[122] As revealed in chapter three, subjects can only relate to such order if it is sustained by an underlying unconscious enjoyment. The latter is produced by an overlap of *objet a* with a stable meaning of fantasy provided by the Master Signifier.

4.3. The emergence of the Master Signifier

The Islamic revolution as an authentic Event represents a gap between the ideological order of the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic. This fissure in the existing monarchical order enabled the inscription of the Nation into a new fantasy, underlined by a new meaning. At the level of social reality, a gap in the social body was characterised by the emergence of multiple political discourses and factions competing for hegemony. At the ontological level, all these different struggles were sublated into a collective social body against the Shah through Lacanian imaginary identification (Žižek 2008f, 31). In the early stages of the Revolution, different political factions gathered behind the mobilising religious rhetoric, since the clergy was deemed unfit to govern. Soon, however, the religious establishment embedded the Revolution in its discourse and institutions, forcing other factions and movements into submission to their tactics.[123] Since various organisations embodied antagonistic socio-political positions, their cooperation was possible only under a common political banner. This new underlying meaning of the socio-symbolic order was fused with the framework of the Revolution *via* the rituals of Karbala matrix. That caused a metonymic slippage of desire, which triggered a new fantasy. For ideology to take hold as a fantasy solution, it must deploy a signifier that holds the underlying meaning of the ideological field together and functions as an empty container for other signifiers' particular meanings (Žižek 2008a, 95; 2008c, 209). For a new social totality or a historical unity to emerge, its narrative must refer to such a pure, empty signifier. The Master Signifier (S1), in Lacan's conceptualisation, closes the gap in the symbolic order by occupying a

[122] The big Other represents an unconscious symbolic field of meaning, which provides the subject with a consistent experience of the social order. See Methodology chapter.

[123] See Introduction to Part I of the thesis for the analysis of events.

hegemonic position and providing an understanding of a certain ideological experience. Historical reality is always symbolised, and the experience of its discourse is provided by an experience of its meaning, supported by some meaningless signifier without the signified (Lacan 2006a, 694).

For the emerging S1 to occupy the hegemonic position in the symbolic order, it had to capture the open identity of the Revolution under a single notion, through which all participating factions could seemingly blend their particular political projects. Religion provided such an empty ideological container by posing as an apolitical framework, which stood on the very border that separates the political from apolitical. Shi'a Islam thus started to function as an empty notion filled with contingent content, which retroactively redefined Shi'a Islam within the national framework. It tapped into a common platform that provided the fundamental language of unity beyond political differences. Khomeinists managed to establish a universal ideological notion, where their particular content won the hegemonic struggle for the sign. Their interpretation of the Revolution provided an empty ideological container to other particular contents by representing itself as apolitical and universal. A struggle for political hegemony is always marked by the appropriation of a seemingly apolitical signifier that marks the impossible fullness of society and transcends political boundaries. The struggle for the empty S1 is therefore a political struggle, where politics marks the gap between the chain of knowledge (S2) and S1 (Žižek 2008c, 207-209).

The Islamic movement achieved that by offering a political solution for the perceived anxiety of modernity through the return to the 'Islamic tradition,' a tautology that points to the S1. The 'return of the Thing to itself' is what Lacan designated as the 'quilting point' (*point de capiton*), at which the signifier falls into the signified and holds the meaning of the ideological order together (Žižek 1993, 148).[124] Tautology reveals the context in which the new desire for a divine Nation should be realised, where the return to 'authentic Islamic tradition' serves as the answer to the anxiety of capitalist

[124] Lacan introduced *point de capiton* in his *Seminar III: The Psychoses* (1997) as the point in the signifying chain that stops its meaning from sliding. In the analysis of ideology in Iran, this point represents the fear of God's wrath, which retroactively suspends all other fears. Such formal inversion is possible due to enjoyment, allowing the fear of God as a general equivalent to be exchanged against all other fears. It bears the same logic as the dialectics of Marx's critique of the commodity form, where all commodities can be exchanged against universal value of money (Žižek 2008d, 16-17, 19, 21). See also subchapter 5.2.

modernity.[125] The path towards the realisation of this impossible desire was thus made possible by channelling the Revolution through the empty container, which totalised the meaning of the emerging socio-symbolic edifice. At the height of the hegemonic struggle, Foucault rightly spotted that "the Iranian clerics want to authenticate their regime through the significations that the uprising had" (Foucault 2001, 451-452). The clerical establishment managed to link the revolutionary uprisings with religious institutions and its discourse, reducing the Revolution to the goal of establishing the Islamic Republic. The metonymic slippage of desire also provided a new metaphor within the framework of the Revolution, giving birth to a new Master Signifier. The new S1 thus became the 'Islamic Revolution,' whose unfolding in that particular context is retroactively presented as a 'historical Necessity' that led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The entire socio-symbolic construction and indeed the existence of the state was totalised on the background of the revolutionary legacy that the Republic now embodies.

The S1'Islamic Revolution' combined and at the same time neutralised the antagonistic potential of incompatible views such as the socialist motif of the worker's dignity and the private capitalist ownership. The role of S1 is to provide an articulation of these contents in a way that suits the newly established relations of domination. These diverse viewpoints rely on the empty signifier to obliterate the differences between them, to erase their antagonistic gaps. Its ideological emptiness therefore provides a fundamental building block for the emerging social order.[126] It determines what subjects will experience as reality and allows us to observe the gap stretched from trauma to fantasy inherent in Shi'ism itself. It is precisely this gap that Khomeini tried to fill during the Revolution and later institutionalised it in the state's systemic dichotomy.[127]

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[125] The intrusion of capitalist modernity coincides with the Shah's attempt to industrialise Iran on a mass scale, which he called the *White revolution* in 1963. Modernisation was Shah's attempt to harvest popular support after the orchestrated coup d'état against democratically elected Mohammad Mossadeq by the CIA and MI6. This capitalist industrialisation, however, caused ever bigger disparities among the population. Analysts also recognise this period as the point where the discontent would translate in the Revolution a good decade later. It also coincides with intellectual responses to the anxiety of modernity, such as those of 'Ali Shari'ati and Jalal al-Ahmad. For further reading on this point, see Adib-Moghaddam 2012; for reading on the White revolution and the events surrounding Mossadeq, see introduction to Part I.

[126] See Laclau 1996.

[127] This gap is particularly visible in the office of the Supreme Leader and its role in the political system. See Introduction to Part II of the thesis and chapter 5 for further reading.

Drawing from the above, we can thus discern the various ideological features of the empty S1 in Iran, whose function is to drown the anxiety of modernity in the safe embrace of religion. Its circular structure also represents the ideological emptiness from which state power justifies its arbitrary intervention. The Regime relies on its ideological emptiness to reward the elites close to the Regime or eliminate the opposition to ideological fantasy from the body of Nation. Opposing this signifier is translated into and perceived as opposing the Nation itself (Žižek 2011, 239). S1 is used to tame individuals or organisations under the pretext of some heretical stain damaging the legacy of the Revolution, sabotaging the Islamic Republic, insulting religious feelings of the Nation or the Supreme Leader himself.[128] This struggle usually materialises as the silencing of political opposition, which emerges as the 'return of the repressed,' a reminder of the radical negativity at the heart of the Regime and the perversion of the revolutionary goals (Žižek 2011, 128).

As Žižek (2008a, 75-76; 2011, 128-129) noted, a post-revolutionary order is always founded on a sort of betrayal of the revolution, which enables the revolutionary regime to eliminate its inherent antagonisms. Many clerics, activists and politicians surrounding Khomeini in the first years of the Revolution were latter executed, imprisoned, or exiled, like his apparent successor ayatollah Montazeri, the first Prime Minister Bani Sadr, or recently his loyal prime minister Mir Mousavi, who embodied the Green movement protests in 2009 before his arrest.[129] It is crucial to note that even the members of the elite were accused precisely of the betrayal of Revolution. The post-revolutionary terror of the Regime was thus not simply an attempt to erase the traces of the revolutionary past, but even more so points to the 'imp of perversity,' which compels the new post-revolutionary order to (re)inscribe its betrayal of the Revolution within itself. The perversion of the revolutionary goals is reflected in the guise of

[128] See chapter 5 for the political function of S1 in Iran.

[129] The biggest challenge to the Islamic Republic so far have been the violently suppressed 2009 mass protests against the disputed presidential elections, won by the conservative populist Mahmud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013). The protesters strived to delineate their religion from the one promoted by the Regime. They did not battle for democratic secularisation as the Western media interpreted it, but for the legacy of the Revolution, where Islam was once again used to accuse the government of being un-Islamic (Varzi 2011, 53, 60).

arbitrary use of power, through which the Regime tries to solidify its hegemonic position and acquire a stable ideological balance.[130]

These dynamics also point to the hyper-ideologisation of the Iranian socio-symbolic edifice with no room for the renegotiation of the gaps in the social construction. S1 tries to erase the multitude of different narratives that pose a threat to the stability of ideological fantasy. The necessity of radically erasing these gaps in the name of a 'supreme Good' points to certain totalitarian features, born out of the ethical dimension conferred on the Event in its Lacanian configuration. The reason for the subject's subordination to the underlying meaning of the ideological fantasy therefore lies in the hypnotic function of S1, which relies on its own act of enunciation, its own tautological force of symbolic injunction. Its symbolic efficiency is thus a way of legitimising the Authority of the Regime. The Regime can rely on the power of S1 as long as the unconscious symbolic field of meaning, the Lacanian big Other, provides the subject with a consistent experience of the social order through the established network of signifiers.

4.4. The (de)construction of the Iranian big Other

The Revolution presupposed the emergence of a new society, whose arrival seems to be always-already postponed, prevented by an antagonism that cannot be included in the social edifice. While S1 provides the meaning to the ideological fantasy in Iran, its consistency is sustained by the unconscious agency of the big Other. S1 and Other thus presuppose one another and retroactively enable each other. This circular loop gives the socio-symbolic construction the appearance of a 'historical Necessity' and serves as its own cause of enunciation, as being always-already there. As Žižek (2008d, 52) noted, S1 as a signifier of lack "is already the unity of itself with its Other, the reflection-into-self of the Other," an inherent Other for which it is. The overlap of S1 and the Other therefore provides and sustains the consistency of the empty ideological meaning for the subject.

With the deconstruction of the Shah's social order, the signifiers constituting the meaning of monarchical fantasy lost their hold through the subversion of Authority *via* the Karbala matrix. That consequently also suspended the consistency of social

[130] See chapter 6 for the analysis of libidinal ideological balance in Iran.

experience provided by the monarchical Other. The rearticulated desire for a divine Shi'a Nation was channelled by Khomeini precisely through the divine Shi'a kernel embodied in *objet a*, which was recognised by the new emerging Other. This Other enabled a new interpellation into a new socio-symbolic order with a new meaning. It can thus be argued that the basic function of ideology is to provide the subjects with a Cause for interpellation, as well as an understanding of its meaning embodied in S1 (Žižek 2008b, 43).[131] When the subjects answer the ideological call of the Other, they misrecognise the radical contingency of such interpellation. They perceive themselves as chosen by the Other and convert contingency into necessity. With this (mis)recognition, the Other as an unconscious agency of the social order confers meaning on the contingency of the Real in the name of God and the Nation. The Iranian subject then tries to fill the traumatic gap of the forced choice to belong to the socio-symbolic order with the fantasmatic object offered by the Other, the *objet a*. This divine object reveals the unique dimension of the Nation and enables a minimal identification among the subjects of the Iranian national fantasy (Žižek 2008d, 108-109, 147-148).

We can further approach the emergence of the Other in Iranian ideology through the libidinal disintegration of the Pahlavi fantasy in 1979.[132] The deconstruction of the monarchical fantasy was triggered by an emergence of a new social order, a new Other. The Pahlavi monarchy recognised this alien, absolute Other in the impenetrable, dishonest religious enemy. The very reasoning of this Otherness was inauthentic and foreign to Shah's ideology, inasmuch as the Shah's ideological structure was increasingly foreign to the Iranians immersed in it. When the chaos of the Revolution reached its peak, it also suspended the subject's connection to the object of the monarchical fantasy. Without the possibility of symbolic identification between the subjects, the consistent experience of the monarchical socio-symbolic order was suspended. If there is no possible identification between the subjects, no imaginary semblance through symbolically regulated exchange of meaning, the symbolic order itself turns into the nightmare of the abyss. The abyss between the subjects must

[131] For the analysis of the interpellation into the Iranian socio-symbolic order, see chapter 5.

[132] The libidinal disintegration of fantasy can be observed in all three Lacanian orders (the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real). In the Symbolic order, we can observe a staunch socio-political resistance to established Western imperialism *via* a new big Other; on the Imaginary level, an identification of a fantasmatic religious kernel and a simultaneous rejection of certain cultural and social aspects of modernity; on the level of the Real, a traumatic reconfiguration of the unconscious subjectivity.

therefore be mediated by the symbolic order, the big Other, which turns the Other-Thing into a semblance *via* the object of fantasy through minimal identification (Lacan 1997, 38; Žižek 2011, 163-165).

In the deconstruction of monarchical fantasy, the subjects experienced themselves as mercilessly exposed to the terror of the Shah's regime, where anybody could be executed at any time for any cause. When the Revolution became a fact, the revolutionary subjects utilised revolutionary terror to force the emergence of a new social order, which also implies a radical transformation of subjectivity. The subjects renounced the kernel of their identity through a new forced choice. They assumed the defence of a new Nation-Thing as the centre of their identity, along with a new moral code conferred on it (see Žižek 2001, 135). A new symbolic Other emerged to enable the identification of those belonging to the new Nation-Thing. It conversely also excluded those who did not and labelled them as the enemies of the Revolution, as the inhuman abyss of Otherness.[133] This is how we should read Khomeini's statement that no single person was killed in the revolutionary terror: "Those that we killed were not men, but criminal dogs!" (Khomeini in Žižek 2008e, 55). The Otherness in this case is the reified representation of the gap, the limit of religion, of God himself.[134] The symbolic Other, God as a social construction emanating from the revolutionary interpretation, then mediates between the abyss of the Thing and the subjects to provide them with consistency, with a cobweb of written and unwritten rules for social coexistence.

It is important to note that it is not merely the new Law that changes the socio-political landscape, but this change reflects the change in subjectivity itself. In other words, it was not enough to create a new rule of law that regulates the social order after the Revolution, since these laws still needed to be enforced unconsciously through Pascalian repetition (Žižek 2001, 136). In this sense, the emergence of a new Other in Iran points to the tendency of gradual, but complete exclusion of all otherness in the name of S1 'Islamic revolution,' since any form of alterity can threaten to open the gaps

[133] See Khomeini 1981a, 8-11.

[134] The Other-Thing, the radical Otherness is not a domain beyond representation, but is already a minimal reversal of the limit of representation into the representation of this limit itself. The point where representation breaks down is again represented in the guise of the Thing beyond representation (Žižek 2011, 175).

in an hyper-ideologised socio-symbolic structure. Such modality of the social order also produces a division within the Iranian Nation, where a certain segment of the population is becoming increasingly foreign to their own supposed national character. According to the Lacanian perspective, this new symbolic structure is also lacking, where the role of ideology is to erase the gaps in the Iranian fantasy construction *via* the sublime object that fills the lack in the Other.[135]

The Other of the Iranian ideological edifice therefore emerged under the protective veil of religious fundamentalism as a defence against the intrusion of modernity. This divine Other was appropriated by the revolutionary Regime, claiming to have the access to the Other as its earthly materialisation. By trying to unravel the divine secret of the Other, the subjects ended up attributing irrational beliefs to the Other as rational explanations for their actions. An important consequence of such perverted assertion of religion is a strong imposition of a divine superego injunction demanding sacrifices (Žižek 2008e, 83). In other words, in the attempt to make the Other a concrete, powerful agency, the ineffable Real is endowed with superstitious beliefs as a rationale for policies and actions in the name of a 'Supreme Good.' The subjects possess the unconscious knowledge of this irrationality, but they nevertheless transfer it to other subjects through the symbolic order.[136] To say it differently, a subject who fully believes in the Regime does not need to actually exist; it is enough for the subjects to presuppose that others believe in the symbolic Other for the ideological belief to function (ibid, 97). The Other therefore also sustains the symbolic Authority of the Regime, where the questioning of the Regime is translated into questioning of the divine Other itself. As much as this dependency solidifies the Regime, it also puts it in danger not just *via* the social and political role of the lack embodied in the *objet a*, but also through the subversion of Regime's Authority *via* the Karbala matrix. The latter relies on the very religious practices and rituals the Regime tries to appropriate in the framework of the state.[137]

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[135] I will explore the relation of the subject to this lack in the libidinal sustainability of fantasy in chapter 6.

[136] I will analyse the transference of ideological belief through the Other in chapter 5.

[137] Interestingly, this also produces different practices of religious rituals themselves. The Regime has appropriated and reinterpreted religious rituals to reinforce its Authority. The response of the Nation is to practice their own 'traditional' rituals in the same religious horizon from which the Regime derives its legitimacy (see Roy 2004, 653-654).

What we can effectively observe globally today and particularly in the case of Iran is a return of religion as a critique of modern society by offering itself as a place of resistance in a perverted form. The arrival of the capitalist mode of production was abrupt in the Middle East and has profoundly perturbed the symbolic order of these societies.[138] The Iranian symbolic order was exposed to this impact more directly and, it can be argued, is desperately trying to establish a new symbolic balance. What we can thus observe in the case of Iran with its tautological return to tradition is an attempt to perversely reassert religion as a safety net to appease the anxieties of capitalist modernity. That shield is materialised through religious fundamentalism, a perverted reassertion of religion as a direct insight into the divine Other (ibid, 82-83). That is to say, since the capitalist drive disturbs the social order by definition, it needs religion to keep it in check. The religious framework in Iran therefore endows the anxiety of capitalist modernity with meaning in order to create a symbolical balance. This balance is explored in Part II of the thesis by analysing how the Iranian political system operating in contemporary, hyper-modern society reproduces itself and how the libidinal balance of such ideological order is sustained through subjectivity.

[138] I will analyse the political economy of Iran in chapter 7.

Part II

The socio-political analysis of contemporary Iran

II.I. Introduction

In chapter four, I tackled the dissolution of the monarchical ideological fantasy that preceded the Islamic Republic. The 1979 Islamic revolution has drastically changed the organisation of society, politics, the economy, and the legal system. These changes did not only signal a shift of power from one ruling class to another, but were also accompanied by a radical restructuring of the ideological edifice in Iran. On this point, I have emphasised that the analysis of events on the level of social reality alone cannot address the complexity of conditions that enabled such shifts to occur. Indispensable as they are, empirical studies of the often violent manifestation of events cannot bring into view the conditions of possibility of the new structural organisation of power and authority.[139] As Gramsci pointed out, the relations of power domination are most effective when their hegemony is silently accepted through consent rather than coercion.[140] In other words, subordination must remain concealed from the subjects in order to be effective. For this reason, the only way to approach the question of power and authority is to address precisely their unwitting domination and discern the libidinal mechanisms sustaining it.

Part II of the thesis aims to analyse the unconscious libidinal attachments that manifest themselves at the level of ideological fantasy. Chapter five elucidates how ideology was materialised in the framework of the Islamic Republic, while chapter six analyses its peculiar ideological balance. Such approach simultaneously reveals how the libidinal consistency of the entire ideological structure is sustained. Part II therefore examines the libidinal organisation of power as a structure of rules, as well as the modality of Authority exercised by those in power. From my theoretical perspective, power is regarded as a rather anonymous structure of relations maintained by the imposition of

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[139] I will follow a Lacanian understanding of power and authority, where they are conceptualised on the background of their lack and sustained by performative mechanisms. In regard to Foucault's omnipresent notion of power (e.g. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (2012) and *History of Sexuality: Volume one* (2015)), a Lacanian definition would point to its lack in the symbolic structure, where this lack is masked precisely by its apparent ubiquity. State power, for example, is therefore not absolute, but based on the subject's obedience to its laws and authority imposed through state apparatuses, as described by Louis Althusser (1971).

[140] The notion of *hegemony* has become a commonplace thesis in political philosophy. Gramsci developed and gradually evolved the idea throughout his famous *Prison Notebooks* (2011), but never offered a succinct definition. Consequently, the concept was widely reinterpreted and scrutinised, with one of the most influential attempts provided by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2014).

rules that determine the social reality, such as the capitalist socio-political organisation of society. Authority, on the other hand, is seen as a structural relation between individuals or institutions, where their hierarchical relationships are defined by a third mediating element, such as a political leader or God. While the organisation of such relationships can vary considerably, the function of Authority is always to restrict and delegate pleasure, which offers security (Verhaeghe 2014, 44, 100, 213, 222). What is not to be overlooked in this inquiry is that power draws its efficiency from the production of unconscious ideological enjoyment. Every form of power implements a mode of enjoyment into the political subject and thus establishes a particular subjectivity, which I will subject to scrutiny in chapter six.

The way power and authority overlap in Iran also reveals certain totalitarian features, obfuscated by a partly participatory political system.[141] Those can be identified in a rigid modality of Authority that sustains a particular form of socio-political hegemony. The social link seems to be based on a type of enjoyment that leaves little room for the redefinition of the ideological order, which I addressed in chapter four. This unconscious enjoyment ties the subject to the fantasmatic 'unique' features of the social order and, conversely, covers up the sacrifices subjects have to make in order to belong to the Nation-Thing, as described in chapter three. When the exclusions from the process of symbolisation tip the libidinal balance, when the system demands too much enjoyment, it confronts the subjects with its inherent lack, which is then mediated in a

[141] Despite the widespread use of the notion of 'totalitarianism' in political philosophy, it remains one of the most insufficiently defined terms. The most widely recognised theory is that of Hannah Arendt (1958), who limited her analysis to totalitarian political movements of Nazism and Stalinism of the first half of the 20th century and focused on the violence they produced. Claude Lefort (1986) expanded the analysis of totalitarian regimes to the second half of the 20th century, when radical terror as a central element for investigation of totalitarianism lost its most brutal dimensions. In line with the psychoanalytic tradition, Herbert Marcuse (1964) with his notion of 'repressive desublimation' showed how totalitarianism can thrive under the guise of liberation. This notion was further developed by Žižek (1994; 2011), who demonstrated how the obedience to the established Authority paradoxically allows for transgressions that sustain a totalitarian order through ideological enjoyment. What Žižek makes clear is that totalitarian regimes are not simply based on purely oppressive political authority, as Arendt suggests. The key feature to comprehend Žižek's analysis of 'totalitarianism' lies in Lacan's notion of the 'forced choice,' which the totalitarian regimes present to their subjects. For Žižek, a totalitarian Authority reserves itself the right to demand from its subjects a justification for their every action, as if their choices are not a product of coercion and they could have chosen otherwise. The mechanism of the forced choice in the Iranian context was analysed in chapter 3 and is explained in the framework of interpellation in subchapter 5.1. For further readings, see Žižek 2008a; 2008b; 2008d; 2008e; Badiou 2014; Lacan's famous text *Kant avec Sade* (in Lacan 2006a). For the analysis of totalitarianism and Authority in Iran, see also introductions to Part I and Part II; chapter 3; subchapters 5.3.2. and 5.4.

way that enables the system's continuity. This allows me to argue that Authority in Iran is based on a totalitarian interpellation, which manifests itself in the distrust of political movements, state power paradoxes, arbitrary use of law, and a grip over private and public life among others.[142] These considerations further open up a series of questions, which I will systematically address throughout chapters five and six. If the socio-symbolic matrix is held together by a rigid structure, how does interpellation manage to embed the subjects within such ideological order? It appears that totalitarian features are concealed from the Iranian subject on the basis of partly participatory and democratic characteristics of the political system. In this respect, the most powerful position in the state structure is nonetheless occupied by appointment and embodies both the highest religious and political authority. Since this office is positioned in the centre of the political system, what form of Authority does it exert through its fusion of political and religious functions? Such considerations necessarily also open up an entire new field of inquiry into the libidinal sustainability of ideological order in Iran.

The fusion of politics and religion triggers different reactions in the international political arena and public discourse. It seems to simultaneously enable the regime in Teheran to be labelled as 'ideological,' 'extremist,' and 'fundamentalist,' as well as revolutionary, standing up to Western hegemony and exploitation. Such fascinations are conversely also echoed in Iran, considering the West to be either a beacon of freedom or the embodiment of corrupt imperialism. However, a coherent analysis of the Iranian political structure reveals a far more complex set of partly participatory political institutions, permeated with clerical bodies. It is in fact difficult to classify the Iranian political system, as it oscillates between totalitarian interpellation, democratic institutions, and clerical scrutiny. These religious and political features form a unique systemic structure that is fused into an operational dichotomy. It allows the Islamic Republic to boast itself as simultaneously the only truly democratic regime in the Middle East, holding elections for national and local offices, as well as an Islamic state

[142] Ideological interpellation as the unconscious subjection of the subject to the hegemonic social order was wittingly explained by Louis Althusser (1971). According to Althusser, individuals are interpellated into subjects in such a way that they recognise their own existence in the dominant ideology of society in which they live and are as such always-already the products of ideology. However, Althusser does not adequately account how the external ideological apparatuses of the state become internalised. Žižek suggests this deadlock can be explained through the Lacanian account of the subject's immersion into the symbolic order, i.e. the big Other (2008b, 42-44). See particularly Žižek 2008b, chapter 1 and 2012a, alongside Dolar 1993, whose insights form the background of my analysis in chapter 5.

enlightened by religious wisdom. This dichotomy operates precisely on an overlap of political and religious functions, where religion does not represent a seemingly triumphant return on the stage of modernity, but functions as a substitution for political rationale.

What is interesting about clerical and republican systemic fusion is that it produces consequences in political reality like Eurocentrism and Orientalism.[143] This framework seems to reduce Iran to a society of simple pious people free of material desires on the one hand, and religious fundamentalists on the other. Orientalism serves to mask the complexity of the social order by conceiving it as oscillating between natural harmony and theocratic tyranny. However, a closer look reveals that Iranian society is a conglomerate of different ethnicities and cultures, in itself split and antagonistic. The above views seem to be a consequence of a strong Western belief in the separation of politics from religion due to their historical struggle for power.[144] Yet, what we find in the case of Iran is a unique fusion of political and religious features that form a functioning state, which seems to provide a remarkably adaptable and stable balance for the existing social order. These considerations serve as a reminder against ideological pitfalls, which reduce Iran to a fundamental theocracy echoed in the public discourse and the mass media. A proper analysis, rather, intervenes in the place of their fusion and discerns their peculiar stability.

The existing literature and research on the fusion of politics and religion in Iran mainly engages in explaining the socio-historic circumstances surrounding the inception of the state, the institutional leverages of power, and the political and cultural characteristics of society. I will address various aspects of this unique systemic fusion, to which different authors have provided different explanations. For example, Olivier Roy (2004) and

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[143] This can be discerned in an abundance of orientalist popular literature, from Montesquieu's *Persian letters* (1721) and Morier's *Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan* (1824), to modern literature such as Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Teheran* (2003); academic literature dealing with Eurocentrism and Orientalism is most notably marked by Edward W. Said's classic *Orientalism* (1978). For a modern analysis of Orientalism and Eurocentrism in Iranian context, see for example Boroujerdi 1996; Tavakoli-Targhi 2001; Miri 2013; Bakhshandeh 2015.

[144] We can observe an (un)witting reproduction of Orientalism and Eurocentrism on the background of the political-religious fusion even in the established analysis on Iran. One such example is a recognised academic Bernard Lewis, who labelled Iran's leadership with an "apocalyptic worldview" and the "suicide or martyrdom complex that plagues parts of the Islamic world today" in an article for Wall Street Journal in August 2006. The US administration of George W. Bush also enthusiastically placed Iran on "The axis of evil" in 2002 and advocated the irrationality of Iranian leadership in regard to the nuclear issue to justify other coercive measures.

Shaul Bakhash (1985) seem to be more inclined to explain different political phenomena through a religious framework; Nikkie Keddie (2004; 2006) and Ervand Abrahamian (1989; 2008) bring in the social and historical aspects of Iranian society; Said Arjomand (1988; 2003) and Ramin Jahanbegloo (2013) focus more on sociological views; Daniel Brumberg (2016) discusses political and institutional organisation of the state, while Dilip Hiro (1985) explains the socio-economic background in the international context. There are many other authors like Ali Ansari (2007; 2013), Homa Katouzian (2003), or William Cleveland (2009), who contributed extensively to the topic. They in fact all fluctuate in and between the mentioned positions in order to explain the phenomenon called the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, such analyses simultaneously fall short of explaining how an overlap of different interests and leverages of power constitutes a socio-symbolic matrix of institutions and subjects.

While the above authors elucidate different cultural, political or economic leverages of the Iranian state, the phenomenological studies of social reality alone cannot adequately explain the libidinal dimension of transference or sustainability of power in such system. That is to say, these empirical interventions by themselves cannot provide a fully satisfactory answer to the question of power's ideological sustainability. To return to Gramsci, a pure imposition of power is ineffective and unsustainable if it does not acquire at least a minimum support of the population, since a successful hegemony conceals its true relations of domination. The real strength of power and authority does not appear to lie solely in the imposition of will, but also in creating unconscious beliefs that provide the glue that keeps the socio-symbolic order together. Since power generates a lure that escapes our immediate perception, empirical analyses can only deal with the consequences those fantasies produce, but cannot answer questions on how they came to be, or how they are sustained. At this point, a Lacanian conceptualisation of psychoanalysis offers a concept of an unconscious agency through which I can approach and analyse the libidinal investments that make this unique fusion of power operational and sustainable – the big Other.[145] I shall therefore position this concept at the centre of Part II and utilise it in order to discern the libidinal relations of power sustaining the ideological structure in Iran.

[145] For a theoretical explanation of this concept, see the Methodology chapter; for its emergence in Iranian ideological fantasy, see chapter 4.

The above questions therefore necessarily lean on and expand the points and arguments made in the previous chapters. To understand how an ideological order manages to sustain itself in the framework of a national state, I will first consider the unconscious Karbala matrix regulating the signifiers invested in Authority, as described in chapter three. This matrix influenced the shift of conditions sustaining 2500 years of monarchical rule. Such structural shifts enabled a construction of a new socio-symbolic order and redefined the modality of ideological mechanisms, as thoroughly analysed in chapter four. These have reorganised the socio-political reality in Iran, which I am addressing in the following chapter five. To approach the libidinal sustainability of fantasy in chapter six, I will first analyse the institutional arrangements of the Islamic Republic in order to discern how political institutions are permeated and influenced by the logic keeping them together.

What Part II aims to bring to light are the powerful fantasies that not only sustain the Authority of such order, but also solidify its domination through the unconscious structures. I will argue that the contradictions emanating from the fusion of religious and political power created a unique ideological balance in Iran that is ultimately sustained through unconscious mediation. I will therefore inquire into the interwoven relations between the subjects, institutions, and Authority, as well as the structural paradoxes they produce. Such approach enables an analysis of the subject's interpellation in, as well as the libidinal sustainability of, the socio-symbolic order in Iran. In order to understand how ideology operates on different levels, this analysis will be carried out against the background of the three ideological levels discussed in the Methodology chapter (Doctrine, Belief, Ritual) that constitute a fully functioning ideology.

II.II. The inception of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The Iranian Revolution represents and eruption of social and political movements that reshaped not only Iran, but sent revolutionary shockwaves throughout other countries with majority Muslim population. The plethora of different ideas on organising society, politics, economy and the state mark an era of profound revolutionary struggles, where the clerical establishment in power today was far from the only contestant for hegemony. As I have pointed out in chapter four, the Revolution does not represent a mere replacement of elites in the position of power, but was accompanied by profound

changes in merely all aspects of life. In the revolutionary turmoil, a section of the clergy won the hegemonic battle and began its quest to establish and solidify a functioning state based on Islamic principles. Interestingly, the name of the Revolution was established retroactively, where adjectives like 'Iranian' or 'Islamic' were added in order to accentuate its Islamic tone and the construction of identity within the national framework. This transition was marked by post-revolutionary violence, a ferocious war with Iraq (1980-1988), and confusing, often contradictory policies issued by competing centres of power.[146] The Iranian regime today asserts itself as a representation of 'Islam in power' and I shall address the key features that form the contemporary state. These features should not be read as just another Islamic or Middle Eastern 'exceptionalism;' they extend far beyond the borders of Islamic Republic precisely because they illuminate the complex and contradictory dynamics regarding the inception and continuity of 'hybrid' political systems (Ansari 2007, 268-272; Ashouri 2011, 46; Brumberg and Farhi 2016, 3, 5; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 423, 430-431; Jahanbegloo 2013, 68; Keddie 2006, 232-234, 238-241).[147]

The Islamic Republic was born out of bewildered attempts to reorganise the social and political order. At the time, most observers viewed the clerical elite as out of touch with the contemporary world and predicted its downfall in a matter of years if not months. However, the state not only survived, but consolidated its power and created a political arena, where various interest groups are competing for influence. The religious establishment centralised its power in 1979 by taking over the existing state apparatuses through a popular referendum that replaced the monarchy with an Islamic Republic.[148]

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[146] For an account of the Revolution in the making, see Kapuściński 2006.

[147] The Islamic Republic is based on a political system that defies classification. Political scientists have called such systems semi-authoritarianism, competitive authoritarianism, or more generally hybrid regimes. The increasingly voluminous and confusing empirical literature on hybrid systems mostly concerns the blend of state control, democracy, elections, and pluralism. See Diamond 2002; Ottaway 2003; Levitsky 2010.

[148] A provisional government led by a non-cleric Mehdi Bazargan was agreed with Khomeini upon his return from exile. The government tried to seize the control over state apparatuses, but found itself competing with the clerical establishment. The latter erected parallel institutions to that of the emerging state in terms of organised militias, courts of law, and committees supervising the interim government. To dissolve 2500 years of monarchy, it was agreed that the form of the new republic is to be put on a popular referendum. However, the latter allowed only to vote for or against the establishment of the Islamic Republic, since Khomeini protested against any other state form to be put to the ballot. This eventually allowed the clerical establishment to implement an Islamic constitution. Bazargan's government was made ineffective and he soon resigned. He famously said: "They put a knife

Nevertheless, tumultuous circumstances prevailed till 1982, as autonomous movements from both secular and religious forces were battling for hegemony. The final result cost thousands of lives and ended up in the domination of the religious establishment over other political factions. The clerical elite knew it had to offer a substantial theoretical and practical foundation for the emerging state. By creating their own doctrinal ideology, Islamic scholars were keen to show that Islam, like democracy, communism, or capitalism, has its own unique philosophical aspects and solutions, which determine social, political and economic policies of the Islamic Republic. The work of Islamic ideologues was an exercise in rejecting the existing parameters of foreign ideologies and giving theirs a specific Islamic tone and identity.[149] On the other hand, justifications for the western-type of private ownership, capitalist dynamics, banking, commerce, welfare, social state, and taxes among others were very wittingly made in regard to Islamic principles (Abrahamian 2008, 169; Ansari 2007, 256-257; Bakhash 1985, 167, 169-172; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 431-432).

It is in fact surprising that Iran's Shi'a have embraced a presidential-parliamentary republicanism that is lacking in several Sunni movements. This is surprising because the traditional Shi'a doctrines define political leadership as divinely ordained and limited to Prophet's descendants.[150] The clergy's historical socio-political power grew from managing education and tax collection, to implementing penal codes and embedding religious doctrines in the constitution of contemporary Iran. The latter is leaning on the legislature from the Iranian 1905-1911 Constitutional revolution, which is interpreted

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in my hands, but it's a knife with only a handle. The others are holding the blade," (Abrahamian 2008, 163). See Abrahamian 2008, 162-164; Keddie 2006, 240-242; Khomeini 1981a, 8-11. For reading on the consolidation of the clerical establishment, see Ansari 2007, chapter 8; Arjomand 1988, chapters 7 and 8; for drafting of the constitution and the first president Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, see Bakhash 1985, chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6; more on the provisional government can be found in Abrahamian 1989, chapters 8 and 9. For a point of view of the regime, see Muhājirī 1983, part 2 and 3.

[149] One of the most visible ideologues was 'Ali Shari'ati along with lay theorists such as Jalal Al-Ahmad, Mehdi Bazargan and Sayyed A. Bani-Sadr, as well as ayatollahs Mohammad Tabata'i, Mahmoud Taleghani and Khomeini to name a few. See for example Keddie 2006, chapter 8; more in Dabashi 2006; Rahnema 2005.

[150] It is necessary to understand Shi'a doctrines towards the holders of political power if we are to grasp the changing of social and political attitudes responsible for a series of revolts and revolutions. See the introduction to Part I and chapter 3; Lambton 2004; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, chapter 6; Keddie 2006, chapter 3; 2004.

through Shi'a doctrines and parliamentary democratic institutions.[151] Over the last decades, Iran has developed into a complex polity of competing institutions dominated by clerics, lay politicians, and military officers. The structure assumed oligarchic characteristics, where a group of ayatollahs dominates the political process through the control of key clerical and political centres, carefully bypassing the state's democratic institutions with a range of clerical bodies (Bohkari and Senzai 2013, 135-138; Lambton 2004, 145-146, 148-149).

After the radical wing of the clergy dominated the hegemonic struggle for the sign, the ideological opposition did not simply vanish, but continued its fight until it was mainly repressed through post-revolutionary terror. The stubborn resistance of opposition movements from liberals, nationalists and communists transformed the inclination to suppress ideological unconformity into an obsession. It affected all areas of life with the clergy addressing children and students to turn in their parents and friends. For four years after the Revolution itself, the clerical establishment based its power on a highly effective network of parallel organisations and was keen to keep this institutional disposition after the consolidation of power. Friday prayers were transformed into political events, though political pragmatism often got the best of religious proclamations. The establishment also called on the transnational Islamic movement to model and export their Revolution, but as far as Iranian political organisation might be appealing to other Islamic states, its specific Shi'a implementations are not (Ansari 2007, 269-270, 274-275; Bakhash 1985, 225-226, 229, 234-6; Gerner 2000, 121; Khomeini 1981a, 11-14). The fusion of politics and religion thus produces a unique political system, as well as contradictions in the social order that force the Regime to constantly adjust its theoretical and practical positions through the dichotomy of the political system. Such arrangement seems to surface further antagonisms, which I will analyse in chapter five. To approach these antagonisms, I will first illuminate how the parallel clerical institutions erected in the turmoil of the Revolution transformed into a functioning political system.

[151] For reading on the Constitutional revolution and the preceding Tobacco revolt, see introduction to Part I; Keddie 2004; Abrahamian 2008, chapter 2; Ansari 2007, chapter 1; Jahanbegloo 2013, chapter 3; Arjomand 1989, chapter 2.

II.II.I. The office of the Supreme Leader

In the battle for hegemony, the clerical establishment erected parallel institutions to that of the emerging state.[152] These institutions were extrapolated from the socio-political spheres the clergy initial wielded power in and the establishment was keen to keep this network of institutions as a leverage of authority. That eventually resulted in the amalgamation of clerical and parliamentary institutions into a dual system. These religious features stem from Iranian pre-revolutionary character, when the clergy exercised power in terms of education and legal expertise. This duality is now reflected in a whole range of institutions parallel to the republican state, which are scrutinised, but not managed directly by the clergy alone. To understand how such a dichotomy operates, we must first look at the highest office in the state structure and how it influences the political system.

The inception of the state was heavily influenced by ayatollah Khomeini, who managed to become the central figure of the Revolution. He overcame an explosion of competing ideas from various groups and imposed his own vision of the state through repression and populist appeal. His solutions for the administration of the state were gathered in a series of lectures known as *Velayat-e faqih*.[153] They established the rule of the just jurist on behalf of the 12th Imam, which later became the central doctrine of the Islamic government. Khomeini argues there that a political structure based on Islamic principles is achievable and that men of religion should manage the state affairs due to their knowledge of the Islamic law. Religion therefore offered him a narrative that transcended generations and classes by tapping into shared culture of religiously inspired protests. These have roots in the Tobacco protest of 1891, Constitutional revolution in 1905, and opposition Khomeini offered in the 1960's before his exile. That in turn provided an explosive fusion of populist nationalism and Islam as the common denominator against the exploitation by the Pahlavi monarchy. This fusion started to serve as an empty container for a variety of different socio-political ideas. One of the main reasons that allowed the clergy to quickly sway to power was the aim to seize and utilise the existing state institutions, rather than to establish a traditional type of Islamic

[152] Uneasy structural duality emerged between the Revolutionary Guards and the army, the revolutionary courts and the civil judiciary, as well as civil service and revolutionary organisations. The fragmentation of state's authority persisted even as the clergy consolidated its power.

[153] See Khomeini 1981b.

political power structure that existed in Iran with the arrival of Islam. The Regime constructed its rule around a doctrine, whose defence it equates with the state's survival (Ashouri 2013, 48; Brumberg and Farhi 2016, 9; Owen 1992, 119-122; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 297-299).

By erecting their own institutions against that of the emerging state, the clerical establishment recreated contradictions in relation to Authority that seem to follow the logic of the Karbala matrix addressed in chapter three. In political terms of contemporary Iran, these contradictions are negotiated by the Supreme Leader, whose central position mediates the antagonisms emanating from this systemic dichotomy. Khomeini's unprecedented popular support served as a political reference point for developing a pattern of authoritarian populism. However, Khomeini did not use his enormous powers to establish a personal dictatorship but acted as an intermediary between different governmental bodies and offered decisions on major questions, while avoiding involvement in routine administrative matters. His tendencies to give priority to political over religious decisions have been extended with the need for more pragmatic politics with his demise. During Khomeini's last years in office, he reluctantly accepted the UN resolution 598 in 1988 that ended the war with Iraq in order to save the Revolution. He also announced systemic changes necessary to keep the Regime afloat, as more and more internal disputes pushed the system into an operational deadlock. Consequently, these changes also coincided with the largest purges of the opposition.[154] These occurred in the post-war consolidation of the Regime, when the ruling clergy was effectively in a civil war with left-wing People's Mujahedin Party (MEK). The biggest political rifts within the Regime, however, came from the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) established by Khomeini, whose various groups he tried to keep in balance to harvest popular support. He was forced to dissolve the party in 1988, when it effectively split into left and right factions (Ansari 2007, 285-286, 290-292, 294; Keddie 2006, 259-260).

In the wake of his demise between 1988 and 1989, Khomeini took several important steps to weaken the opposition and strengthen the state for his followers. He ousted his supposed successor grand ayatollah Montazeri due to the latter's liberal opposition and faced a situation, where the grand ayatollahs did not fully accept the doctrine of *velayat-*

[154] The total number of executions amount to ca. 11,000 people. See Abrahamian 1999, 209-219.

e faqih.[155] Khomeini ordered a rewrite of the constitution and stated that the needs of the Islamic Republic outweigh Islamic law, effectively meaning that the future Supreme Leader could ignore the views of other ayatollahs. The constitution was also changed in terms of religious qualifications for the highest office, consequently paving the way for the current Supreme Leader Sayyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei with weak religious credentials.[156] It also formalised the office's control over most state power, thus strengthening the Supreme Leader's position *vis-à-vis* the president and the parliament (*Majlis*).[157] Khomeini also abolished the office of the prime minister and created the Expediency Council to solve legislative deadlocks between the parliament and the scrutinising body of Guardian Council. However, it took the current Supreme Leader Khamenei quite a long time to consolidate his power due to the lack of charisma and religious qualifications, as well as the desire to control him politically. With no clear successor to Khomeini, he was quickly elected as a weak candidate with serious opposition from the old clerical structures. The clerical elite remains split on the constitutional views of the Supreme Leader to this day and the Regime never dared to fully break with traditionally independent Shi'a ayatollahs, whose fatwas are binding

[155] The introduction of *velayat-e faqih* also represented a new step in implementing Shi'a political thought. The idea divided both secular and religious public as well as the clerical establishment, arguing that the power of the *faqih* offers sovereignty and authority parallel to the one of the state. Such voices in the clergy were nevertheless a minority and were silenced as the reversal of the same logic, namely that the institutionalisation of the *faqih* is not only necessary for an Islamic state, but also represents a neutral figure who will settle disputes among different groups and interests and prevent a re-emergence of monarchical absolutism. Interestingly, the whole idea was debated by some ayatollahs on the arguments of Rousseau's social contract. Despite the view of many that the institution of the Supreme Leader was in conflict with Article 6 of the Constitution, which legitimises Authority from the popular will, the establishment nevertheless created these two concepts in an ambiguous symbiosis (Bakhash 1985, 85, 88).

[156] The obvious discrepancies surfaced in Articles 5 and 107 of the constitution, establishing the office of the Supreme Leader with its dual political and religious responsibilities. The Supreme Leader could be either directly recognised by the people or elected through the Assembly of Experts, which is composed of clerics who are elected by their constituencies. The constitutional amendments to Article 107 after Khomeini's death clearly point to the political qualifications for this position. The amendment eliminated the highest religious requirements for the Supreme Leader, as well as the possibility to be directly recognised by the people. Such changes in the acquisition of Authority also show the underlying discrepancies between the traditional clerical establishment and the new revolutionary order (Boroujerdi and Rahimkhani 2016, 138-140; Roy 2004, 642-643). See Schirazi 1997.

[157] The Supreme Leader is the commander-in-chief of the military and has a major say on the heads of security organisations, as well as interior, defence, and intelligence ministries. He also appoints the head of judiciary and fills important positions in clerical bodies. See Bohkari and Senzai 2013, 138; Boroujerdi and Rahimkhani 2016, 144-150; Jahanbegloo 2013, 69-71; Buchta 2000, chapter 5; Roy 2004.

for their followers (Ansari 2007, 302-304; Keddie 2006, 260-262; Boroujerdi and Rahimkhani 2016, 136-139, 142, 150-151).

II.II.II. Systemic dichotomy

Let us now look at the interwoven functions of clerical and lay institutions, their leverages of Authority, and the mediating function of the Supreme Leader. The institutional organisation of the state is grounded on republican institutions and permeated with a variety of clerical bodies. The latter share the Authority with structures of a modern state such as the presidency, the parliament, and the judiciary with associated ministries and institutions. The Revolution replaced the existing bureaucrats of the monarchy with lay officials and middle ranked clerics, while grand ayatollahs were kept aside. Contrary to the simplistic depiction in the West, Iran is not simply a model of a totalitarian theocracy, despite featuring those elements.[158] A functioning government remained in place for reasons of community influence through state apparatuses. It is clear to the Iranian elite that they do not appeal to any real divine authority, but harvest their power from the approval of the population. At the same time, parallel political structures mirrored on the democratic model of the French Republic provide the clerical system with legitimacy. Such arrangement simultaneously enables appointed institutions a distance from assuming administrative responsibility, despite the fact that most policies pass through their scrutiny. At the centre of this systemic arrangement is the office of the Supreme Leader as the highest political and religious position in the state, which directly or indirectly exercises control over the majority of social and political life in Iran. The Islamic Republic reflects this duality in its name as well as in its constitution, which hinges on the dichotomy of a divine and popular sovereignty. Such dichotomy in legitimacy, Authority and sovereignty is reflected in the power struggles among different institutions, which compete to interpret this religious-political dichotomy to their own advantage (Jahanbegloo 2013, 68-69, 72; Gerner 2000, 119-121; Owen 1992, 122, 172-173, 176).

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[158] These views are mostly promoted by conservative politicians, analysts, organisations and media institutions that shape public discourse. For example, the CIA's World Fact Book (2016), characterises Iran with a "theocratic system of government," while a variety of analysts and policy makers point to the irrationality of its theocratic leadership. Such views are also advocated by a variety of thinks-tanks and NGO's, like the pro-Israel Lobby (AIPAC) or the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) in the US, who lobby for governmental policies and influence the public discourse by publishing papers, analyses and books.

The political system is a compromise among different factions that culminated in a structure, where the Iranian people can directly elect the president, members of a single chamber parliament (*Majlis*), the clerical Assembly of Experts and the municipality councils (see Figure 1). On the other hand, the constitution places most leverages of Authority in the hands of appointed clerics through state's structures. Another important clerical institution is the Council of Guardians with veto power over the legislature presented by the parliament on the basis of Islamic standards. It also filters candidates for elections to avoid opponents of the Revolution in the government, presidency and even in the Assembly of Experts, thus consolidating the position of the Master Signifier. Although the socio-political life now includes a limited manifestation of popular will through the ballot in comparison to the monarchy, freedom of expression and choice are nonetheless limited. The shadow of the Shah's notorious security organisation SAVAK was replaced by equally ruthless organisations in and outside of the state authority, delivering arbitrary punishments with its tacit approval (Abrahamian 2008, 164-166; Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 433, 438-440; Keddie 2006, 248).

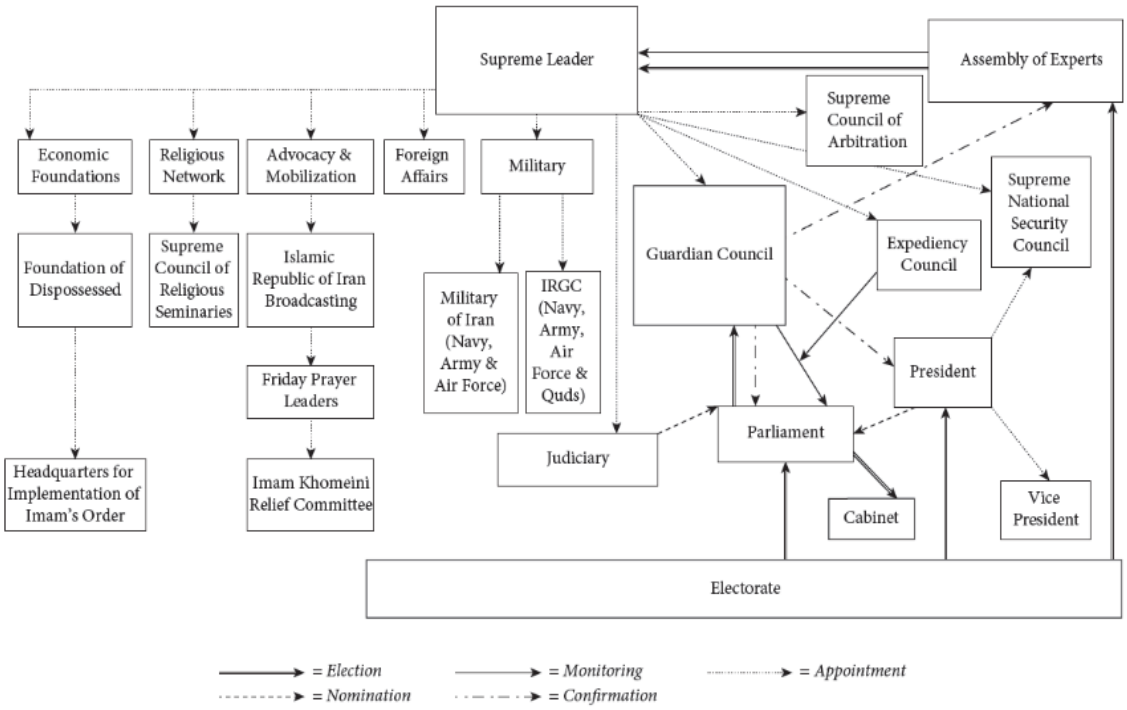

Figure 1: Layout of the Iranian political system. Reprinted by permission of the Indiana University Press: Boroujerdi and Rahimkhani 2016, 141. In: Brumberg, D. and Farhi, F. 2016. Power and Change in Iran: Politics of Contention and Conciliation. Copyright 2016.

As illustrated in Figure 1 above, Iranian political system created institutions occupied by both clerics and laymen, most obviously in the parliament. Like other directly elected institutions, the parliament is held under clerical scrutiny *via* the Guardian

Council. Further clerical power is wielded through the Assembly of Experts, whose members are popularly elected and appoint the Supreme Leader, but are themselves screened through the Guardian Council. However, religious institutions are not always managed by direct appointment and in certain cases must share the leverages of Authority with laymen bureaucrats. An important example is precisely the Guardian Council; it consists of 12 officials, six of which are appointed by the Supreme Leader and another six jurists appointed with parliamentary approval by the head of Judiciary, himself appointed by the Supreme Leader. That points to the Council as a political leverage of the Regime, which is also insulated from public supervision. To provide a sort of checks and balances, the Assembly of Experts can in theory hold the Supreme Leader accountable, but in doing so would undermine his divine position, subject the office to criticism and push the whole system into an operational deadlock (Bohkari and Senzai 2013, 138, 147; Jahanbegloo 2013, 69-71; Roy 2004, 643).

This uneasy systemic coexistence also produces a form of political authority, whose gap is embedded in the constitution. This can create political frictions between the appointed, elected, conservative, and reformist policy makers in domestic legislative and foreign policy. For example, after Khomeini's demise, there was a need for more pragmatic politics following the devastating war with Iraq. However, systemic dichotomy produced strong, clerically dominated power centres that can influence governmental policy. An exemplary case of the conflicts emerging from such dichotomy is the famous fatwa issued by Khomeini against Salman Rushdie for his novel *Satanic Verses*. Since the fatwa was still in place after Khomeini's death, the leader of the powerful Fifteen of Khordad Foundation, ayatollah Hassan Sane'i, declared an increase of the reward for Rushdie's death.[159] Immediately after, then-president Hashemi Rafsanjani, who placed economic development as his priority and sought much needed international support and investment, rushed to explain that this foundation is not a governmental organisation and does not reflect official governmental policy. However, he found himself in a position, where he had to defend the theological validity of Khomeini's fatwa, but on the other hand also assure the international

[159] Different religious foundations such as this one enjoy a privileged position in the state system and play significant roles in trade, industry, or managing large endowments and funds. According to some estimates, they manage about 20% of Iran's GDP. See introduction to Part III; Boroujerdi and Rahimkhani 2016, 146-150; Buchta 2000, chapter 8.

community that the government will not follow suit by sending assassination squads abroad (Ansari 2007, 302-304; Buchta 2000, 6).

The government is in a similar domestic situation, when the Regime wants to adopt certain unpopular policies resisted by the elected officials, but manages to materialise them through its own institutional leverages. The citizens then blame the government for adopting certain policies or being unable to deliver on their campaign promises. This allows popular discontent to manifest itself against the government and simultaneously divert the same discontent away from the Regime. It is also a way for the latter to keep the elected government in line with its vision of development, curb political aspirations outside its influence and decrease the government's popularity for next elections.[160] In terms of policy analysis, this creates an even bigger confusion with the temporal pragmatic alliances across political factions. The Regime also learned from the failures of Pahlavi monarchy and the 1953 coup d'état orchestrated by the CIA and the MI6 against the nationalist Prime Minister Mohhamad Mosaddeq to quickly quell political resistance.[161] Islamic legitimisation under the state's framework is thus contested on religious and political grounds by domestic rivals for power and external rivals for leadership in the Shi'a Muslim world. It is therefore the task of the Iranian leadership to constantly regenerate the doctrinal and practical approaches to socio-political realities within a religious framework.

We have arrived at the point where we are able to observe the unique constitutional arrangement of the political system and the functions of different political bodies that form the Islamic Republic. Since Iranian political identity is formed on the background of the Shi'a–Sunni divide, the issue arising next is how these unconscious political attitudes shape the contemporary understanding of the Islamic Republic. Considering that the Shi'a establishment now occupies the official position of Authority, how do Iranians experience it if any Authority is by definition unjust? What we can observe in the case of Iran is a fusion of republican and clerical institutions into a peculiar and

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[160] This happened during both of reformist president Mohammad Khatami's terms (1997-2005), who won the elections by promising the liberalisation of public space and systemic changes. The conservatives, with the support of the religious establishment, foiled Khatami's public image and reduced Reformist's chances in the next elections, paving the way for conservative Mahmud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013). See Keddie 2006, 324-329.

[161] On the rise and fall of Mohhamad Mosaddeq, his resistance to the monarchy, and the nationalisation of the oil industry, see introduction to Part I; Katouzian 2009; Kinzer 2008; Ambrahamian 2013.

functioning systemic balance. Such amalgamation appears to provide the social order with stability, despite their apparent contradictions. Let us not forget that power achieves its hegemonic domination through the manufacture of consent, where it positions itself as the best possible answer for the given socio-historic situation. It achieves a silent submission of the subjects, where its true position of domination remains concealed. How exactly does the unique fusion of power function in Iran and how is it sustained on a libidinal level?

5. The politics of the Gap

This chapter aims to analyse how political subjectivity in the Islamic Republic of Iran is immersed into its peculiar socio-symbolic order. I will build on the knowledge gained in the previous chapters and divide the inquiry into four interconnected parts. First, I will analyse how the subjects are unconsciously imbedded into the socio-symbolic order in Iran through the process of ideological interpellation.[162] Second, the process of interpellation ensures the subjects support the socio-symbolic order through their unconscious libidinal investments. To approach the libidinal economy sustaining ideology in Iran analysed in chapter six, I will first address the form of ideology and the function of the big Other keeping it consistent.[163] Third, the consistency of ideology is maintained through the mediation of its inherent gaps. I will therefore discern the gaps which the peculiar ideological order in Iran produces in political reality and analyse their unconscious mediation. As the introduction to Part II reveals, the Iranian political system is based on a dichotomy of clerical and republican institutions, whose fusion produces inconsistencies in political reality, as well as for political subjectivity. How precisely is the religious dimension of the social order embedded within the framework of the state? How does a political system based on a fusion of clerical and republican institutions function on a libidinal level? Fourth, I will analyse how the dichotomy of the political system is mediated by the highest office in the state structure and the consequences this has for political subjectivity. What is the role of the Supreme Leader, who simultaneously embodies the dominant political and religious authority? This chapter therefore elucidates how the socio-political reality in Iran is sustained on the backdrop of its inherent gaps.

5.1. The modality of interpellation

To approach the above questions, I will begin by exploring the particular modality of interpellation into the socio-symbolic edifice in Iran. I will argue that the social order in Iran is based on certain totalitarian features, which are obfuscated by a partly

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[162] For the notion of interpellation as an unconscious submission of the subject to the ideological order, see introduction to Part II; Althusser 1971; Žižek 2008b, chapter 1 and 2012a; Dolar 1993.

[163] The big Other is an unconscious agency providing a consistent experience of the social order to the subject. See Methodology chapter for a theoretical explanation; chapter 4 for its emergence in Iran; chapter 6 for its role in sustainability of ideology in Iran.

participatory political system described in the introduction to Part II.[164] I will lean on psychoanalytic understanding of totalitarianism in order to explore how a socio-symbolic order with totalitarian features is sustained by the subjects interpellated in it. The analysis of interpellation can reveal the modality of the subject's submission to the ideological order. The more enjoyment the ideological order demands from the subject, the stronger the subject's submission to the fantasmatic kernel of ideology. I will therefore limit my investigation of totalitarianism to ideological interpellation in order to further discern the function of the Other in Iran. As chapter four showed, the social order in Iran is held together under a tight grip of the Master Signifier (S1) and sustained on the background of the Other's divine laws.[165] Such ideological structure produced a socio-political order, which cannot be easily analysed. As the introduction to Part II further revealed, Iranian political system resist the analysis within the established set of political theories, since its categorisation becomes a collage of idiosyncratic features, an oxymoron such as a 'theo-democratic totalitarianism.' How is the subject interpellated into such order?

In the inquiry below, I endorse the Lacanian premise that every socio-symbolic order is by definition lacking and, as such, works on the background of certain gaps and prohibitions. This lack is then mediated and neutralised through the process of interpellation, where the subjects are obliged to freely choose the submission to the socio-symbolic order with its written and unwritten rules. Since the ideological order is held together by the enjoyment of the Nation-Thing discussed in chapter three, it is worth exploring the relation between this enjoyment and the level of ideological submission that glues the subject to it. For the Iranian subject, that means accepting what Lacan called the "forced choice" in *Seminar XI* (1994) and *Seminar XIV* (2002).[166] It essentially designates an act, which works against the subject's interests, the scale of

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[164] The notion of 'totalitarianism' discussed in the introduction to Part II reveals that a totalitarian political order is not based on a purely oppressive Authority, but interpellates the subjects into the socio-symbolic order through what Lacan called "the forced choice." For the analysis of the forced choice, see chapter 3; Lacan 1994 and 2002; for readings on totalitarianism and Authority, see Žižek 1994; 2011; 2008a; 2008e; Lacan's *Kant avec Sade* (in 2006a); Verhaeghe 2014.

[165] For a theoretical analysis of the Master Signifier, see Methodology chapter; chapter 4 for its emergence in ideology in Iran; chapter 6 for its libidinal role in Iranian fantasy; chapter 7 for its role in political economy.

[166] See chapter 3 for the analysis of the subject's inclusion into the socio-symbolic order through the mechanism of "forced choice" described by Lacan. See also Lacan 1994; 2002; Žižek 2008d, chapter 4.

which depends on social dynamics and the mode of Authority the subjects find themselves in.[167] The stronger the imposition of the state and its apparatuses, the more traumatic the forced choice for its subjects. Such analysis conversely also reveals the libidinal investments sustaining the ideological order in Iran on the background of the traumatism involved by accepting the Nation-Thing.

I will lean on the experimental psychology of Jean-Léon Beauvois, who made the first steps in exploring such an apparent oxymoron as the one described above.[168] Beauvois analysed the relation between the subjects' willingness to make a choice against their interest and the information they were given in regard to this choice, i.e. the formal possibility not to choose what was expected from them. I will extrapolate his experiments that focus on the opposition between the formal and actual freedom of choice to my analysis of the subject's forced choice to belong to the socio-symbolic order in Iran. Beauvois's experiments show that imposing a certain formal freedom of choice does not make much difference in the percentage of subjects accepting it. In essence, roughly the same amount of subjects make the traumatic choice, regardless of whether they are given the freedom to choose or not. However, this does not mean that the bestowal of the freedom to choose is insignificant in this operation: those given the freedom to do so will not only make the same decision as those being denied it, but also tend to 'rationalise' their 'free' decision on the background of the traumatic awareness that they freely act against their interests (Žižek 2001, 117).

Beauvois's findings open a new way to understand the unconscious interpellation that embeds the subjects into a socio-symbolic order. These considerations point to a gap between the fantasmatic kernel of the subject and the symbolic space to which the subject complies. A socio-symbolic order successfully includes the subjects into its frame only if the relations of domination sustaining it remain concealed, since the subjects must in turn support that very order. These libidinal investments are particularly interesting to explore in the Iranian case, where the 1979 Islamic revolution totalised the subjects into a radically different socio-symbolic order.[169] To discern the modality of this interpellation, I will utilise Beauvois's categorisation of the three

[167] See 3 modes of Authority (traditional, manipulative, totalitarian) in Žižek 2008d, 249-253.
[168] See Beauvois 1994.
[169] See chapter 4 for the construction of the Iranian ideological order.

different modes of choice and align them with the forced choice of belonging to the socio-symbolic order in Iran. In this regard, the authoritarian mode works on a pure and direct command of the Master, sustained by reward or penalty system (under the ideological injunction 'Obey!'); the totalitarian mode identifies a higher Cause or a supreme Good discussed in chapter four, which is larger than the subject's individual interest ('Obey and thus serve your Party, Nation, God etc.'); the injunction in the liberal mode is made by referencing the kernel of the subject's ideological inner nature ('Enjoy!') – and you already obey (ibid, 118).

We should note that a direct authoritarian mode practically does not exist, as even the most brutal authoritarianism derives its legitimacy from at least a minimal reference to a Cause or a supreme Good, where the command reverberates between the lines. Beauvois simply misses the point that an effective Authority cannot be sustained purely on the background of punishment and reward. On the other hand, totalitarianism as well as liberalism interpellate the subject on behalf of its own good. The difference between the latter two is that totalitarianism imposes its order on the subject 'from above' regardless of its will ('I will force you to be free!'), while liberalism covers up this paradox 'from below' by addressing the subject's 'free' self-perception ('Look in yourself and decide freely what you want'). The liberal mode therefore naturalises reasons for subjection, where the subject accepts the imposed order without being aware of its submission. In both cases, however, what seduces the subject into obeying and freely accepting the forced choice is an injunction imposing on the subject a symbolic commitment with its own inherent forces. We can already spot the symbolic efficiency of S1 'Islamic Revolution' at work, designating precisely this hypnotic force of the symbolic injunction. The above three ways of legitimising Authority are thus three ways of covering up the emptiness of ideological interpellation (Žižek 2001, 118-120; 2008a, 40).

Such categorisation of ideological interpellation supported by the analysis in chapter four allows me to identify the mode of ideological injunction in Iran with totalitarian features. However, we should bear in mind that the Iranian political system is a fusion of republican as well as theocratic institutions that provide it with a peculiar socio-political stability. The process of interpellation provides an insight into the unconscious organisation of the ideological matrix, along with the level of traumatism involved in the forced choice tying the subjects to the Nation-Thing. The stronger the inherent

trauma, the more it fuses the subject to the core of ideological enjoyment, to the enjoyment of the Nation-Thing. This also signals a stronger imposition of S1 that holds the meaning of the socio-symbolic order together. Disturbing this element would jeopardise the entire ideological fantasy, since it also covers its inherent antagonisms. A tight control of the fantasy's meaning also exposes its antagonisms more clearly, which the Regime covers by constantly adjusting its position and eliminating political opposition. The aspirations to obliterate social antagonisms in the name of a higher Cause also points to totalitarian features.[170]

Above considerations allow for a conceptualisation of the forced choice imposed on the subject as a political legitimisation of Authority. Ideological interpellation in its totalitarian features covers the emptiness of its call by implicitly obliging the Iranian subject to view historical progress from the perspective of the Cause, the supreme Good embodied in the Other. Interpellation closes the gap between history and historicity observed in chapter three and provides the subject with a fantasmatic frame, where the meaning of events are defined retroactively to fit the Doctrinal level of ideology. In this sense, no act or event falls empty since the Regime's divine purpose is accounted by history where time is meaningless and its actions are registered through the divine Other. The idealism hidden in this logic evokes a personified God in the form of the Other, which redoubles empirical history and maintains its accountancy (Žižek 2008b, 159). The modality of interpellation thus points to a social order with totalitarian features, which allows the Authority to deal with political opposition by measuring its guilt against the laws of the Other. Such organisation of the social order relies on the arbitrary use of authority by hijacking the judicial branch of the state and its repressive apparatuses.[171] It follows the same logic that was able to legitimise revolutionary violence as an evolution towards the supreme Good in the name of the Other. The view of the Iranian Regime is thus that of triumph, guaranteed in advance by the divine 'necessity of history.'

Since the supreme Good in the Iranian example fuses national identity with a practically nationalised religion, it also points to the ideological kernel of enjoyment embodied in

[170] The Iranian socio-symbolic order is built on the tautological return to its 'true Islamic tradition.' This tautology gives the Iranian fantasy a specific meaning, which is sustained by eliminating the elements that do not fit its fantasy frame. See chapter 3 for further reading.

[171] See analysis developed in chapter 6.3.

the Nation-Thing. What gets lost in the process of interpellation is precisely the subjective position of the Iranian subject. According to Iranian ideology, the Iranian revolutionary subject is somewhat excluded from the ordinary human weaknesses. The Iranian subject is endowed with a particular divine dimension, incomprehensible to those excluded from its Nation-Thing (see Žižek 2008b, 162). Chapter four identifies this dimension in *objet a*, which serves as the mediator for identification among Iranian subjects through the divine object within them, while it simultaneously points to the lack in the symbolic structure. The fantasy thus supports the Iranian revolutionary subject through *objet a* and totalises it into the socio-symbolic order *via* the S1 'Islamic Revolution.' Because the *objet a* and S1 are tied to a specific socio-historical configuration, they provide the fantasy with an apparently consistent structure.[172] While such disposition grants the Regime a seemingly stable flow of appearances, it simultaneously points to its very weakness, since it must quickly cover the emerging antagonisms to appear stable. How do the subjects maintain the stable appearance of the social order?

5.2. The form of ideology and the function of the big Other

The above considerations show that the subject succumbs to the enjoyment of an illusionary libidinal consistency of ideological fantasy through the process of interpellation. This consistency can be observed through the Hegelian thesis 'appearance as such is essential.'[173] A stable appearance of the Regime's unity is essential for the consistency of the social order, where the factional political struggles are confined to the limits of S1. If this appearance is disturbed, the gaps in the socio-symbolic order become visible and jeopardise the entire fantasy. This is also the reason why totalitarianisms strictly forbid to proclaim that 'the emperor is naked,' despite the obvious truth. But why, then, is this appearance sustained at any price if everybody

[172] For clarification on the difference between the S1 and *objet a*, see Methodology chapter.

[173] This term is concerned with the relativity of perception and the difference between the knowledge build on perception and conceptual knowledge on the lawfulness of things. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), Hegel warns of the danger of conceiving reality as it exists for immediate perception. He proposed a thesis where "the supersensible is therefore *appearance qua appearance*" (1977, 89), implying there is something behind the conciliatory flow of phenomenal appearances. To say it with Lacan, what these appearances mask is precisely the lack embodied in the socio-symbolic structure in order to appear complete and produce enjoyment for the subject immersed in it. Since the consistency of the socio-symbolic order rests on the stability of the big Other, Hegel's thesis is therefore another way to describe the function of the Other.

seems to be aware of the truth? It appears that the emperor must remain clothed if normal life is to continue. Pointing to the gaps in the flow of appearances triggers the traumatism involved in fantasy's dissolution that is well known to Iranians from previous revolts and revolutions.[174] The unconscious agency keeping this flow of appearances together is the big Other, which sustains the libidinal network of fantasy. The above considerations also open up a different way of thinking about ideological deception. If a stable appearance of the social order is to be maintained, it is the big Other that should be maintained in its ignorance; it is the emperor that should not know. That is to say, those deceived by the ideological illusion are not primarily the subjects of ideology, but rather the lacking Other, since exposing its lack threatens the socio-symbolic order with dissolution (ibid, 225).

Ideology in its totalitarian features could therefore be designated as a mass alienation that sustains the subjective consistency of a given ideological order.[175] It also points to a paradoxical fetishist split at its heart: the subjects seem to transpose their belief onto the big Other of fantasy who believes in the social order for them and thus sustains the subjects' libidinal consistency.[176] That is to say, the Other sustains the subject's libidinal consistency by creating a distance towards a direct assumption of official ideological doctrines and provides the subject with meaning. Subjects hold on to their subjectivity by transferring their belief in the social order onto the Other, who provides them with a meaningful distance towards the social order promoted by the Iranian Regime (Žižek 2008d, lxx). Not only would the subjects lose their libidinal consistency by directly assuming official ideological absurdity, the same would happen without the transference of ideological belief onto the Other enabling a distance to it. In other words, this circuit enables the Other to believe in the Regime for the subject, while the Regime asserts itself as the Other's embodiment. The necessary virtuality of the Other therefore gets reinforced by the Regime, which offers the subject certain doctrines and

[174] Surprising to some, Iran today stands at the forefront of rebellious nations of the 20th century, whose history is imbued with revolts and revolutions. See introduction to Part I; chapter 3.

[175] According to Lacan, the 'necessity of alienation' is vital in the formation of the social subject and begins with the immersion into language. He describes this process as the formation of the ego in his famous essay *The Mirror-Phase as Formative of the Function of the I* (2012).

[176] For the analysis and the role of the fetish in ideology, see Methodology chapter; Freud 1956; Lacan 2007; Žižek 2008a, chapter 3.

practices that are anchored in the subject's unconscious through Pascalian repetition.[177] Precisely these unconscious practices enable the reproduction of ideology in Iran regardless of the subject's actual belief in the social order. This allows me to observe the dialectical interdependence of the subject and the Other; there is no subject without the Other providing it with the functioning network of signifiers and there is conversely no Other without the subject's libidinal investments in the symbolic network. This inseparability of the subject and the Other is also the reason why the ideological fantasy of the Iranian Regime appears rather stable, since the mutiny against the Regime simultaneously represents a mutiny against the Islamic self. An ideological belief transferred onto the Other therefore at the same time enables a distance towards the ideological order, as well as perpetuates its existence for the very same reason.

Where do such considerations leave us in the case of ideology in Iran concerning its religious core? At first glance, it appears as if the subjects are directly addressing an external Master, God as the essence of the social order and the Cause for interpellation.[178] On the other hand, there is a clear fetishist split in the transference of ideological belief onto the Other. Does Iranian ideology then function on the background of traditional symptomatic ideology or a modern fetishist one?[179] We can perhaps best observe the difference between traditional and modern ideology apropos Marx's notion of the unconscious status of commodity fetishism.[180] In this sense, the subjects in traditional ideology would directly assume a public belief in religious doctrines, likely as an appearance towards which they can maintain a distance. The modern subject, on the other hand, does not necessarily directly believe in the Other, but represses this belief in the unconscious. Such subject can explicitly claim it does not believe, while the fetishist distance nevertheless enables the subject to believe. The modern Iranian subject seems to share these features by transposing the ideological belief onto the Other. The same dynamics can be observed in the unconscious theology of commodity fetishism as developed by Marx, where the relations between subjects take the form of relations between things (Marx 1982, 164-165; Žižek 2008d, cii n. 96).

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[177] For an explanation of Pascalian repetition, see Methodology chapter; chapter 3; Pascal 2006; Žižek 2008b, chapter 1.

[178] I will thoroughly analyse the function of the Master and the Leader in subchapter 5.4.

[179] For differences between symptomatic and fetishist ideology, see Žižek 2008b, chapter 3.

[180] For an explanation of Marx's commodity fetishism and its development, see Methodology chapter; Marx 1982, 164-165; Vighi 2012, 33-35; Lacan 2007.

The functioning of modern ideology can thus perhaps be best observed in the example of money: subjects know money is in reality a worthless piece of paper with numbers on it, but they endow it with a fetishist belief due to its structural position in capitalist society.[181] The subjects can therefore be equally aware that the predominant hegemonic order in Iran is in reality not some earthly materialisation of a divine Other, but they suspend this knowledge in order to sustain the consistent experience of the social order.

We can also observe how the above belief transferred onto the Other is anchored into the subject's unconscious by the fear of God evoked by the Regime (Žižek 2008d, 16-17, 21).[182] It is possible to align the logic of exchange of the fear of God against all other fears as equivalent to the logic of Marx's critique of the commodity form, where every object can be universally exchanged against money. This internal split must also be read consubstantially with the unconscious Karbala matrix regulating the signifiers invested in Authority analysed in chapter three. The gap in Authority opened by the Karbala matrix re-emerged in the Islamic Republic through a dual republican-clerical political system.[183] This gap was then covered with the office of the Supreme Leader as the pacifying mediator between religious and political authority in the obvious advantage of the clerical establishment. Read against the background of commodity fetishism, the fetishist illusion thus lies in social reality itself, not in the perception of it.[184] An Iranian subject might identify itself as Shi'a Muslim, but does not necessarily believe in the Regime as the embodiment of that belief.[185] The real problem lies in separating the two, since the Regime claims to be the Other's materialisation. This points back to the question of symptomatic and fetishist ideology, where the modern

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[181] Capitalist political economy in Iran is analysed in chapter7.

[182] This idea was briefly analysed in subchapter 4.3.

[183] The Shi'a consider any earthly authority by definition unjust, as it is merely a substitution of the 12th Imam. In their historical resistance to Sunni authority following their split at Karbala, the Shi'a have erected parallel political structures next to those of the official Authority. We can observe the same process in the Islamic revolution, where the clerical establishment erected parallel institutions to that of the emerging government, which eventually made the latter ineffective. This gap between religious and political institutions was materialised in the constitution that established a dichotomous political system. For a detailed description of the Iranian political system, see introduction to Part II; for reading on Shi'a doctrines and the subject's unconscious relation to Authority, see introduction to Part I and chapter 3.

[184] Alfred Sohn-Rethel's notion of 'real abstraction' can help clarify this thought further. See Sohn-Rethel 1978; its development in Vighi 2012, 30-33; Žižek 2008b, chapter 1.

[185] It is interesting to think of the Iranian subject at this point, where he approaches his own otherness in the Other promoted by the Regime and is forced to reconcile himself with it. See the function of the Other in Iranian ideology in chapter 4 and its libidinal role in chapter 6.

Iranian subject appears to transpose the belief onto the Other, who believes in the Regime for them through the fetishist distance. This circular loop means that the subject experiences God through its unconscious activity *via* religious rituals prescribed by the state.[186]

We should therefore not fall into the trap of conceiving Iranian ideology in the purely traditional symptomatic mode, solely for the reason of addressing some higher divinity that appears to be in the position of the Master. As discussed in chapter four, Iranian return to tradition is an answer to the anxiety of modernity, where the modern subject represses its belief into the unconscious. This, however, does not suggest that Iranians are secret atheists suffering under a theocratic government, since an atheist also believes in the Other *qua* symbolic construction. The gap, rather, lies between the social order as constructed by the Regime and the unconscious fiction of the Other produced as a necessary consequence of the subject's castration; between the social reality of the subject and its religious interpretation. This gap also means the Iranian subject can never reach its full imagined identity. We have observed the same antagonism in the fantasmatic unity of the subject and the Nation, as well as between the Shari'a and the state law, where the role of ideology is to fill the gap between them.[187]

The above points to the fact that ideological discourse should not be treated literally. However, the distance towards official ideology in Iran should not simply be equated with the modality of cynical distance found in liberal democracies, where the subjects maintain an inner distance towards official state rituals yet partake in it. We can avoid this uncanny dimension, the apparent simultaneous coexistence of cynicism and fanaticism, by discerning how ideological manipulation simultaneously points to the form of ideological closure and with it to the disavowed truth. Totalitarian ideology relies on a much more radical type of self-distance, with constant political manipulations, reinterpretations of the past and fabrications of social relations,

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[186] For the development of the Lacanian thesis 'God is unconscious,' see chapter 3; Lacan 1994; 2013.

[187] A consubstantial gap re-emerged as a dichotomy of the political system, where discrepancies between the governmental and religious institutions emerge when these power centres issue contradictory policies. That happened in the case of the writer Salman Rushdie, when a religious foundation increased the reward for his death already demanded by Khomeini, while the government rushed to calm the international community. Another example can be found in controversial presidency of Mahmud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), who used religious doctrines against the clerical establishment itself in order to gain political leverage. See introduction to Part II; Buchta 2000, 6; Bohkari and Senzai 2013.

underlined by a sincere belief in the results of such manipulation. A 'totalitarian universe' is an Orwellian construction of a fetishist split, a disavowal of the knowledge on the ideological order, not a universe of some repressed secrets. The deceived knowledge in no way prevents the subject from believing in the results and effects of manipulation. The necessity of establishing truths and axioms conversely shows that totalitarianism is not a form of dogmatism with all the answers, but, on the contrary, a power structure that has all the questions. This gap between knowledge and belief determines the daily ideological horizon and only attests to the disavowal of reality full of pragmatic paradoxes (Žižek 2008b, 203; 2008d, 242-244). Social reality in its superficial consistency then consolidates the Regime's Authority, necessarily producing a split subject in the process.[188]

5.3. The politics of the Gap

5.3.1. Religion and the state

The socio-symbolic order in Iran was drastically reconstructed when the 1979 Islamic revolution toppled the last Shah's ethno-nationalistic ideology with a tautological return to Islamic tradition analysed in chapter three. An inevitable question surfacing at this point is how such ideology managed to materialise itself within the state structure. I will approach this question through the Lacanian presupposition of the inherent negative substance that shapes the dialectics of the socio-symbolic matrix. To understand how ideology in Iran managed to materialise itself in a social totality, I will first look at how it mediates its grounding antagonism. This inherent antagonism must be negotiated in order to create a consistent experience of ideological totality. I will analyse the mediation of the contradictory fusion of religious and democratic features in the framework of the national state, within which Iranian ideology is materialised. Such approach allows me to explore the libidinal connection between the subjects and the state on the backdrop of the inherent lack that binds them together.

I will approach the overlap of the subject and the state by analysing what both the state as the structure imposed from above and the political subjectivity interpellated into such order are lacking. The desire for a 'unique Shi'a Nation' revealed in chapter four found

[188] As with the three modes of Authority - traditional, manipulative, totalitarian (see Žižek 2008d, 249-253), this also points to three different types of disavowal of Authority, namely three types of "I know, but…" - normal, manipulative, fetishist (see Žižek 2008d, 245-249).

its expression in the idea of a 'divine Islamic democracy' that was materialised in the Islamic Republic.[189] The role of ideology is precisely to mediate and neutralise the gaps such a fantasmatic unity produces and tie the subject to the socio-symbolic order. I will approach the mediation of fantasy in Iran through the fundamental paradox of the lack of identity as described by Gillian Rose, who approached it through Hegel's notion of speculative proposition. In the ultimate case of identity of religion and the state, Hegel suggests that "in general, religion and the foundation of the state is one and the same thing; they are identical in and for themselves" (Hegel in Rose 2009, 51).

Rose already warns at the beginning that reading the intersection of religion and the state in a non-speculative way can easily end up in an uninformative tautology. In this sense, Hegel's argument could be referred only to total theocracies and even those cannot fully exist in their doctrinal totality, as we observed in the Beauvois's example of total autocracies. The point Rose is making is that the fantasmatic identity in the dialectics of the subject and its object points precisely to the lack on which their identity depends and, ultimately, binds them together. Only when the lack of identity between the subject and the object is experienced can their identity be grasped. The subject in question is then not fixed with external contingent reality of the state, but acquires meaning through a series of contradictory experiences (Rose 2009, 51-52). In this sense, national identity in the Islamic Republic could only be experienced as a result yet to be achieved, which on the other hand drives the Regime towards ideological purification.

Hegel's thesis should therefore be read as a speculative experience of the lack of identity between religion and the state (Rose 2009, 53). An analysis of the overlapping lack of religion and the state can help shed light on how the Iranian political subjectivity sustains such ideological order. As revealed in the introduction to Part II, the Islamic Republic is founded on religious doctrines, which presuppose a divine fantasmatic totality. Such totality also reveals the gaps in the symbolic construction, like the gap between the Shari'a and state law observed in chapter four. In this case, the content of the Shari'a law was perverted and utilised in a distorted way to fit the pragmatic functioning of the state and its apparatuses. It would be misleading, however, to see the failure of Shari'a implementation depend on external social circumstances preventing its

[189] See introduction to Part II for political and philosophical clashes over the organisation of the political system. For contemporary philosophical debates in Iran, see Postel 2006.

full realisation. As noted in chapter three, Islam opened a new horizon for signification and renegotiation of subjectivity to historically available substance, where Lacan's signifier becomes temporarily attached to specific signified through the social struggle for particular content (Zimeri 2008, 5-7; Lacan 2006a, 694). The failure of implementing religious law in a religious state therefore points to the very insufficiently articulated notion of religion itself and the inadequate state institutions towards that content. The systemic inadequacy of the Islamic Republic to fundamental concepts of Shi'a Islam is thus consubstantial to the inadequacy of religion to its own doctrinal foundation. This deficiency is then redoubled, reflected into-itself on the level of ideological Ritual through religious rituals prescribed by the state. Here we can observe the overlapping lacks of religion and the state in their fundamental dependency: the lack embodied in the Islamic Republic grounded in religious identity and the inherent lack of the form of religion to which Iran refers to as its doctrinal basis.

The speculative identity of the subject and the state therefore exists on the backdrop of their inherent lack in correlation to the central religious doctrines that ground their relationship. The inherent negativity negotiating the totality of ideology in Iran is thus mediated through the framework of the state and its institutions. The very way this deadlock is negotiated sustains the form of ideological appearance. The overlapping lack of the state and its religious foundation materialises ideology in its specific social and historical configuration. Their fusion is always realised in a distorted, incomplete way, but we should not overlook that the very failure to fully embody religion in the constitution of the state points to the actuality of their speculative identity. The way the overlapping lacks materialise themselves in the framework of the state also points to the logic regulating them. Here we can observe the ideological closure that links the gap separating the state from its religious foundation with the inherent lack of this foundation itself (Žižek 2008d, 104).

The entire identity of the social order therefore relies on the mediation of its inherent lack, where the role of ideology is to erase these antagonisms and form a consistent socio-symbolic order. This fundamental negativity of the social order is precisely what binds the subjects and the state. The Iranian state presents itself as an effective mediation of all particular contents and identities. A variety of different political and social factions forming the identity of the Islamic Republic are then confined to the meaning of S1. The positive content of the Islamic Republic therefore covers up the

conceptual gap separating the state from religious doctrines at its base. Such reading of Hegel's speculative identity is also consubstantial with the tautological return to itself and confirms S1 'Islamic Revolution' holding the meaning of ideology in Iran.

5.3.2. Clerical and republican systemic dichotomy

As observed in the introduction to Part II, Iran has a unique dual political structure of clerical and republican institutions that is decentred from within. This complex systemic arrangement emerged out of the struggle between the secular and religious factions of the Revolution. In the revolutionary turmoil, Khomeini channelled the emerging desire for a divine Shi'a Nation into a political project for the establishment of the Islamic Republic. He insisted that different political parties in their hegemonic struggle must nonetheless conform to the interests of the Nation who fought for the slogan of Islamic revolution. Khomeini also rejected other forms of democracy found in USA or USSR and insisted on Islamic government. Altering the framework of the Islamic Republic would mean moving in an opposite direction of the Revolution and he soon labelled all factions who did not adhere to such arrangement as the enemies of the Nation and hence of Islam (see Khomeini 1981a, 8-11). At the end, the political system was created on the backdrop of an ambiguous symbiosis of clerical and republican institutions that consequently solidified the S1 and simultaneously excluded other forms of state organisation.

The inevitable question that springs to mind is how to account for the structural position of Authority within the Iranian political system, given its clerical and republican dichotomy? As the introduction to Part II showed, it is not possible to simply label the Islamic Republic as a totalitarian theocracy or a presidential democracy, since it fluctuates between the two with its own specific dynamics. A purely totalitarian political organisation of the state would also equate Authority with a particular social class, making it an easy target for the Karbala matrix as it was in the case of the Shah. To discern the structural position of Authority in Iranian political system, I will lean on Claude Lefort's basic premise of the 'democratic invention,' where the place of Authority must remain empty by structurally necessity.[190] Lefort argues that democracy is governed by the people as the collection of subjects of power. Since they cannot

[190] See Lefort 1988.

govern themselves, the elected person occupying the place of Authority can do so temporarily. That means Lefort eliminates the position of the Leader as a political body; it is the death of the king as Kantorowicz puts it.[191] This empty place therefore works as a sort of surrogate for the Leader, the dynamics of which I will thoroughly analyse in the next subchapter (Žižek 2008b, 165).

In an attempt to adapt Lefort's 'empty place of Authority' to Iran, what emerges is an intrinsic system of governing based on republican institutions legitimised by elections, as well as clerical bodies managed by appointment. As discussed in the introduction to Part II, Iranian political dichotomy is partly legitimised by elections for local and national offices, and even some clerical bodies like the Assembly of Experts, who elects the Supreme Leader. The Supreme Leader can also be theoretically impeached by the clerical Assembly of Experts, itself elected through the ballot box, but screened by the Guardian Council. The consideration that even the highest office in the state structure is exchangeable at least in theory and controlled by appointment rather than hierarchical or hereditary succession seems to evoke Lefort's concept of the empty place of Authority. However, if we read the structural position of the Supreme Leader in the political system against Lefort's 'democratic invention,' we can observe a different mode of Authority imposing itself than that of an 'empty place.'

Lefort's understanding of Authority is characterised with electoral legitimisation, where a political subject is temporarily granted the exercise of Authority under the condition that the elected subject only remains its proxy. Elections in a formal democracy mark a moment of social dissolution, a temporarily suspension of the symbolic network of social relations in the democratic society. Its institutional structures include this temporary eruption of the Real as a regular reproduction of the socio-symbolic order. This suspension changes society into a contingent collection of abstract individuals and serves to temporarily fill the empty place of Authority. The subjects in such order are aware of the distance between the place of Authority and the subject exerting it, preventing any individual to become consubstantial with it. This limit is defined by the Lacanian Real and Symbolic, where the locus of Authority changes into a purely symbolic construction and cannot be occupied by any real political agency (Žižek

[191] See Kantorowicz 1957.

2008b, 166; 2008d, 267-268). How do the limited political elections in Iran reflect Lefort's notion of the 'democratic invention?'

This consideration brings us to the obvious reproach against the democratic critique of Iranian system, claiming that Iranians in fact do elect their national and regional representatives in a system with established democratic processes. However, we should not overlook that the task of the Regime is to maintain the double institutional arrangement of the state to their advantage. The Regime cannot afford authentic opposition to the established systemic disposition in the government or in the clerical structures. This could reveal the gaps in the symbolic edifice and disturb the hypnotic meaning of S1, as well as the Other providing the subjects with a consistent experience of the social order. The filtering of elected candidates through the Guardian Council fulfils that requirement, which pre-empties any subversive potential enabled by elections.[192] To eliminate opposition to the established hegemonic order in Iran, the candidates must be verified in advance and the 'real' interests of the Nation are prioritised before its confusing and fluctuating opinion. The effective elections thus take place before public elections and the ballot has merely a plebiscitary function (see Žižek 2008b, 166-167). These pre-given choices in fact signal the lack of choice proper, enabling the Regime to neutralise the subversive potential of elections. While a temporary dissolution of the social edifice is a structural necessity for a formal democratic reproduction, Iranian democracy excludes this potentially subversive moment by selecting only appropriate candidates for the ballot box. At the same time, the highest office in the state structure as well as the appointed clerical bodies are not subjected to electoral legitimisation or public scrutiny. Nonetheless, screened elections for local and national offices provide a sense of participation and prompt vigorous debates in the *Majlis* that were unthinkable under the Shah, which points to the fact that the government can be openly scrutinised in public.

How, then, do filtered elections influence the position of Authority? Where are the leverages of Authority placed within the complex Iranian political dichotomy? As observed in Part II, Iranian Regime allows for limited elections that endow the political system with legitimacy. At the same time, the Regime also represent itself as the embodiment of the divine Nation through its clerical bodies, particularly the office of

[192] See introduction to Part II for an analysis of the political system.

the Supreme Leader. Does such an arrangement not remind us of similar dynamics in socialist countries, whose Regimes claim to be the embodiment of the 'People?' By proclaiming themselves a 'People's democracy,' they create a category of the People or the Nation as a political body, which the state supposedly embodies (Žižek 2008b, 165). Is such a political structure found for example in China or Cuba similar to Iran, albeit the latter grounds its meaning in a religious rather than a socialist framework? These systems also 'verify' and filter their candidates in order to exclude subversive elements in the ruling institutions. However, there is one crucial difference 'People's democracies' struggle with and the Iranian political system wittingly bypasses. In 'People's democracies,' the government is a direct extension of the Party, which translates the rebellion against the government as a rebellion against the Party. The Regime in Iran, however, created an ambiguous symbiosis of clerical and republican institutions, where the latter manages the administrative affairs of the state, despite the fact that majority of decisions are scrutinised by clerical bodies. Leaving the administration of the state in the hands of elected institutions enabled the Regime an additional distance from the elected and replaceable government. That in turn enables the Regime to bypass the discontent with administrative policies that is directed at the government. The leverages of Authority in Iran are therefore shared between appointed and elected institutions, despite the fact that the majority of policies must be approved by the appointed clerical bodies. The latter have incorporated the institution of the Leader in the political system by claiming it embodies the divine Nation. On the contrary, a Lacanian definition of formal democracy would be a socio-political order in which the Nation embodied in their unique representative, the Leader, does not exist as a unity (ibid). In Lefort's terms, the place of Authority in Iran is therefore never really empty, but always-already partly occupied by the appointed Leader.

The above considerations beg the following question: why are elections needed in the first place if the constituency is aware that their political choices are limited by the same Authority they are supposed to lend legitimacy to? One part of the answer lies in the previous experience with the oppressive reign of the Shah and the other in the electoral legitimacy of a political order. The longing for the so-called freedom associated with the democratic tradition could simply not be overlooked in the inception of the new state in 1979. In this sense, democratic mechanisms legitimise the rule of the Iranian government through the 'will of the people,' which is enshrined in Article six of the

Iranian constitution. Even limited elections provide a semblance of formal democracy epitomised in the ballot box, which lends legitimacy to the Regime. The elections are therefore needed because the Regime in Iran, and the same could be said for the democratic regimes of the West, has not yet invented a different type of political apparatus that would provide a strong enough legitimacy to justify its rule. The Regime is then forced to commit itself to a ceremonial preservation of democracy through the ballot box, while simultaneously beguiling its effects. On this point, however, we should not succumb to the temptation that any divergence from formal democracy is by default a perversion of true democracy. As Žižek noted (2008b, 109), democracy is not defined by the positive content of this notion but by its opposition, its differential relation to a 'non-democratic' position, which can vary in the extremes. Social reality exists only through exceptions and deformations of the democratic notion, which must remain a necessary fiction, a plurality of forms, where effective democracy is unable to reproduce itself.

The place of Authority in Iran is therefore not consubstantial with Lefort's 'empty place,' since the filtered elections eliminate their fundamental subversive potential. What additionally complicates the issue next to republican electoral legitimacy is that clerical institutions harvest their legitimacy by incorporating the political institution of the Leader into the political system. The Leader embodies the Nation in Iran through the highest office in the state, the office of the Supreme Leader. Through this position, the Regime represents itself as the interpreter of the Other's divine will and the political materialisation of the Nation-Thing. It justifies the dual systemic arrangement by playing on the enjoyment of unique religious features materialised in a national framework. The very existence of the Islamic Republic with its peculiar political system thus epitomises the Nation's uniqueness and represents the materialisation of its desire, where the Regime merely fulfils the Nation's 'historical necessity.' National-religious structure in Iran thus forms the point from which progress emanates in their eyes and is anchored in the centre of their political identity. Combined, these characteristics exclude the possibility of an institutional break through elections and cement the current organisation of the socio-political structure, pointing to certain totalitarian features *via* the political Leader. The Nation therefore by definition supports the Regime as its embodiment and the individuals who do not automatically exclude themselves from the body of Nation.

The Islamic Republic therefore functions on a peculiar political dichotomy, where the Regime equates its survival with the survival of the political system. We can therefore observe a semblance to Lefort's notion of the 'empty place,' which manages to fuse a limited democracy with a semi-totalitarian rule through religious framework. To keep it functional, the Guardian Council neutralises the subversive potential of elections by filtering eligible candidates. The Regime seems to be keeping the signifiers holding the meaning of fantasy under a firm grip of S1 'Islamic Revolution' that leaves little room for the re-negotiation of gaps in a hyper-ideologised socio-symbolic order. The Regime's vigorous protection of the state structure produces paradoxes in Authority that emerge through the obscene network of repressive state apparatuses operating within and out of the public symbolic authority with the state's tacit approval. These come in the shape of *Basij* militia or arbitrary use of judiciary to deal with the perceived threat of castration from the political opposition.[193] The structural dichotomy of the state therefore produces real, often contradictory effects in social reality. These gaps operate on the background of the Karbala matrix that is covered by the office of the Supreme Leader, who mediates between republican and clerical institutions. The next step is thus to analyse how the position of the Supreme Leader negotiates the political dichotomy embodied in the state structure and its libidinal ramifications for political subjectivity in Iran.

5.4. Master vs. Leader

The empirical analysis in the introduction to Part II showed that the office of the Supreme Leader is positioned in the centre of the state structure in Iran and exercises a high degree of control over the socio-political life in the country as the highest religious and political authority. What is interesting is that the Karbala matrix still provides a subversive mechanism for the substitution of Authority, despite the Shi'a now being in its place.[194] That produces cracks in the legitimacy and policies of the Regime. The latter is then forced to constantly reinterpret religious doctrines and rituals to strengthen its signifiers of Authority. The official Authority is therefore still unjust for the Shi'a, which is why the Regime offers its own interpretation of religious eulogy. This gap in

[193] See chapter 6 for a libidinal analysis of repressive state apparatuses sustaining the ideological order.

[194] This could be observed in the 2009 mass demonstrations against the disputed presidential elections that have shaken the foundations of the Islamic Republic, where the demonstrators used Islam to accuse the government of being un-Islamic (see Varzi 2011, 53, 60).

Authority is materialised in the dichotomy of the political system in Iran and mediated by the office of the Supreme Leader. His task is to guide the country's development between pragmatic politics and Islamic principles and negotiate the gaps such dichotomy produces. The Supreme Leader is therefore intended to fill the emerging systemic gaps and mediate between different institutions, organisations, and political factions. This position thus enables the political system to function, while it simultaneously represents its impasse. In order to analyse the libidinal economy sustaining Iranian ideological edifice in chapter six, I shall first discern the ambiguous function of the Supreme Leader in the state structure through the analysis of the totalitarian Leader and the traditional Master as approached by Žižek (2008b; 2008d).

How are we to account for the function of the Supreme Leader in Iranian political dichotomy and his role in exercising Authority? In order to reveal the subject's relation to Authority and the Supreme Leader's role in shaping this relation, I will build on the arguments of interpellation and the political critique made in the previous sections. As discussed above, Authority in Iran is legitimised with references to external divinity and imposed through the state apparatuses. We should thus address the relations between the institutions exerting Authority and the subjects of ideology in order to see how the domination of power relations is concealed. Let us first address the seemingly absolute power of the Supreme Leader, which at first glance seems to offer a comparison with the Hegelian Monarch. In his *Philosophy of Right* (1979), Hegel argued that the Monarch "has often no more to do but to sign his name. But this name is important. It is the last word beyond which it is impossible to go. /…/ In a well-organised monarchy, the objective aspect belongs to the law alone, and the monarch's part is merely to set to the law the subjective 'I will'" (1979, 288-289).

As the introduction to Part II reveals, the authority of the Supreme Leader is not absolute, since different power centres force him to carefully manoeuvre between different political factions, social institutions and economic centres to keep the system functional. Although the judicial power is independent by the constitution, the Supreme Leader can nonetheless mediate between the legislature, executive, and judicial branches. However, his influence is not limited only by different power centres, but also by the constitution itself; Article 107 explicitly states that the Supreme Leader is equal in front of the law to others, precisely to prevent the system from sliding into totalitarianism. Hegelian Monarch also directly embodies the Nation and functions as

S1 for a given socio-symbolic order. Chapter four has revealed a different S1 in Iran and the critique of the political system above shows that the Supreme Leader cannot be directly equated with the traditional Master, with the Hegelian Monarch.[195] Rather than assuming the symbolic mandate of S1, the Supreme Leader serves as the protector of the 'Islamic Revolution' and its legacy. He seems to protect the S1 precisely by covering the gap between the subjects and the Other through the manipulation of *objet a*, the divine kernel of the Shi'a Nation within the national framework.

But how can we analyse the role of the Supreme Leader in the symbolic space of Authority? As the political critique above reveals, the dichotomy of the political system incorporates the position of the Leader into the state structure through clerical bodies and particularly through the office of the Supreme Leader. The latter also legitimises his position with references to external authority of the Master. However, the analysis of the form of ideology in Iran in subchapter 5.2. also revealed its fetishist features and showed that the Iranian subject is not directly addressing an external divinity. As the political system itself, the position of the Supreme Leader seems to resist classification; it does not appear to fall into the category of the Hegelian Monarch, neither is it consubstantial with the locus of Authority embodied in the totalitarian Leader, albeit embodying the characteristics of both. I will lean on Žižek's analysis of a classical pre-bourgeois Master and a totalitarian Leader to analyse the functions the Supreme Leader in Iran. What are the basic characteristics of the Master? The classical Master, like the Hegelian Monarch above, possesses a sublime dimension as if he is the personification of the State.[196] The subjects treat him as a Master due to his supposed supernatural features, overlooking that his charismatic authority is an effect of a symbolic performance. This illusion is simultaneously the reason why the Master has to legitimise his authority *via* references to a non-social, external Authority like God. In this sense, the Nation then performs the Pascalian symbolic rituals, materialising the illusion of

[195] The Supreme Leader then equally cannot be reduced to a symptom and the subject still has to confront the Real of his desire. There are mounting tendencies in Iran to reduce this position to a symbolic Authority. However, both Khomeini and Khamenei produced real effects in social reality pending on their decisions and they have both compromised with or yielded to pressures of different factions across the political spectrum, or demonstrators on the streets (Keddie 2006, 259-260, 277). See introduction to Part II.

[196] See also Kantorowicz's (1957) analysis of the King.

being always-already divine; without this performative mechanism, the charismatic authority of the Master loses its power (Žižek 2008b, 163).

The totalitarian Leader, on the other hand, no longer needs this external point of reference to legitimise his rule, but rather addresses the Nation as its embodiment, as an executor of the Nation's will. His power is therefore no longer legitimised by a reference to an external divine Authority, since the main deception is the opposite one to the Master: the Nation with which he legitimises his rule effectively does not exist, or, more to the point, the Nation exists only through and in a fetishistic representative of the Regime. If the Master is legitimised as such through the symbolic performance of the Nation, the only 'real Nation' in totalitarian disposition is the one that supports the Leader (ibid, 164). That is to say, the Iranian Regime positions itself as the Regime because it believes it represents the 'real' interests of the Nation, because it is embodied in the Nation and expresses its true will. The theoretical difference between the Master and the Leader therefore lies in the method of interpellation and relation to Authority. The authority of the classical Master stems from the gap of S1 in relation to the 'chain of knowledge' (S2), while the totalitarian Leader is separated from S1 and takes the form of an object which lacks the support in S1. The Master therefore reappears in the guise of a Leader, who excluded as S1 takes the shape of an object that embodies the chain of knowledge. As the embodiment of knowledge, the Leader assures the subject he has the ability to carry out the historical necessity in the name of the Cause (Žižek 2008d, 235).[197]

The above dynamics slowly start to illuminate the functions of the office of the Supreme Leader on the backdrop of the Iranian institutional arrangement. The leading ayatollah is separated from S1 and partly occupies the position of the Leader; however he simultaneously acts as the guardian of S1 through the position of the Master. In such interwoven libidinal dynamics, the totalitarian Leader demands obedience to Authority because of his alleged knowledge (S2), i.e. his ability to materialise the divine Cause. Additionally, the subject is guaranteed the righteousness of the Cause with a reference

[197] The theoretical point not to be missed here is that the self-apparent dependency of S1 and the superego injunction to enjoy is misleading; the status of the superego demanding enjoyment and submission to Authority is that of the chain of knowledge S2, not the symbolic authority of S1, which points to the gap between knowledge and belief constituting everyday ideological attitude (Žižek 2008d, 236).

of the Master, who is guided by an external divinity. The Supreme Leader needs a reference of the Master not only because the Shah occupied the position of the Leader before, but also because the enjoyment of the Nation is fused with religion *via objet a*. Since *objet a* slides from object to object, the Regime is forced to constantly adjust its position by mediating the inherent lack of the symbolic edifice. In this sense, the Master manipulates the sliding of *objet a* by evoking S1 'Islamic revolution,' which confirms the divine desire and the 'historical necessity' of the Nation. The Leader, on the other hand, claims to have the ability to materialise the divine desires of his beloved Nation identified by *objet a*. The totalitarian Leader therefore additionally legitimises his decisions through the divine guidance of the Master. Together, they create a libidinal loop for the engaged subjectivity, which simultaneously fuses an omnipotent external divinity providing the ideological Cause, as well as assurances on the ability to deliver it.[198]

The intriguing position of the office of the Supreme Leader in Iran therefore represents an agency of Authority, where the acts of the totalitarian Leader are protected by the divine insight into the Other's Real *via* the Master. The Leader also shares the leverages of Authority with elected institutions, allowing him a distance from the administrative responsibility. Conversely, the Master is protected by the same systemic dichotomy enabling him to exclude himself as a direct personification of the state and represent himself as a neutral apolitical figure. In other words, political decisions are enforced through the function of the Leader and given meaning through the divine insight of the Master by materialising their overlap through the political agency of the Supreme Leader. The dichotomy of the political system as a materialisation of the gap inherent in the Karbala matrix is therefore mediated through the dichotomy of the Supreme Leader, who tries to cover the gap between political and clerical institutions with his double function.

The above insights can also be analysed against Beauvois's exposition of totalitarian interpellation at the beginning of the chapter, where the subject is a part of the socio-symbolic order by responding to a call making him bigger than himself. In terms of the ideological call of the Other, the Master assures the subject he has an answer to the Other's question through *objet a*, while the Leader guarantees the materialisation of the

[198] See subchapter 6.2. for further libidinal analysis of the Supreme Leader's position.

Cause for interpellation if the subject freely submits to the forced choice of the Nation-Thing. Interpellation reveals a circuit between the Nation and the position of the Supreme Leader, where the latter tries to manipulate the *objet a* to cover the inherent antagonism of the ideological order. That is to say, the nation is only a Nation when it is embodied in the Leader representing the Regime. The latter is held in place through the emptiness of S1, whose legacy is protected by the Master. A real subject of the Nation therefore supports the Regime and through it Shi'a Islam, which resonates the divine dimension of its identity. Those who do not accept the Regime as the embodiment of the divine Other are automatically excluded from the Nation and become its enemy. A rebellion against the Regime is thus simultaneously a rebellion against the Nation-Thing and the Islamic self.

These considerations reveal the role of S1 and *objet a* in interpellation and their overlap with the functions of the Master and the Leader, further developed in subchapter 6.2. The Supreme Leader of Iran as the guardian of revolutionary legacy is utilising the ideological emptiness of S1 for political purposes and points to its necessity by manipulating the *objet a*. By constantly filling the gaps that emerge consubstantially with the Karbala matrix, the clerical establishment ensures the consistency of the Iranian socio-political trajectory, but for the same reason cannot afford authentic political opposition. These dynamics provide the fantasy with stability and meaning, tame the subversive function of *objet a*, as well as solidify the authority of the Regime. The Regime's symbolic authority embodied in the Master is sustained by the Nation's performativity of religious rituals. The Master creates a distance towards the totalitarian dynamics of the Leader and simultaneously supports ideological reproduction on the level of the Ritual. The constitutional arrangement, on the other hand, allows the Leader a distance from the discontent with the administrative management of the state, which is directed at the elected institutions. Considering the lack of theological qualifications of the current Supreme Leader ayatollah Khamenei, the symbolic authority of the Master should also be taken for granted, since its disintegration threatens the meaning of fantasy. The authority of the state in Iran is then additionally reinforced by the Leader, who can materialise it through state apparatuses.

Such interplay of ideological mechanisms and leverages of Authority enable Iranian systemic dichotomy to function. This duality is embodied in the office of the Supreme Leader and reflects his fluctuating role between the Master and the Leader. This office

represents the highest political authority in Iran as well as God's presence for all Shi'a, which additionally reinforces the socio-political position of the Regime. By incorporating both roles and limiting them with the constitution, the Iranian political system avoids the possible deadlock of the Hegelian constitutional monarchy. In this sense, the Monarch reinforces his rule by personifying the state, but causes problems to its continuity with his demise, as Khomeini almost did. This is the card reformist political structures in Iran play on, demanding changes from within in order to ensure systemic development and stability. The political and religious structures forming the Iranian political system therefore seem to be fused together into a fragile balance, where temporary factional alliances depend on pragmatism rather than political or theological rigidity. This systemic gap has been additionally amplified by perverse capitalist structures analysed in chapter seven. The systemic dichotomy in the Islamic Republic is thus rather a point friction instead of fusion of Authority, which the office of the Supreme Leader tries to mediate.

As we can see, the political function of the office of the Supreme Leader dominates over religious ones, where political discourse must nonetheless derive from religious framework. This is the reason why many analysts on Iran advocate, either explicitly or implicitly, for a separation of politics from the religious domain, since politics seems to be hijacking the religious framework to its own ends.[199] However, the political functions of religious institutions should not be regarded as the retreat of religion in the name of political pragmatism. On the contrary, we can observe the return of religion in its perverse form as a substitute for politics. The Regime of course uses religious discourse to further its political goals, but this should not be read as politics taking over the religious dimension, since the rise of global demagogy *qua* religion is obviously intervening in the political domain and not *vice versa*. These authors overlooked the return of religion as an answer to the anxiety of capitalistic modernity, which erodes the traditional structures of the social order. What we see emerging in Iran is an interwoven libidinal structure that produces a functioning network of social and political relations in capitalist modernity through religious framework, and seems to be sustained by a successful mediation of its inherent antagonisms. How precisely are these antagonisms

[199] See for example Oliver Roy (2004), Nikkie Keddie (2004 and 2006), Ervand Abrahamian (2008), or Hamid Dabashi (2011), all arguing for the prevalence of politics over religion.

mediated on the level of unconscious political subjectivity? How does their mediation sustain the libidinal structure of ideology in Iran?

6. Subjectivity and the sustainability of fantasy in Iran

Chapter five elucidated how ideology in Iran interpellates political subjectivity into its seemingly contradictory ideological structure. Every ideology generates a certain blindness to the gaps in its symbolic structure, which allows the subject a consistent experience of the socio-symbolic order. The libidinal consistency of the ideological fantasy is sustained by the central unconscious agency of the social order, the big Other, who provides the subjects with a stable chain of signifiers forming the meaning of the socio-symbolic edifice.[200] The subjects must equally sustain the Other through their libidinal investments if the Other is to provide the subjects with a consistent experience of social reality. This dialectical relation between the subject and the Other is crucial for the reproduction of the ideological order in Iran and its peculiar libidinal balance. Chapter six will therefore build on the knowledge and the theoretical approach emerged in the previous chapters in order to inquire into the ideological balance sustaining the socio-symbolic order in Iran. It analyses the sustainability of ideology and approaches its reproduction by exploring how the consistency of the socio-symbolic order is maintained on the level of the unconscious. The libidinal economy of subjectivity sustaining the peculiar ideological balance in Iran can be analysed *via* the three main psychic structures developed by Lacan – psychosis, neurosis and perversion, which I will address in detail below. How does the political subjectivity in Iran organise its libidinal economy to sustain the hegemonic ideological order?

6.1. Neurosis and perversion

The analysis of the political system in chapter five showed that the Iranian post-revolutionary order is based on an emergence of the sublime political body in the shape of a Leader, supported by the traditional Master. In a semi-totalitarian system with limited democratic participation, a common feature of the revolutionaries appears to be a full assumption of their perverse role as an instrument of the big Other (see Žižek 2008d, 256-257). How precisely does the libidinal economy of the subject sustain such an ideological order? I will approach this question by analysing the dialectical relation

[200] See Methodology chapter for a theoretical explanation of the big Other; chapter 4 for its emergence in ideology in Iran; chapter 5 for its role in the ideological interpellation of the subject.

between the subject and the Other *via* the object of fantasy.[201] As chapters four and five revealed, this object simultaneously represents a promise of harmony, as well as a potentially devastating inconsistency that characterises both the subject and the Other. The way subjects relate to the object of fantasy and specially its lack ultimately provides them with identity and determines their basic psychic structure. That conversely reveals the form of unconscious libidinal investments sustaining the ideological fantasy. I will primarily deal with neurosis and perversion to discern the way the consistency of the Other is sustained.[202] I should point out at the beginning that these psychic structures do not categorise specific social or political factions but reveal the dominant libidinal strategy that sustains the ideological fantasy in Iran. Inevitably, both mechanisms of neurotic repression and perverse disavowal are ways of sustaining the Other, who provides the subjects with a stable network of signifiers for their libidinal consistency. Both subjectivities tremble in the face of the Other's dissolution, so they sustain it with either constant doubt or presupposing it as a concrete and strong agency. Ultimately, the Other must be sustained in order to keep the meaning of signifiers forming the subject's identity stable.

We should look at these psychic structures in more detail, since the unconscious processes of neurotic repression or perverse disavowal involve libidinal positions structured around fantasy, the dialectics of which ultimately sustain the ideology in Iran. Let us first discern the position of the doubtful neurotic: Lacan claimed that "the structure of neurosis is essentially a question" (Lacan 1997, 174), "a question that being raises for the subject" (Lacan 2006a, 432). The neurotic establishes an ambiguous relation to the Other, since he somewhat cannot fully accept the object of fantasy as the kernel of his identity. The subject indeed constructs his identity *via* the Other, but the signifiers forming his subjectivity are unstable. The Iranian neurotic therefore constantly questions the signifiers forming his identity, the same signifiers that ultimately make sense of the subject's identity in the symbolic edifice. Contrary to the psychotic, a neurotic therefore does sacrifice his *jouissance* in order to enter the symbolic order, but remains obsessed with the sacrifice, which is seen as a theft on the

[201] For a theoretical analysis of *objet a*, see Methodology chapter; chapter 4 for its emergence in Iran; chapter 5 for its political function; chapter 7 for its role in political economy.

[202] I will not deal with the psychotic form of libidinal organisation, since the libidinal economy of the psychotic does not recognise the symbolic pact with the Other.

part of the Other, who now profits from it. The neurotic, in other words, is afraid to be reduced to the object of the Other's enjoyment, which is precisely the position of the pervert (Žižek 2008a, 44-45).[203]

The neurotic therefore holds the Other accountable for his symbolic castration (or what Lacan called secondary repression), where castration signals "that *jouissance* has to be refused in order to be attained on the inverse scale of the Law of desire" (Lacan 2006a, 700). That is to say, worried that the Other is profiteering on its sacrifice, the neurotic attempts to steal bits of *jouissance* back, believing he too can dupe the Other. This response points to the subject's relation to Law or Authority and inevitably to the ideological enjoyment sustaining the fantasy construction.[204] As Žižek notes (2008a, 44-45): "[…] the neurotic's basic libidinal notion is that the Other's authority is not 'legitimate': behind the façade of Authority, there is an obscene *jouissance* stolen from the neurotic." The neurotic subject is therefore deeply aware of his division, which causes anxiety. The knowledge on his incompleteness is precisely what the neurotic needs to repress in order to construct his subjectivity through the signifiers provided by the Other. As revealed in chapter three, the Karbala matrix equally functions on the backdrop of illegitimate Authority, drawing parallels to the neurotic organisation of libidinal economy. The Karbala matrix was formed on the background of the split within Islam that ended in Sunni domination, towards which the Shi'a community developed a subversive stance. The unconscious dynamics of Shi'a socio-political structures thus bear neurotic features, while the ruling Authority is by definition illegitimate. This neurotic resistance to Authority is still reflected in the Islamic Republic, even though the Shi'a themselves are now occupying its place.

The neurotic libidinal strategy of the Karbala matrix and its relation to Authority reminds us of the Hegelian Master – Slave dialectics.[205] The slave misperceives the Master's amassing *jouissance* and acquires enjoyment by stealing bits of *jouissance* back from the Master. The latter is well aware of the slave's actions, but tolerates it in

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[203] Particularly a hysteric neurotic wants to be the object of the Other's desire, not the Other's enjoyment; paradoxically, the way to achieve this desire is by postponing its satisfaction, which would bring enjoyment. An obsessional neurotic, for instance, is prepared to do anything in order to prevent the Other enjoying in his place (Žižek 2008a, 44).

[204] See Methodology chapter for the explanation of ideological enjoyment; chapter 3 for enjoyment of the Nation-Thing; chapter 7 for its role in political economy.

[205] See Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), particularly the chapter *Self-Consciousness*.

order to provide him with a minimum of autonomous identity. This libidinal bribe thus sustains their whole relationship on the backdrop of such an uncanny exchange (Hegel 1977, 104-119; Žižek 2008a, 45). Although the dynamics are not as straightforward, the 2015 nuclear deal that lifted international economic sanctions in exchange for curbing the nuclear programme perhaps offers us an example of such relationship.[206] The powerful conservative forces within the Regime's structure resisted the deal, but they seemed to simultaneously become wary of the neurotic reaction in a culturally and ethnically diverse country towards what the neurotic might perceive as amassed and stolen *jouissance.* The socio-political neurotic structures have signalled that the price of *jouissance* alienated from them would be too great and the consequences too grave. That could have shaken the very foundations of the Regime and the dominant position of perverse structures. The signifiers holding Authority in place might lose their firm meanings, since the neurotic unconsciously considers any Authority illegitimate. This dialectic is necessary because the perverse structures alone can only maintain a very fragile balance, where a desperate attempt to sustain the Other imposes a certain blindness on the Regime's own predicament. The perverse structure needs the neurotic mediation in order to balance the system, whose dialectics underline the central argument of this chapter. When the Regime finally agreed to the deal, the entire country burst in national enjoyment with Khamenei's pictures being paraded by the same neurotics regarding him as the materialisation of the illegitimate political Authority. The neurotic's anxiety was appeased, providing the fantasy with a stable flow of appearance and producing ideological enjoyment. This dialectical libidinal bribery therefore serves both structures in sustaining the status quo. The Regime willingly gave something to the neurotic to balance the socio-symbolic structure, while the neurotic could claim its own political victory in the face of Authority.

Let us now discern how the perverse structures address the lack in the object. If neurosis is a question for the subject, then perversion is characterised by the lack of such questions, since the pervert does not doubt his acts serve the *jouissance* of the Other.

[206] The agreement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was reached in July 2015 and implemented in January 2016 by the Islamic Republic of Iran and the EU+3 group (EU represented by Germany, France and the UK, and Russia, China and United States, also known as the P5+1 group). See European Union External Action Service (EEAS 2016) for a description of EU relations with Iran and the JCPOA agreement.

Inevitably, both mechanisms of neurotic repression and perverse disavowal are ways to sustain the Other, who provides the subjects with an at least minimally stable network of signifiers for their libidinal consistency. In this sense, the pervert instrumentalises himself in the position of the object of the Other's enjoyment. A consistent Other can then strengthen the signifiers of the pervert's identity. The neurotic, on the other hand, perceives the object of fantasy as what simultaneously connects and disrupts his libidinal ties with the Other due to the latter's appropriation of neurotic's enjoyment. Lacan described perversion as "an inverted effect of the phantasy. It is the subject who determines himself as object, in his encounter with the division of subjectivity" (Lacan 1994, 185). The pervert therefore inverts the fantasy ($◊a into a◊$) by occupying the place of the object and making himself the executor of the Other's will (Lacan 2006a, 653; Žižek 2008d, 234). Precisely by assuming the role of the object, by making himself the object of another's will, the perverse subject constitutes himself and sustains his reality. In short, the subject deals with the lack in the Other, which is ultimately its own lack, as the object that fills it.[207] We can see that both neurotic and the pervert perceive the Other as lacking, but relate differently to its inconsistency, which ultimately shapes their subjectivity.

In his seminar *Anxiety* (2014), Lacan pointed out that the neurotic is not ready to sacrifice a part of himself in order to complete the Other's lack. This refusal sustains his reproach that the Other is manipulating and exploiting him. Contrary to the pervert, the neurotic does not disavow his symbolic castration and refuses to put it to the function of the Other, or as Lacan put it, "turning his castration into what the Other lacks" (2014, 46). The pervert, on the contrary, turns his castration into something positive, a guarantee of the function of the Other in which the subject perceives itself as destiny, a necessary product of the 'historical necessity' (ibid). The pervert readily sacrifices himself for the role as an object-instrument that fills the Other's lack by "offering himself loyally to the Other's *jouissance*" (ibid, 49). In his negotiation with the Other, the pervert therefore does not receive strong enough signifiers that would enable him to form a neurotic identity but achieves it by identifying himself with the object that fills the inconsistency in the Other. By making the Other appear complete, the pervert can

[207] In this sense, we could say that the lack of the Other is clearer to the pervert, which is why he desperately needs to disavow it in order to gain a stable identity from the Other.

proceed to solidify his identity, which is sustained by the illusion of consistency *via* the object of fantasy. This construction of the Other must then be kept in place at all costs, since its disintegration threatens the pervert's symbolic identity. If the antagonism underlying the neurotic's relationship with the Other provides the subject with identity through repression, the case of perversion relies on disavowing the lack of the Other's desire. In my analysis of ideology in Iran, a perverse subject therefore follows the desire for a Shi'a Nation *via* the divine object of fantasy, the lack of which he then desperately tries to cover.

We can see that both subjectivities respond to the same inconsistency, but they do so in different ways depending on their relation with the lack embodied in the object of desire. While for the neurotic the object of desire ultimately prevents the Other's consistency and simultaneously the subject's identity, the pervert transforms this ambiguous object into a fetish in order to sustain the illusory existence of the Other, the social order split from within as analysed in chapter five. The pervert's disavowal therefore relies on fetishism as a way to control subjective reality.[208] *Vis-à-vis* the neurotic, we could say that the pervert does not accept a desire arising from lack. It is at this point that the pervert enacts its disavowal: it is not lack that causes desire, but a presence, a presence embodied in the fetish object. In the face of increasingly diminishing symbolic authority, the fetish then represents a little lie that allows the pervert to control the truth about the world and himself. This highlights the function of fetish "against the threat of desire's disappearance, and the role of a fetish in perverse structure, as the absolute condition of desire" (Lacan 2006a, 571). Fetish conversely also closes the space for the reinterpretation of desire, meaning that the desire of the Other must be viciously pursued to solidify the pervert's identity and the consistency of fantasy. The pervert therefore enacts the fetish to cover the lack in the Other's desire for a divine Shi'a Nation in order to avoid his own encounter with it.

What does that mean in terms of the ideological call of the Other in Iran? We can posit a hysteric neurotic as the outcome of a failed interpellation. This subject resists the dominant form of ideological interpellation and refuses his symbolic mandate in the Iranian socio-symbolic edifice in the name of the object representing his divine Shi'a

[208] For an analysis and the function of fetish, see the Methodology chapter; Freud 1956; Žižek 2008a, chapter 3; Lacan 2007.

kernel (see Žižek 2008d, 101). In other words, he refuses the dominant form of symbolic identification that ties the subject to the enjoyment of the Nation-Thing, which leads the neurotic to address the Other with constant doubt. The pervert, on the other hand, cannot establish the fantasy of his own autonomous identity as detached from the Other because he perceives the Other as weak to the extent that the latter cannot provide strong enough signifiers to enable an autonomous identity process. Since the pervert cannot construct a functioning Other to establish a neurotic difference from it, the only other choice is to strengthen the Other where it is lacking. That prompts the pervert's direct intervention in the social order by identifying and erasing the object representing the lack in the Other, the lack of the divine dimension of the Shi'a Nation. Ultimately, both subjectivities strive to sustain the Other in return for their libidinal consistency and a place in the symbolic edifice.

6.2. Interpellation and the split socio-political order

The unconscious agency of the Other sustains the consistency of signifiers enabling a coherent experience of social reality for the subject. Simultaneously, there is no Other without the subject's libidinal investments in it. This dialectical connection between the subject and the Other is vital in the process of interpellation. What is interesting in the Iranian case is that the subjects interpellated into the social order form different libidinal responses to sustain it. Interpellation produces both neurotic and perverse subjectivities that conversely sustain the Other with either repression or disavowal. We should not overlook that these two subjectivities are formed by the same unconscious agency, since there is no Other of the Other (Lacan 2006a, 688). The two forms of subjectivity therefore reflect different types of libidinal investments sustaining the unconscious agency of the social order. How can we account for the different libidinal strategies sustaining the Other in Iranian fantasy? We can search for the answer in the distinct disposition of the state analysed in chapter five, through which the Iranian Regime represents itself as the Other's embodiment. The Regime tries to appropriate the Other by prescribing a particular reading of religion, along with rituals and practices that strengthen the signifiers of its Authority through Pascalian repetition.[209] The Regime

[209] See Methodology chapter for the analysis of the Pascalian repetition; Pascal 2006; Žižek 2008b, chapter 1.

therefore promotes its interpretation of the Other, which solidifies the Regime's socio-political position on a libidinal level.

How precisely do the two subjectivities relate to the specific socio-political dynamics of the Other in Iran? I described in chapter five how subjects displace their belief onto the Other, which enables them to believe in the social order unconsciously. Since the Iranian socio-symbolic order is marked by totalitarian features, this displacement allows the subject to create a distance towards the Other promoted by the Regime and to construct an identity that enables him a place in society. In other words, the subject recognises his own otherness in the Other promoted by the Regime. The displacement of belief then further enables the subject to reconcile with his identity in such order, while unconsciously still believe in the big Other sustaining the ideological edifice.[210] What is therefore at stake is the construction of the subject's identity, which is an eternal question for the neurotic. The neurotic subject must repress the identity marking his difference from the Other in order to gain consistency. What the subject substitutes in this case is the signifier for the subject, which is active in its place. That is to say, the neurotic subject transposes his activity onto another, he is being active through another, which allows for a consistent identity. The second subjectivity works as its opposite: the subject thinks he is the one being active, the one enjoying, while it is the Other who is really enjoying in his place. A perverse subject therefore 'knows' the Other is lacking but disavows this knowledge, which results in the misperception of the subject's own *jouissance.* What the subject substitutes in this case is the object for the subject, which regulates how the subject relates to *jouissance.* Such organisation of libidinal economy reflects the strategy of the pervert, who assumes the position of a pure instrument of the Other's *jouissance* (Žižek 2008a, 149-152). The pervert therefore identifies with the desire of the Other promoted by the Regime in order to strengthen the consistency of his identity. The neurotic, on the other hand, represses his own identity, his own otherness, by transposing the belief in the social order onto the Other of fantasy and thus believe through a proxy.

What socio-political consequences does the Regime's appropriation of the Other produce for the Iranian subject in social reality? As discussed in chapter five, the Regime appropriates the Other by establishing official religious interpretations and

[210] See subchapter 5.2. for the analysis of transposing the belief onto the Other in ideology in Iran.

practices, where the only correct reading of religion is the one of the Regime. More importantly, these practices strengthen the unconscious belief in the social order through Pascalian repetition for both types of subjectivity. On the level of ideological Belief, Olivier Roy has observed the opposition to the state's privatisation of religion in different religious practices emerging parallel to those of the state, a phenomenon he termed "social Shi'ism" versus "State Shi'ism" (2004, 653).[211] We can again observe the logic of the Karbala matrix surfacing subversive parallel structures as a part of unconscious resistance to the Authority. These religious rituals enable the subject to gain a distance from the Regime's ideological dynamics, which simultaneously enable the reproduction of the hegemonic ideological order. Different libidinal connections to the Other therefore provide both subjectivities with a place in the ideological structure and a wary libidinal balance. As Žižek noted (2008d, 102), such 'diversity' of the Other functions as a fetish by means of which the subject is able to preserve the traumatic identity that gives him a role in the socio-symbolic order and conceals the subject's own split. It is also a way for the subject to prevent the encounter with the Real that threatens his symbolic identity.

How do the different libidinal strategies influence the hegemonic position of the Regime? As discussed in chapter five, the Regime represents itself as the materialisation of the Other and is as such placed between the subjects and the Other. Particularly the office of the Supreme Leader acts as the mediator between the subjects and the Other by substituting the position of the Hidden Imam.[212] In this sense, the Supreme Leader influences ideological interpellation through his structural position in the political system. This office gives weight to the ideological call, since it points to the divine object within the subjects, which is simultaneously reflected in the social order. The ideological call of the Other in a social order decentred from within addresses precisely

[211] We can again observe the tautological reinvention of 'traditional' rituals in specific religious occasions such as mourning, in religious holidays that are increasingly localised, and even in business cooperation. This gap was addressed in the philosophical writings of Abdolkarim Sorush, who contrasts between religion (*'din'*) as a direct relation between God and the subject, and the apprehension of religion (*'dark-e dini'*), which is a way this relation is embodied under a certain system (Roy 2004, 653). As observed in the introduction to Part I and chapter 3, this allows the Shi'a to conform to Authority, while still conceiving it as illegitimate and create subversive parallel institutions to overthrow it. This public mask is called *taqiya* or *ketman*, which was interpreted in modern totalitarianism by Miłosz (2010).

[212] See introduction to Part II for the analysis of this position in the Iranian political system. See subchapter 5.4. for the analysis of the libidinal position of the Supreme Leader in the political structure.

this inherent split, which strengthens the interpellation *via* the double function of the Supreme Leader. His fluctuating role between the totalitarian Leader and the traditional Master further reflects the way subjects relate to the object of fantasy and echoes the formation of different subjectivities.

These insights allow me to analyse the interpellation of the Iranian subject through the double function the Supreme Leader. The office of the Supreme Leader and its role in the political system was addressed in subchapter 5.4., to which we can now add the libidinal dimension in the framework of interpellation. In this sense, the Master as a protector of the S1 'Islamic Revolution' points the subject to a Cause for interpellation, which is guaranteed by the external authority of God. Since both the neurotic and perverse subjectivities experience the Other as, fundamentally, lacking, the Master therefore strengthens the ideological call by guaranteeing the subject the insight into the completeness of the Other. The Master legitimises the Cause by pointing to the divine object embodied in the call of the Other, which at the same time binds the subjects of ideology in Iran. This simultaneously provides the Other with consistency, luring the subjects to accept the forced choice of the Nation-Thing discussed in chapter three. The Master therefore tries to cover the lack in the Other by pointing to the divine *objet a* through religious eulogy, which consequently strengthens the Regime's position of symbolic Authority. However, the subject still experiences the lack in the desire of the Other, which is then either repressed or disavowed.

At this point, ideological interpellation of the Iranian subject is additionally strengthened by the position of the totalitarian Leader. As the embodiment of knowledge, the Leader guarantees to the subjects that he has the ability to materialise the divine Cause revealed by the Master. The Leader demands obedience to his authority due to this knowledge and addresses the subject with his ideological injunction 'Obey and thus serve your divine Nation!'[213] His position strengthens the interpellation into the socio-symbolic order with a perverse utilisation of religion as a substitute for politics. The subject therefore accepts the Other's Cause to belong to the Nation-Thing due to the Leader's knowledge on the Nation's enjoyment. That is to say, the subject pledges obedience to the authority of the Leader, since the latter appears to have knowledge on his libidinal consistency, i.e. the ability to materialise the Other's

[213] See subchapter 5.1. for the analysis of interpellation into the socio-symbolic order in Iran.

desire. The traditional Master, on the other hand, additionally strengthens the meaning of the Cause and the lacking identity of the subject under the cloak of religion. Since symbolisation always produces a certain leftover, as Lacan teaches us, this leftover is precisely the lack in the symbolic structure preventing the subject's consistent identity. The lack in the Other is then dealt with either through neurotic repression or perverse disavowal in order for the Other to provide the subject with a consistent experience of the social order.

Different libidinal strategy to address the conundrum of the lack in the Other, along with the Supreme Leader's fluctuation between the Master and the Leader, produces different libidinal investments that inevitably sustain the unconscious power of the Other. Perverse disavowal in this distinct socio-political disposition is particularly intriguing, since perverse structures represent the dominant libidinal support for the socio-symbolic order in Iran. As the pervert disavows the knowledge on the lacking Other, he also pledges obedience to the authority of the Leader, because the latter has the knowledge on the pervert's libidinal consistency. In exchange for libidinal consistency, the pervert assumes the position of the object that would fill the divine dimension lacking in the Other as promoted by the Regime. The pervert additionally strengthens his symbolic identity *via* the traditional Master, who mediates between the subject and the Other. The pervert therefore thinks he is the master of his own destiny, of his own enjoyment, but is in reality only the instrument of the Other, who is enjoying in his place. Through this instrumentalisation, he relies on the Other to complete his identity and strengthen the signifiers of Authority.

It is also important to note that the desire for the divine Nation is strengthened through the Pascalian repetition of religious rituals prescribed by the Regime. Additionally, religious institutions do not limit desires, but function as their very guarantee.[214] The key is to channel *jouissance* rather than prohibiting it, since *jouissance* limited to the symbolic Law of religious institutions does not pose a threat to religious authority. This points to the fact that the Iranian pervert has nothing to do with following a particular faith or its doctrines, but merely identifies with its perverse content for his libidinal consistency. The pervert 'knows' the Other is not complete and thus fulfils the demands of the Leader by perverting the religious framework of the Master in order to cover the

[214] For the analysis of desires in the framework of religious authority, see Methodology chapter.

Other's lack. Conversely, we could say that by not fully accepting the object of fantasy, the neurotic gets caught in the game of resisting the Other, which paradoxically acknowledges its existence. By rejecting the object of fantasy, the neurotic exposes the lack in the Other, which threatens the identity of the pervert. The latter must then fill the place of the object if the Other is to maintain its consistency, which conversely provides the pervert with a stable identity.

Both forms of subjectivity therefore relate to the Other *via* the object of fantasy. Through *objet a*, the Regime seems to claim to have an answer to the ideological call of the Other, thus strengthening the interpellation for the neurotic and the pervert by presenting the Other as consistent. As the Regime points to *objet a via* the Supreme Leader, a Shi'a believer is automatically transformed into a believer of the Regime, a subject of the Nation. This simultaneously creates a loop, where a belief in the Other is equated with a belief in the Regime. Any resistance to the Regime is then automatically translated into the resistance to the divine Other. Despite the different libidinal relation to the Other, both subjectivities ultimately strive to maintain the Other and sustain the status quo.

A stable appearance of the Other as an unconscious power structure is therefore vital to keep the ideological fantasy consistent. The Regime in Iran seems to be well aware that the stability of the state rests on systemic coherence and the approval of the population, not purely on imposing will. This is the reason why the Regime goes to great lengths to sooth the differences between a variety of political factions and organisations before inviting the Nation to unite at the ballot. In almost every election, the Regime categorically accuses the West of interference, partly to accentuate the unique features of the state and the Nation to the population. Conversely, the usually high electoral turnout is a sign that the subjects unconsciously believe in the power of the Other fusing the social order together. However, Iranian neurotic political structures do organise themselves against the imposition of Authority. This could be observed in the Green movement demonstrations of 2009 against the disputed presidential victory of Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who was supported by the dominant conservative clerical establishment.

The libidinal relation to the Other gives us a good insight into the intertwined dialectical relationship of the neurotic and the perverse structures in the ideological fantasy in Iran. Both strive to either repress or disavow the hole in signification in order to construct a consistent identity. The neurotic seeks to form an identity different from the Other but

represses it; simultaneously, the Karbala matrix provides the neurotic with the unconscious mechanism for the substitution of signifiers holding the Authority of the Other in place. The pervert, on the other hand, reinforces the same signifiers of Authority because he is unable to break the deadlock of his own identity. For the pervert, it is precisely the presence of an object that triggers the anxiety of lack and it is the lack in the object that establishes the way subjects experience the Other. At this point, we can risk a hypothesis on the socio-political dialectics of the pervert and the neurotic: The neurotic represses the Other's impotence in order to gain subjectivity, which makes him unable to act, to break out of its symbolic pact. The pervert, on the other hand, 'knows' that the Other is lacking, but disavows this knowledge by instrumentalising himself in the position of the object that the Other lacks. The neurotic therefore has signifiers of identity establishing his difference towards the Other, but is unable to act, while the pervert acts blindly to fill the Other in a desperate attempt to keep the signifiers forming his identity consistent. How does the dialectic between the perverse and neurotic structures therefore operate and ultimately sustain the ideological fantasy in Iran?

6.3. Authority and the libidinal sustainability of fantasy

The above inquiry elucidates that the network of signifiers forming the meaning of Iranian fantasy is sustained by libidinal investments of the subjects into the unconscious agency of the social order, the big Other. The materialisation of this ideological fantasy in social reality is further reinforced through state apparatuses as the analysis in chapter five revealed. For these structures to remain functional, the underlying meaning of the Iranian fantasy is sustained under a Master Signifier (S1) tied to a specific socio-historical context.[215] To keep it in place, the Regime depends on a number of state apparatuses aimed at taming the resistance to Authority. These apparatuses include particular armed branches like the *Quds* forces operating abroad, special judicial branches like the *Islamic Revolutionary Court* and *Special Clerical Court* that deal with domestic offences undermining the Islamic Republic, and a number of intelligence and

[215] For the analysis of the S1, see Methodology chapter; chapter 4 for its emergence in Iran; chapter 5 for its political role; chapter 7 for its role in political economy.

security services operating alongside established state apparatuses.[216] Ideological unconformity is sanctioned through the Stalinist-style mock trials with necessary public confessions, allowing the Regime to single out individuals and organisations undermining its 'revolutionary legacy.' However, I will not explore those organisations in detail, but will primarily analyse their structural position in the libidinal network sustaining the ideological edifice seemingly full of paradoxes. Perhaps the most revealing example of the libidinal economy within such disposition is the so-called morality police or parastate forces called *Basij*.[217] They are sent on the streets to 'restore public order' in case of recalcitrant demonstrations and operate away from public scrutiny, indiscriminately using imprisonment, torture, and even extrajudicial executions. The *Basij* represent an underside to public authority, a paradox that tacitly overlaps with the symbolic authority of the state. It should not be overlooked that these structures do not operate through public symbolic authority, but are imposed through an obscene network of repressive state apparatuses in the name of a 'higher Authority.'

The predominant libidinal sustainability of Iranian fantasy through the psychic structure of perversion inevitably triggers questions regarding the pervert's relation to Authority or the Law. In his famous text *Kant avec Sade*, Lacan (2006a) considers the pervert's libidinal investment into the Other sustaining the Authority of the socio-symbolic order, which I will reinterpret in the Iranian framework. Lacan points out that the supreme Good, the Cause embodied in the call of the Other "appears only by excluding everything the subject may suffer from due to his interest in the object" (2006a, 646). That signals the pervert's need to destroy the presence of an object, which embodies the lack threatening the pervert's consistency. We should be careful to avoid Kant's mistake by designating this as a sort of pathology. There is nothing pathological in a Sadean executioner, because he has nothing to do with pleasure; he conceives this as an ethical act in line with his duty towards the supreme Good (ibid, 646, 652). The pervert (of the sadist persuasion) thus becomes an executioner, desperately trying to maintain the

[216] For reading on the rule of law, see for example Kar and Pourzand 2016; Tabari 2003. For reading on security and intelligence apparatus, see Abrahamian 1999.

[217] The *Basij* organisation was established by the civilian volunteers for the Iran-Iraq war, which was integrated into the Revolutionary Guards. It is known to consist of fervent supporters of the Revolution and represent an example of perverse structures in the libidinal network of ideology in Iran. See Golkar 2010; Forozan 2016.

fragile appearance of the socio-symbolic order.[218] Through a consistent Other, the perverse executioner experiences himself as a result of 'historical necessity.' The executioner therefore finds enjoyment by working for the Other, by becoming the instrument of the Other. As Lacan writes (ibid, 662), in this process the pervert turns "a tyrant's desire into a duty, if a tyrant is someone who appropriates the power to enslave the Other's desire." However, as revealed in chapter five, the 'tyrant' in Iran should not be simply identified with the Supreme Leader; the 'tyrant' in this case is the unconscious perverse logic sustaining the fantasy form, the materialisation of which the Supreme Leader is.

To analyse how perversion sustains Authority measured against the divine laws of the Other, I will make a brief distinction between three elements comprising the Law or Authority, which the subjects experience as a foreign superego pressure. First, we have the author of the Law; second, the subjects who have to obey the Law; third, the executor of the Law in whom Lacan discerned the pervert above. The identity of first two elements is consubstantial: the subject is effectively the author of the Law and is autonomous in obeying his own Authority. That raises the interesting question of the executioner's mediation as a supplementary figure of Authority, since he positions himself as both the author of the Law and the subject obeying it (Žižek 2001, 138). If we translate this into the logic sustaining the Iranian ideological order, we see that the author of the Law is the Other as a necessary fiction of the subject that sustains the socio-symbolic structure. In other words, the author is God himself, imposing on his subjects the eternal laws of the supreme Good. The subjects of the Law are the people of Iran, while the Regime works as the executioner of the Other's will, of God's divine authority. As Lacan pointed out, the split is not between the author and the subject since they are consubstantial, but between them and the Law's executor, who transcends the split between the God-given Law and its empirical manifestation. This demarcation also allows me to observe the function of the Supreme Leader as the extension of the

[218] Perversion can be further delineated according to the way the pervert relates to the object of fantasy, either *via* the gaze (exhibitionist, voyeur), or voice (sadist, masochist). Particularly interesting are the libidinal structures of the masochist and the sadist, which are two different outcomes of the same logic. While the sadist occupies a position of the Other and strengthens his identity *via* the object of fantasy, the masochist submits to the Authority of the Other as the object of the Other's enjoyment to make the Other exist. While expanding on this division might provide further insights into the configuration of the libidinal network of the ideological fantasy in Iran, it would not necessarily bring a greater clarity to the overall analysis of its sustainability.

Regime: as a Master he is the medium revealing the Law of the Other to the subjects, while as Leader he imposes it through state apparatuses in the name of the divine Cause. We can observe this paradoxical gap in Khomeini's decision that the laws of the Islamic Republic override Shari'a law, because they have greater value for the development of the state and with it Islam itself (Roy 2004, 644-645). The Regime therefore keeps the Nation hostage through its own interpretation of the Law of the Other and imposes it *via* the mediation of the executioner.

In the short-circuit of Authority and *joiussance*, the neurotic libidinal subjectivity acknowledges the Law in order to find enjoyment in its transgression, while the pervert directly elevates the enjoying Other into the agency of the Law. The pervert acknowledges the obscene underside of the Law, since he gains satisfaction from installing it. In the Iranian ideological construction, this Sadean executioner appears as an instrument of Authority, operating in the shadow of the Regime with its tacit approval. This mandate is delegated to him by the totalitarian Leader, while its meaningful content is provided by the traditional Master. His radical objectivization of its own subjective position takes the executioner beyond the deceptive appearance of cynical detachment. By making himself an instrument of the Other's will, he avoids his own subjective division, but pays for it through the alienation of his own enjoyment. The totalitarian subject therefore displays his own freedom as the freedom of the Other, occupying a position where his will is completely instrumentalised. The pervert's position is therefore somewhere between neurosis and psychosis, between psychotic foreclosure of Authority and neurotic integration in it (Lacan 2006a, 652; Žižek 2008a, 46-47; 2008d, 235).

At this point, the role of perverse structures and the pervert's intervention into the social order become clearer. The goal of perversion seems to be an attempt to materialise the Other, which is normally only unconsciously presupposed. That is to say, because the perverse subject 'knows' that the Other is weak, he strives to make it appear as a concrete and powerful agency. In a sense, then, perversion moves from the efficiency of the virtual (unconscious) Other to the presumed efficiency of the 'really existing,' authoritarian Other. This Other is increasingly authoritarian because the pervert must constantly reinforce its symbolic consistency to solidify his own identity. This feature can be observed in the Regime's appropriation of the Other through the promotion of doctrines and practices that strengthen the signifiers of Regime's authority.

I will thus turn to the role of perversion and discern how the position of Authority is mediated and sustained, as well as expose the way an unconscious fantasy in Iran achieves its stability through the Other. As described above, the pervert sustains the Other by instrumentalising himself in the position of the object. Since this object is possible only in relation to fantasy, it therefore minimally materialises the fantasy's desire for a divine Shi'a Nation. In light of the introduction to Part II and chapter five, we could argue that the Supreme Leader as an extension of the Regime's domination represents a materialisation of this desire and epitomises the institutional arrangement of the state. However, as Lacan reminds us, there is always a lack embodied in the object of desire that threatens the pervert's fantasy. The Regime perceives this as a threat of castration undermining the consistency of the Other. In political terms, the lack embodied in the object is represented by the so-called Iranian other, a consequence of the cultural division, whose identity under the Other promoted by the Regime is becoming increasingly foreign to its own supposed national character.[219]

We should not conceive this other as a contingent consequence of the current form of Iranian ideological fantasy, since totalitarianism identifies unconditional Otherness with a particular historical figure (Žižek 2011, 155). The neurotic subject in Iran resists the unjust Authority through the Karbala matrix, which undermines the signifiers invested in Authority. As discussed in introduction to Part I and chapter three, Iran is full of rebellions against political authority: Varzi (2011) points out how the Shah's monarchy saw Al-e-Ahmad who utilised religious discourse to warn of 'westoxication' as the other; similarly, Motahhedeh (2008) places this otherness in the leader of the still persecuted religious sect Babi; Dabashi (2011), on the other hand, finds the same characteristics of the subversive other in Al-Afghani. In effect, what they all represent is a fetishized object for Authority, the embodiment of a subversive potential in *objet a*, which must be tamed to conceal the Other's impotence.[220] Since the Iranian other

[219] The origin of this bifurcation lies in the 19th century, when growing numbers of Iranians longed for modernisation in the European framework. With the 1920s, this view informed state policy and started to form a 'modern middle class.' The 1979 revolution ended the political hegemony of this social class, but despite large-scale emigration and socio-political restrictions, such cosmopolitanism in Iran still represents the country's cultural driving force. See introduction to Part I; Chebabi 1990; Postel 2006.

[220] On this point, we can observe how fetish emerges at the intersection of two lacks: the lack of the subject and the lack of his Other. The positivity of the fetish object occurs when these two lacks overlap, since the fetish functions as both the representative of the Other's unsurpassable depth, and as its opposite, namely what the Other lacks (Žižek 2008a, 132). If the Iranian other embodies a subversive

threatens the fantasy construction with symbolic castration that was unsuccessful with the pervert, the latter needs to exclude "everything the subject may suffer from due to his interest in the object," as Lacan pointed to above (2006a, 646). As the potentially subversive side of *objet a* needs to be tamed, the pervert has to destroy the object in order to sustain the consistency of the Other and with it the stable appearance of fantasy.

How is the potentially subversive object threatening the socio-political stability of the Regime mediated and neutralised? From the position of Authority, the Regime invites the Nation to destroy the castrating object that threatens their common fantasy. This is achieved through pervert's instrumentalisation, who is addressed by the totalitarian Leader and comes in the form of authority paradoxes like the *Basij*, or the judiciary's show trials mentioned above. The pervert recognises the duty of being an object that brings consistency to the Other by eliminating the subversive materialisation of *objet a* in the shape of the Iranian other. That is to say, as the subversive object embodied in the Iranian other threatens the Regime with symbolic castration, the Regime's executioner seeks to castrate the Iranian other. By removing this object, the Regime solidifies its authority and erases the gap in a hyper-ideologized socio-symbolic order. That enables the pervert to experience the Other as a concrete and efficient power agency, which provides him with a consistent symbolic identity and produces enjoyment. Such mediation creates an uneasy social balance, where the Regime must distance itself from deploying torture, extrajudicial executions or hijacking the judiciary. Despite undermining its symbolic authority, the Regime nonetheless relies on these paradoxical structures to reinforce its socio-political stability. Such systemic organisation further consolidates the Authority of the Regime and strengthens the Other sustaining the fantasy.

The libidinal mediation sustaining the peculiar balance of Iranian fantasy ends with the elimination of the object by the *Basij* or the judiciary's show trials determining the 'heretical' guilt of the subject through the emptiness of the S1. At this point, the Iranian other accused of counter-revolutionary action is invited to sacrifice himself in order to save the consistent appearance of the socio-symbolic order. The accusation of 'insulting

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potential and points to the Other's lack, the Supreme Leader then points to its inaccessible depth. It appears that both are in fact two sides of the same coin, functioning as the parallax object of ideological fantasy that regulates castration. For an analysis of the parallax object and its exchangeability between symptom and fetish, see Žižek 2001, 13-15.

the religious feelings of the Nation,' or 'undermining the revolutionary legacy' in reality forces the accused to prevent the exposure of the Master's impotence and the Leader's illusory knowledge. It is crucial to maintain this appearance of fantasy, which is why the victim is asked to publicly confess its deviancy. Such underlying argumentation points to the fact that there is no divine Other. The Regime knows it harvests support from its subjects not some real external divinity, but such an open confession would jeopardise the entire fantasy. To save it, the subject effectively must assume responsibility for the Regime's impotence, and confess his guilt determined under the emptiness of the S1 and measured against the divine laws of the Other. In other words, the subject is not sacrificed for the Cause, but for the fact that the Other does not exist (Žižek 2008a, 205).

At this point, we are reaching back to the issue of totalitarian features discussed in chapter five, where the gap between knowledge and belief determines daily ideological attitudes. The subjects are therefore divided between what they consciously know about their socio-political organisation of reality and a set of more or less unconscious beliefs they hold in regard to its Authority. The Karbala matrix simultaneously produces a gap reflected in the institutional organisation of the state, as well as in the knowledge and actions of the subjects. A perverse fusion of semi-totalitarianism and limited democracy is sustained by a dialectical relationship of perverse and neurotic structures that provide the libidinal structure of fantasy in Iran with its peculiar balance. The perverse structures do appear solid on the surface but maintain a very fragile balance. Both use the unconscious Karbala matrix to reinforce their socio-political position *via* religious practices, where the political and social messages reverberate between the lines. This can be observed in the continuous calls for reforms within the neurotic socio-political structures and conversely the ambivalent uneasiness of perverse structures in implementing them.

These libidinal categories are of course not rigidly assigned to particular subjects and political institutions, but reflect the predominant libidinal economy sustaining the ideological fantasy in Iran. Despite the perverse logic being in the position Authority, they do not completely neutralise neurotic structures. In political terms, the neurotic symbolic authority is indeed disintegrating, but, paradoxically, the perverse structures need the neurotic intervention to balance the system and prevent it from imploding. The Regime must appease the neurotic, for example by propagating morality based on

religious doctrines, since it would otherwise undermine its own symbolic authority. Although the ideological fantasy in Iran is supported by perverse structures, the Regime must also sustain the systemic stability through neurotic mediation. Since a perverse structure alone is too feeble, it needs the neurotic to balance the system and prevent it from sliding into a totalitarianism, where it faces self-destruction. This, on the other hand, also represents a libidinal bribe for the neurotic subject, who now gets some satisfaction by receiving crumbs of enjoyment *via* identity politics. On this point, we can also observe the global weakening of symbolic efficiency of the neurotic structures. They are supported with a type of perversion that comes in the shape of global capitalism, as well as a return of religion as substitute for politics discussed in chapter five. How does capitalism as a perverse socio-symbolic matrix fit in the seemingly contradictory ideology in Iran?

Part III

Iranian Political Economy

III.I. Introduction

Part III of the thesis inquires into the organisation of the political economy in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It consists of an empirical introduction, followed by a theoretical inquiry. I will analyse the political economy in Iran on the backdrop of its peculiar ideological order by building on the approach and knowledge elucidated in the preceding chapters. These chapters inquired into the unconscious structure of the socio-symbolic order in Iran and the political subjectivity immersed in it. The analysis of enjoyment tying subjectivity to the ideological order described in chapter three allowed for the inquiry into the construction of a new order on the level of the unconscious agency in chapter four. Those insights provided a way to analyse the materialisation of ideology in the socio-political framework of the Islamic Republic addressed in chapter five. The modality of political subjectivity sustaining the libidinal matrix of the socio-symbolic order in Iran was analysed in chapter six. These combined insights allowed us to observe the unconscious attitudes to Authority, as well as the anonymous power structure within which Authority is exercised. Next to the peculiar structure of the socio-symbolic order, there is another invisible power that often eludes the analysis in the case of Iran – the political economy.[221] The analysis of the political economy in Iran will argue that capitalism as a socio-economic mode of production and consumption deploys its own inherent forces of hypnotic injunction as an intricate ideological structure.[222] As a metaphor for the latter, Slavoj Žižek proposed an analogy of a giant

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[221] The analysis below argues that the political economy in Iran is based on capitalist doctrines, despite the fervent anti-capitalist discourse in the political arena. Put simply, capitalism as a mode of production and consumption forms a system of power relations in which everything, including one's own labour, has a price on the market determined by demand and supply with the goal of maximising profit. Profit marks the yield on the return of production capital invested, that is to say, it relies on the extraction of surplus-value. The extraction of surplus-value depends on the exploitation of surplus-labour, where the realisation of surplus-value into profit is determined by the market. The accumulation of profit therefore marks the whole cycle of making profits and reinvesting them in the economy. More importantly, such organisation of the economy produces social practices regulated through commodity fetishism. Capitalism therefore profoundly influences social relations and forms a socio-economic model, whose very practices are anchored into the unconscious. Psychoanalytic critique of capitalism (e.g. Lacan 2007 and 2006b; Žižek 2014a and 2016) argues that capitalist ideology mediates its inherent contradictions by tying the subject to the core of its unconscious enjoyment. Such critique underlines my analysis of capitalism in Iran, which I will fully develop in chapter 7. For further readings, see Marx 1982; for the analysis of commodity fetishism, see Marx 1982, 164-165; Vighi 2012, 33-35; Žižek 2008a, chapter 3.

[222] In the analysis of the capitalist mode of production and consumption, or as Lacan called it, the capitalist drive, I will follow the theoretical perspectives emerged in the previous chapters. Lacan's

squid in the introduction to his book *Disparities* (2016). The squid's interwoven tentacles, like the ones of global capitalism, spread invisibly throughout the ocean's floor, connecting and regulating every corner of the globe. To what extent do the tentacles of global capitalism reach into the Islamic Republic?

Part III aims to elucidate the organisation of political economy in the post-revolutionary order in Iran. The analysis concerns the ideology imposed on the subject through state apparatuses 'from above,' as well as the decentred network of unconscious beliefs 'from below' that reproduce the seemingly 'non-ideological' economic dimension of the socio-symbolic order.[223] I will inquire into the political economy on the level of ideological Ritual, where ideology creates a distance to itself and is reproduced through economic and legal coercion (Žižek 2012a, 15). An exemplary case of such unconscious reproduction is Marx's critique of commodity fetishism, with parallels in the socio-political realm analysed in chapters five and six. The opposition between ideological state apparatuses (see Althusser 1971) as the external materiality that always-already pertains to ideology and commodity fetishism as ideology that always-already pertains to external materiality ultimately points to the opposition between the state and the market (Žižek 2012a, 18), which I will address in the Iranian framework.

The organisation of political economy is particularly interesting in the case of the Islamic Republic, since the country has been under international sanctions to one extent or the other from its very inception.[224] Furthermore, its political project is built on an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist rhetoric that simultaneously pushes the Regime to deliver on its promises in order to ensure its legitimacy.[225] Nonetheless, we could argue that Iran finds itself in the global capitalist system at least to some extent due to the fact that its economy heavily relies on the export of fossil fuels and import of

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(2007; 2006b; 1978) approach to Marxism, further developed by Žižek (2014b; 2016), McGowan (2003; 2013), Feldner and Vighi (2015), Zupančič (2006) and others puts the analysis of capitalism in historical, as well as largely neglected ontological dimensions. See chapter 7.

[223] Žižek (2012a, 17-18) conceives the opposition between the ideology imposed through state apparatuses and the ideology in its seemingly spontaneous social practices as the ultimate opposition between the state and the market.

[224] For the success and failures of the sanctions strategy, see for example Alizadeh and Hakimian 2014; Amuzegar 2014, chapter 8; Berman 2008; Fayazmanesh 2003; Takeyh and Maloney 2011.

[225] For the construction of the Iranian socio-political order, see introduction to Part II, chapters 4 and 5; for literature on revolutionary discourse, see Dabashi 2006; Keddie 2006, chapter 10; Khomeini 1981a; Pesaran 2011, chapter 2; Bakhash 1985.

commodities.[226] This presents us with an interesting question of how the global capitalist matrix influenced the development of the revolutionary political economy in a system that fought against the capitalist socio-economic model. This antagonism also appears to be at the heart of factional and identity conflicts, where the elite struggle mirrors the struggle of the state versus the free market.[227] Moreover, it seems that the stability of the political economy and the social order within the institutional framework of the Islamic Republic is essential for the Regime's survival, since it determines the material basis of social reality as a large part of revolutionary expectations. At the heart of the analysis thus lies a seemingly simple question of how the ideological order in Iran functions in a global capitalist economy.

At the inception of the Islamic Republic, the organisation of political economy was marked by a revolutionary deconstruction of the monarchical order, a war with Iraq, US and later international sanctions, followed by the gradual lessening of governmental regulations and restrictions through liberalisation of the post-war period, all of which I will address below. As a post-revolutionary Regime, contemporary Iran has been in a state of perpetual crisis since its inception, which inevitably also outlined the management of its economy. Due to the mounting international sanctions, the country has been increasingly isolated from the global trade, capital flow and investment as a punitive measure for its alleged nuclear threat and support of terrorism, which inevitably pushed the import-export oriented economy into the black market.[228] The questions on Iran's economy, however, are gaining in significance particularly after the 2015 nuclear deal, which lifted international economic sanctions in exchange for curbing the nuclear programme and opened the possibility for the country's direct integration into the global markets.[229] But does the post-revolutionary Iran want to be

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[226] For literature on economic dependency and the oil sector, see for example Amirahmadi 1990, chapters 2 and 3; Amuzegar 2014, chapters 1, 5 and 6; Maloney 2015, chapter 8; Salehi-Isfahani 2009.

[227] For factional politics reflecting the economic dimension, see for example Akhavi-Pour and Azodanloo 1998; Rakel 2009, chapter 3; Mosheni 2016.

[228] The size of the informal economy in Iran is difficult to measure due to different models of analysis, lack of data, and categorisation of informal economy. Schneider (2007) estimates that the Iranian informal economy accounted for about 20,2% of the GDP in 2003, a share which has increased to 22,19% in the years 2008/2009 (Khandad and Nili 2014). Tougher sanctions following this period have probably increased the size of informal economy. For further reading see also Farzanegan 2013.

[229] The agreement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was reached in July 2015 and implemented in January 2016 by the Islamic Republic of Iran and the EU+3 group (EU represented by Germany, France and the UK, and Russia, China and United States, also known as the P5+1 group). See

integrated in the global economy? How has its economy been organised so far? As a country in perpetual crisis, does it operate on the basis of capitalist doctrines, or does it work on its own revolutionary dynamics? With these basic questions, we almost inevitably hit the same ideological oscillation as in the introduction to Part II: is Iran a fundamentally religious state, free of material desires, or a corrupt theocracy, filling the pockets of its elites? It seems that we are again faced with supposedly mutually exclusive regressive and progressive option, between religious fundamentalism and economic globalisation. This consideration points to an entirely new field of inquiry in Iranian political economy: how are the unconscious structures in Iran elucidated in the previous chapters conflated with global capitalism? How are the religious and revolutionary socio-political features balanced with capitalism to provide the legitimacy and sustainability to the political project of the Islamic Republic?

A chief obstacle for the analysis is the limited literature on Iranian revolutionary and post-revolutionary economy available to the international reader, apart from the inquiries into the oil sector or particularly strong industry sectors, like nuclear or auto production. In general terms, the majority of existing literature on Iran can be divided between the scholars of International Relations focusing on the geopolitics and nuclear security of the wider Middle East, and political scientists focused on the identity and formation of the Islamic Republic. The limelight on the nuclear security, revolutionary discourse, and factional politics in Iran tend to ignore the economic dimension of the state. Furthermore, the studies of revolutionary socio-political upheaval mostly neglect the economic factors of the revolts and revolutions mentioned in the introduction to Part I and chapter three.[230] The literature on the Iranian economy, however, can be roughly divided into three categories: the first includes those authors who are critical of the Regime's economic performance on the background of its failure to fully implement capitalist dynamics (e.g. Amuzegar 1997 and 2014; Maloney 2015; Salehi-Isfahani 2009); the second and largest group of authors is critical of the Regime because it was not able to find its 'third way of economic independence' – however, they mostly fall into the trap of proposing solutions within the capitalist framework, which they identify

European Union External Action Service (EEAS 2016) for a description of EU relations with Iran and the JCPOA agreement.

[230] For accounts of the Islamic revolution from an economic perspective, see Afshar 1985a; Amirahmadi 1990, chapters 1 and 2; Maloney 2015, chapter 2 and 3; Mather 2009; Motahari 1985; Pesaran 1985.

as the problem in the first place (e.g. Amirahmadi 1990; Bakhash 1985; Brumberg 2016; Mather 2009; Mosheni 2016);[231] the third and smallest group is also critical of the Regime (e.g. Ghorayshi 1981; Pesaran 2011), but oppose the fact of contemporary capitalism significantly penetrating Iran, overlooking that capitalism governs different socio-political relations with the same logic. A critical economic view of the Regime by authors based in Iran points to the silent hypnotic force of the capitalist ideology, as well as dissatisfaction with the economic model and factional political struggles.

The questions posed above ultimately concern the organisation of capitalist economy and its conflation with the ideology in Iran. In order to analyse their peculiar fusion, I will address these questions in three interconnected steps. Firstly, the introduction to Part III below inquires into the historical analysis of political economy in the Islamic Republic. The intriguing empirical research will provide the insights into the economic model in Iran. Secondly, the analysis of ideology cannot be adequately addressed by empirical research alone. As revealed in the Methodology chapter, the need to draw a demarcation line between ideology and factual reality pulls us right back into ideology.[232] To analyse the unconscious capitalist matrix, I will approach the analysis through ideological enjoyment as the last support of ideology, which moves the inquiry beyond the formal discourse analysis.[233] Thirdly, historical and ontological approaches must be conflated if we are to arrive at a feasible critique of the capitalist matrix and discern its libidinal sustainability with the ideological order in Iran. Such approach is based on the insight that capitalism is not a simple abstraction, an overdetermined totality as a contingent articulation of different economic discourses. In his critique of political economy, Marx already pointed out that capitalism must be analysed according

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[231] The anti-imperial sentiments connected to economic exploitation and the desire for economic independence amplified by Khomeini's rhetoric were so strong that the constitution of the Islamic Republic in Article 43 states: "[t]he economy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with its objectives of achieving the economic independence of the society, uprooting poverty and deprivation, and fulfilling human needs in the process of development while preserving human liberty" (IranOnline, 2016). It also provides a list of clauses on how this should be achieved. For the constitutional framework of the economy, see Pesaran 2011, 41-53; Maloney 2015, 129-135.

[232] If ideology is already at work in everything that we experience as reality, we should treat ideology as Lacan's '*not-all;*' namely to assume a place that enables us to maintain a distance towards ideological dynamics. Since ideology engulfs reality, this place must remain devoid of any positive content. For further analysis, see Methodology chapter; Žižek 2012a.

[233] For a theoretical explanation of ideological enjoyment, see Methodology chapter; chapter 3 for its emergence in ideology in Iran; chapter 5 for its political role in Iran; chapter 6 for its role in libidinal sustainability of fantasy; chapter 7 for its role in political economy. See also Žižek 1994; 2008b; 2008d.

to its structure with economy as its object. As Žižek noted (2007b, 211), "[c]apitalism is *not* just the outcome of multiple discursive strategies and struggles for hegemony - the 'logic of capital' is a singular matrix […]."

The analysis below therefore endorses Lacan's insight that every socio-symbolic order is already immersed in a particular ideological meaning. Psychoanalytic approach changes the perspective of inquiry to the ontological dimension of ideology by endorsing the premise that there is no externality to the above ideological dynamics. Such inquiry is able to analyse how capitalist ideology embeds the subjects into its own unconscious logic. The true difficulty, therefore, is to think of capitalist ideology in its ontological lack and simultaneously grasping it as consubstantial with the lacking subjectivity. The ontological lack embodied in both the socio-symbolic order and the political subjectivity is mediated by ideology that binds them together. Psychoanalytic inquiry can access the subject's unconscious libidinal economy mediating this lack, as well as the processes of transference structuring social reality. Such approach can therefore discern how the political subjectivity coalesces with the unconscious logic of capital in Iranian fantasy. How precisely is a socio-symbolic order with religious and totalitarian features mediated in the murky waters of global capitalism?

III.II. Economy of the Islamic Republic

III.II.I. Revolutionary economics

The Islamic Republic inherited an economic model that has been through boom and bust, declining steadily since 1976 under the last Pahlavi shah. The economy is still heavily depended on the international price of oil, while relying on foreign industry, technology, and food imports. Such combination caused sudden and dramatic rises in the price of basic commodities in times of crisis, while surplus was accompanied by inflation in time of prosperity.[234] The Shah tried to modernise and industrialise the country through the *White revolution*, which paradoxically increased the dependence of the Iranian economy on foreign knowledge to operate and sustain the newly established

[234] The 'first oil shock' occurred in 1973, when the oil producing OPEC members proclaimed an oil embargo as a response to the US support of Israel in the Yom Kippur war. The price of oil nearly quadrupled, massively increasing the economies of oil producers. The 'second shock' occurred in 1979 with the Islamic revolution and the following Iran-Iraq war, decreasing the global oil supply and surging its price on the market. For further reading, see Barsky and Kilian 2004.

industry.[235] Increasing reliance of the monarchy on global capitalist system that mostly fed the Iranian elite saw its opposition in the form of intellectual responses and mass protests in the short-term nationalisation of oil industry under Mohammad Mossadeq (1951-1953), revolts organised by Khomeini in 1963 and the 1979 Revolution itself.[236] The Islamic revolution marked a collapse of the state's economic organisation and its bureaucracy, despite a small foreign debt, good infrastructure of roads, ports and airports, communication networks, power plants, metal industry, and a private sector developed in the last decade of the monarchy. In the ensuing chaos, the new government took over large economic sectors in the name of the Revolution through nationalisation and expropriation, including banking, insurance, major industry, large scale agriculture and construction, as well as foreign trade (Amirahmadi 1990, 15-20; Amuzergar 2014, 33-34; Bakhash 1985, 166-167, 177-178; Maloney 2015, 75-83; Pesaran 1985, 31-35; Pesaran 2011, 22-27).

The first steps towards the socio-economic policy of the new Islamic government were to define and implement 'Islamic economics.'[237] The government found itself consumed by unemployment, lack of production, massive flight of capital and expertise, blockade of its international funds and mounting economic sanctions following the US embassy hostage crisis.[238] The early phases of the new revolutionary order were dominated by improvisation, institutional clashes and political competition, while massive displacements of workforce and development projects added to the political and economic uncertainty.[239] Amidst the chaos on the streets and competing centres for

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[235] The *White revolution* could also be read as the eroding intrusion of the University discourse in Iran, which prompted a response from religious and intellectual movements that ended in the 1979 tautological 'return to its true roots.' See introduction to Part I; chapters 3 and 4.

[236] See introduction to Part II for the analysis of events.

[237] Generally, the 'Islamic economics' includes nationalisation, state intervention, welfare, rationing, and the elimination of interest. Several lay and clerical writers concerned themselves with Islamic economics, most influential of which were Ali Tehrani (1974), Musa Sadr (1971), Habibollah Payman (n.d.), and Mahmoud Taleghani (1982). For readings on theory and debates, see Bakhash 1985, 167-175; Choudhury and Malik 1992; Pesaran 2011, 22-34.

[238] Revolutionary students broke into the American embassy in Tehran and took 52 American diplomats and personel hostage for 444 days. For reading on the hostage crisis, see for example Farber 2004; Hiro 1985, chapter 5; for its economic effects, see Maloney 2015, 126-129; Amirahmadi 1990, 31-34, 39, 173.

[239] Discrepancies soon emerged between the new government and parallel revolutionary committees run by the clergy. While the government urged businessman and industrialists to return to the country in exchange for government protection, it looked helplessly by as other businessman were thrown in jail and their enterprises seized by revolutionary bodies. For readings on the economy of the first, short-

power, the new leadership mostly left the economic structure of the previous regime in place. As with the parallel political organisation of the state described in the introduction to Part II, the revolutionaries took over economic institutions with their own cadre, while continuing the existing business arrangements. Such move asserted clerical control over the economy and with it the predominance of the Islamist faction in the struggle for power.[240] As in the case of political institutions, the key to take over the economy was the assertion of Authority. In competition for legitimate Authority with revolutionary committees, the government officials struggled to assert control over the economy (Amirahmadi 1990, 21-23; Maloney 2015, 108, 111; Pesaran 2011, 40-41).

Such parallel organisation of the state was possible, since Khomeini enjoyed the support of the rural classes, the clergy and the *bazaar* bourgeoisie. Khomeini increased the political and economic power in the hands of the latter two, who stand for private property and deregulated economy as landowners and merchants. The wealth of the Pahlavi regime, certain sectors of the economy, and redistribution of commodities was put under the control of different religious Foundations.[241] These enjoy a privileged position in the economic system and generate approximately 20% of the country's GDP. Either by compromise, persuasion or force, the clerical faction rising to power eventually also brought factory strikes, workers' committees and sporadic land seizures under control.[242] The loyalty of the poor was maintained through oil income by subsidising housing and consumption commodities, health, education, and infrastructure in rural areas. Vigorous debates on the economy ensued, while different religious and

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lived government led by Mehdi Bazargan, see Pesaran 1985; Bakhash 1985, chapters 5, 6 and 7; Abrahamian 1989, chapters 8 and 9.

[240] The revolutionaries found themselves in an unexpected position, where they rehashed some of the policies they chastised under the monarchy. With inflation at 50% for basic commodities, the *bazaar* merchants became targets of resentment, labour leader's demands were reversed and their unions repressed, civil taxation to fund the state remained, while the religious tax is managed by the clergy. On the other hand, the Shah's lavish military budget was slashed, some construction projects abandoned, oil production constrained, land reform put in action, while the state absorbed the production capacity under its control (Maloney 2015, 109, 111).

[241] Different religious foundations play significant roles in trade, industry, or managing large endowments and funds. For further readings, see Bakhash 1985, 181-185; Boroujerdi and Rahimkhani 2016, 146-150; Buchta 2000, chapter 8; Maloney 2015, 120-126.

[242] As a predominantly rural country, with land concentrated in the hands of wealthy families and the clergy, the debate and violent struggle over land was one of the first concerns of the revolutionaries due to economic, political and social reasons. See Afshar 1985b; Bakhash 1985, chapter 8; Hooglund 1982; Majd 2000.

lay factions clashed over its meaning, purpose, and organisation.[243] In the midst of internal political, social and economic violence, Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980 in what was one of the most ruthless wars of the previous century.[244] The increasing socio-economic instability fuelled by revolts in the provinces, social unrest in the cities and vicious political struggles was additionally amplified by miscalculated war burden, which by the end accumulated to approximately 592 billion dollars in damage (Amirahmadi 1990, 24-28; Bakhash 1985, 176-178; Keddie 2006, 246, 255-256; Maloney 2015, 108-120; Mather 2009, 70-71).

The clergy led by Khomeini initially represented itself and justified the Islamic government as a defence of the poor, which ultimately failed to materialise. The mounting chaos of worker's protest that brought the industry to a near halt demanded Khomeini's intervention and he urged the workers to return to work immediately or be "regarded as opposition against the genuine Islamic Revolution" (Khomeini in Maloney 2015, 109). We can observe how the empty Master Signifier (S1) 'Islamic Revolution' started to be used to articulate the economic policy serving the political project of the Islamic Republic.[245] Further challenges to the survival of the state shaped its institutions and patterns of authority. The new leaders implemented policies that simultaneously ensured their own survival, while the Regime absorbed rival elite factions fighting for domination. The clergy's assent to power did not conclude the fuelled extremist rhetoric and violence of the political periphery, but merely limited its scope within the confines of the S1. The war with Iraq surfaced a post-revolutionary state and re-shaped the

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[243] The first 2 years of philosophical clashes between different revolutionary groups drove the country to the brink of economic collapse. The left wing opposition was particularly influential in organising the economy based on 'social justice,' despite the differences between Islamic leftists and conservative clergy that shaped the economy throughout the 1980's. Left wing clerical concept of social justice was a blend of Marxist-Leninist ideas, anti-imperialism and nationalism. For further readings on the debates over the economy, see Rahnema and Nomani 1990; Bakhash 1985, chapter 7; Hooglund 1986; Amuzegar 1997; Pesaran 2011, chapters 2 and 3.

[244] Saddam Hussein's growing fear was that the Revolution unfolding in Iran would inspire the long-suppressed Shi'a majority in Iraq. He took advantage of the revolutionary chaos but miscalculated the popular support for the Regime against a foreign aggressor. The war took 8 years to finish and demanded a million dead, with atrocities like Hussein's use of chemical weapons and Iranian tactics of 'human waves.' For reading on the Iran-Iraq war, see Karsh 2014; Hiro 1991; Johnson 2011; for an economic perspective of the war, see Razoux 2015; Alnasrawi 1986; Maloney 2015, chapter 4; Amirahmadi 1990, 42-70.

[245] The empty S1 holds the underlying meaning of the ideological fantasy in place. For its theoretical explanation, see Methodology chapter; chapter 4 for its emergence in ideology in Iran; chapter 5 for its political role in Iran; chapter 6 for its role in fantasy's sustainability.

economic development of the country. The banner of social justice under the S1 served to unify the clashing factions, while economic nationalisation and war slowly transformed the early revolutionary discourse into a commodity-driven one (Amirahmadi 1990, 64; Mather 2009, 69; Maloney 2015, 139-140; Pesaran 2011, 61-62).

III.II.I.I. Post-war deregulation

Silent integration into the global capitalist economy by the end of the war in 1988 and Khomeini's death in 1989 ushered a new era of economic deregulation with the election of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani for president (1989-1997), followed by Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), and Hassan Rouhani (2013-). The Regime invested heavily in reconstruction projects overseen by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), which subsequently turned the military wing into a mega-corporation over the ensuing decades.[246] Revolutionary discourse raised the post-war expectation for just redistribution, along with economic opportunities and benefits. Necessary commodities were channelled to the population, which served to support Regime's legitimacy. Rafsanjani followed the *laissez-fair* policies of economic development, advocated privatisation, tried to bring foreign companies in Iran, revived the stock exchange, and negotiated with the IMF and the World Bank.[247] The implementation of capitalist policies put him in a direct confrontation with the Islamic left, who viewed these intrusions as a betrayal of the Revolution. An open immersion into the global capitalist logic created a struggle over the post-war economy between different revolutionary groups with their own political ambitions.[248] What emerged is a highly competitive socio-political arena, where factional struggles for influence are,

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[246] The IRGC was established in accordance with the article 150 of the constitution as the guardian of the Islamic revolution, tasked with promoting Islamisation and safeguarding the country's borders. It played a major role in the Iran-Iraq war and the reconstruction of the country, developing a vast network of business enterprises in agriculture, mining, transportation, export and industry, which greatly influences economic policy. It expanded its ties with other revolutionary organisations outside the military sphere such as religious foundations, and became a threat to civil authority and the small private sector. The IRGC also plays a major role in shaping political, social and cultural policies by the virtue of its representation in the Supreme Council for National Security, which determines Iran's defence and national security policy (Pesaran 2011, 18; Maloney 2015, 244-245). For further readings on IRGC and its activities, see Forozan 2016; Ostovar 2016; Sinkaya 2016; Takeyh 2009.

[247] Privatisation opened an important role in contemporary Iranian economy, which I will address below. For reading on the first steps towards privatisation under Rafsanjani, see Amuzegar 2014, 68-74.

[248] For debates, strategies and obstacles of the post-war reconstruction, see Amirahmadi 1990, chapter 4; Pesaran 2011, chapter 4; Maloney 2015, chapter 5; Amuzegar 2014, chapter 4.

from my Lacanian perspective, tied with the S1 'Islamic Revolution.' Already in the early 80's, the Regime managed to limit these factional clashes within the framework of S1. These elite struggles for political influence reflect a complex intersection of economic and identity conflicts that mirror differences in society regarding the roles of the state and the market (Amuzegar 2014, 34, 67-68; Brumberg and Farhi 2016, 11, 13, 21; Maloney 2015, 191-193; Mather 2009, 72; Pesaran 2011, 18).

To avoid economic collapse, Rafsanjani established the Plan and Budget Organisation (PBO) to produce consecutive 5 year economic plans that would bring Iran in line with development.[249] The administration also ended Iran's isolation from foreign markets, international financial institutions, and sought much needed investment. They welcomed the return of foreign companies like the American Coca-Cola, which simultaneously appealed to the consumer market and offered economic incentives to domestic production. When this particular deal was signed with a local company, the head of the Foundation for the Oppressed opposed the agreement by insisting that the deal is a deliberate attempt of the West to corrupt Iranian culture, which provoked parliamentary and public debates. The Regime scraped the deal, but when Pepsi-Cola bid on the Iranian market a year after, it successfully signed a contract with a subsidiary of another religious foundation. This intervention points to the utilisation of the divine dimension inscribed in the Revolution to achieve economic and political influence.[250] It simultaneously signalled other potential investors that these foundations are an important economic force to be reckoned with. There are a number of similar incidents with foreign investors, whose projects were blocked by the domestic elite pursuing their

[249] His economic plans increasingly advocated the role of the markets, reducing government subsidies and multiple exchange rates, devaluing currency, promoting exports and privatisation, slashing the public sector, along with free trade zones and the required legislation. However, the plans had and have serious issues in regard to their implementation. High expectations and projections remain mostly unfulfilled as they fall victim to factional struggles, international sanctions, oil price volatility, political instability, or ineffective policy. For reading on the first economic plan and its ills, see Maloney 2015, 201-209; Pesaran 2011, 73-88.

[250] This deal offers an example of evoking the divine dimension of the Revolution reflected in the Iranian revolutionary subject. This divine dimension was explained as the function of *objet a* in chapter 4. For the theoretical explanation of *objet a*, see Methodology chapter; chapter 4 for its emergence in Iran; chapter 5 for its political role; chapter 6 for its libidinal role in sustaining the Iranian fantasy.

own interest under the cloak of S1 (Maloney 2015, 212-213, 232-233; Keddie 2006, 264; Salehi-Isfahani 2009, 12).[251]

Rafsanjani's 'structural adjustment' plans to open the Iranian economy *via* domestic and foreign private enterprise have failed in the face of the Regime's protectionist policies.[252] Since the elites were themselves a part of the state structure competing for influence within it, they preferred state control over trade and commerce, rather than the state losing those leverages of power altogether. Rafsanjani's first and second economic plan had limited success despite having the support of the Supreme Leader, whose office approves most of the economic policy directly or indirectly through clerical bodies. The following two terms of reformist Mohammad Khatami, who advocated for greater social freedom, liberalisation of public space and an economic middle ground, mostly fell out of line with how the conservatives and the Supreme Leader defined the political limits of S1 (Pesaran 2011, 95; Salehi-Isfahani 2009, 33; Keddie 2006, 263-267, 270).

The Reformists tried to implement policies that would avoid threats of the global economy, while simultaneously utilise its opportunities.[253] Khatami's emphasis on social liberalisation in the face of economic stagnation and international isolation made him adopt antagonistic views and policies reminiscent of the failed approach to capitalism with a human face: "[…] we definitely do not want capitalism. But we

[251] The factional struggle over power and resources surpasses the 'Western' ideological divide. Exemplary is the fate of Turkish bidding on the Iranian market, where mobile company Turkcell and airport operator TAV were forced out on the basis of ideological and security reasons (see Pasaran 2011, 153-158).

[252] A post-revolutionary Iran with deeply seeded colonial resentment to foreign penetration resisted the plans and the establishment of an autonomous private sector. Rampant corruption, misguided investment, insufficient oil production, ageing technology, increasing foreign debts, additional US sanctions, lack of foreign investment and domestic political rigidity along with worker's protests foiled the plans (Keddie 2006, 264, 267).

[253] Khatami's presidency marked an important moment in Iranian reformist movement striving for social and cultural reform, which at the end found itself outmanoeuvred by witty clerics and conservatives. Khatami also sought rapprochement with the West and suggested the idea of *The Dialog Among Civilizations* as a response to Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations*, a theme the UN adopted in 2001. For a description of political developments, see introduction to Part II; for readings on Khatami's socio-economic strategy, see Pasaran 2011, chapters 5 and 6; Amuzegar 2014, chapter 7; Maloney 2015, chapter 6; Khatami 2004; Tazmini 2009.

respect the value of capital" (Khatami in Maloney 2015, 236).[254] The two new five-year plans envisioned deregulation, privatisation, non-oil exports, reforms regarding the rule of law and labour, while refused to privatise public services in a neoliberal fashion and kept subsidies for necessities.[255] The economic direction of the administration thus explicitly prepared Iran for the integration into the global economy. The unwitting immersion into the capitalist production and consumption mixed with expectations of the Revolution surfaced the antagonism between the market and the state, which is reflected in the factional political struggles. The Reformists lost that struggle with Khatami, which produced disappointment among the growing urban population with alarming youth unemployment, strict limits on foreign investment, oil dependency, corrupt institutions, and a lack of domestic investment.[256] In the 2005 elections, the Reformist camp lost to conservative populist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who promised to 'put the oil money on Iranian dinner table' (Pesaran 2011, 99, 108-109; Keddie 2006, 273-274; Maloney 2015, 265; Amuzegar 2014, 124-127; Salehi-Isfahani 2009, 34).

Among other policies that immersed post-revolutionary Iran deeper into global capitalist system was a particular attention to privatisation by creating the National Privatization Organization. The latter in particular further burgeoned factionalised power struggles under Ahmadinejad, who approved the Reformist fourth pro-market development plan with an emphasis on the privatisation of industry, commercial companies and infrastructure with several strategic exceptions.[257] Interestingly, the

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[254] Many academics (e.g. Žižek, Feldner and Vighi, Verhaeghe, Butler) connect the term with the failed Left's approach to political economy, where 'capitalism with a human face' marks the Clinton-Blair attempt at neutralising its rising anxiety.

[255] Promoting economic growth and competitiveness also meant the administration would have to tackle the inherent structural contradictions of the entire socio-economic system (e.g. certain subsidies, state monopolies, or labour safeguards) that benefited the elite, as well as the public. The elites connected to the Regime enjoy preferential access to credit, foreign exchange, as well as licences and contracts, standing in the way of deregulation and liberalisation Khatami envisioned. The plans thus bore little fruition as they would weaken the ruling clerics and their allied *bazaaris* (Keddie 2006, 273; Maloney 2015, 265).

[256] However, some Reformist policies had successful long-term consequences, such as the improvements in the rule of law, fund for oil revenue volatility, enhancements to trade and investment, exchange rate unification and important changes to the article 44 of the constitution clarifying the roles of the private and public sectors (Maloney 2015, 290).

[257] Ahmadinejad led a populist campaign by the slogan 'oil money on every Iranian dinner table' that intervened in the unfulfilled promises of the Khatami government. Ahmadinejad's emphasis on the 'disinherited' provided him with a wide popular support and he was sceptical of selling state's assets. He made a risky political move and requested the Supreme Leader to modify his privatisation plans by allowing a part of the shares to be available for provincial investments and the two lowest level income

Supreme Leader explicitly advocated privatisation, but pointed to the divine dimension of the Revolution by warning that privatisation must be done in accordance to the constitution, national security, and "the pre-eminence of Islamic and revolutionary values" (Khamenei in Maloney 2015, 290). The Iranian version of the 'capitalism with a human face' is viewed both as a threat to be resisted, yet an opportunity to solidify the Regime and advance particular political factions. These developments also prompted changes in the institutional architecture, which simultaneously allows us to explore the internal built-in Regime mechanisms of elite contestation. These dynamics could illuminate the libidinal interplay and sustainability of the ideological order in Iran analysed in chapters four and five with the unconscious matrix of capital (Mather 2009, 74-75; Maloney 2015, 290-291; Mohseni 2016, 38-39; Salehi-Isfahani 2009, 34).

Ironically, the international sanctions imposed on Iran also had an unpredictable effect in convincing the Regime that a private sector would be more difficult to isolate from the global economy. In 2007, the Supreme Leader requested the officials to speed up the privatisation plans and encourage private investment.[258] In 2008, the IMF even praised Iran for its divestment programme, which essentially transferred the ownership of state assets into private hands, as well as its willingness to allow foreign capital in important sectors of the economy.[259] However, the constitutional mechanisms disrupted the privatisation process, which was shaped through the factionalised power structure in a way that benefits a broader spectrum of political elites. Ahmadinejad's government with the Supreme Leader's consent pushed for a specific type of privatisation in which the clergy and elites closely connected to the state structure such as shareholders, speculators and certain commanders of the IRGC were assured a buy-in of the supposedly privatised assets. Such outcome protects the clerical base of power from political and economic threats of privatised economy without blocking the beneficial

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groups. The populist move appealed to the Supreme Leader, since it put the distribution in state hands and solidified the support of the poor classes. This popular policy was in line with Ahmadinejad's campaign slogans on social justice and became known as the 'justice shares' policy. However, only crumbs of oil wealth were distributed to the population (Amuzegar 2014, 74-79; Maloney 2015, 333-337; Mohseni 2016, 57-58; Pesaran 2011, 179).

[258] For readings on privatisation, the economic empowerment of different factions and the IRGC, banking, and monetary policy under Ahmadinejad, see Amuzegar 2014, chapter 11; Habibi 2013; Mohseni 2016; Molavi 2012; Pesaran 2011, chapter 7.

[259] Ahmadinejad's government also accelerated the precarisation of the labour force in line with the IMF's vision of 'economic adjustment,' although job security is an important demand of the Iranian workers (Mather 2009, 77).

capitalist processes creating those threats. Paradoxically, it generates legitimacy for the Regime among the population by creating a distance between the elite's silent buying of the supposedly privatised assets and politically accountable elected officials handling the privatisation process (Mather 2009, 76-77; Mohseni 2016, 49, 60).

The clergy thus silently expanded its economic leverages through privatisation, which simultaneously pushes the elites into internal competition through state institutions. The Regime managed to confine these struggles to the framework of S1 by appropriating economic power through capitalist logic. This creates the same distance to the Regime as the outsourcing of daily administrative policy to the elected institutions analysed in chapter five. While most of the discontent is directed at factional parliamentary struggles competing for influence and popular votes, the Regime managed to exempt itself from the anxiety generated by capitalist drive precisely by utilising it in its favour. As observed above, different political factions along with the office of the Supreme Leader interpret capitalistic intrusions in line with S1 in a way that provides them with political, economic and social leverages. Since the task of the Supreme Leader is to ensure the survival of the revolutionary regime, he changes alliances between different factions to ensure a balance of the socio-political order. While such mediation facilitates a plurality of views and approaches, it simultaneously encourages popular participation. All factions are nonetheless limited to the line of development envisaged by the Regime under S1 and the divine dimension of *objet a*. It appears that regardless of how factions or the office of the Supreme Leader interpret capitalism, they have fully succumbed to its logic that now ensures their survival and strength. In this sense, the current Rouhani's government pursues the strategy outlined above, with a bigger emphasis on foreign investment in light of the 2015 Nuclear agreement. Such arrangement opens up a contradictory field of inquiry, where a revolutionary, self-proclaimed anti-capitalist religious regime is embedded in the logic of global capitalism. How is the capitalist matrix conflated with the seemingly contradictory revolutionary order? Moreover, how do these two matrixes create a libidinal balance that ensures the reproduction of ideology in Iran?

7. Crisis capitalism

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of political economy in the Islamic Republic of Iran by following the theoretical approach surfaced in the previous chapters. The above empirical inquiry revealed an implicit integration of capitalist policies and doctrines within the Iranian economic system, which at first glance seems incompatible with the country's revolutionary trajectory. Simultaneously, this empirical exploration falls short in answering the questions of the peculiar amalgamation and sustainability of Iranian ideology with capitalist rationale posed at the beginning. To approach their peculiar fusion, I will utilise Lacanian psychoanalysis to analyse how their contradictions are mediated on the level of the unconscious. A shift of perspective to the libidinal dimension of ideology accessible to psychoanalytic inquiry enables me to approach the unique conflation of the capitalist dynamic with Iranian socio-political structures. Their amalgamation simultaneously reveals how the unconscious mechanisms constituting the ideological order in Iran, as addressed in chapter four, sustains its seemingly antagonistic balance with the capitalist mode of production and consumption.[260] I will therefore approach capitalist fantasy in Iran by conflating the empirical and ontological dimensions of analysis and build on the knowledge surfaced in previous chapters. The aim of this chapter is thus to discern how the capitalist matrix creates a sustainable libidinal balance with the ideological order in Iran.

"One can behold in capitalism a religion, that is to say, capitalism essentially serves to satisfy the same worries, anguish, and disquiet formerly answered by so-called religion" Benjamin (2005, 259) wrote in his famous fragment *Capitalism as Religion*. His observation seems to point to the unwitting alliance between capitalism and religion, rather than their supposedly antagonistic nature. Benjamin's consideration also reverberates the question on the ideological oscillation of Iranian political economy between religious fundamentalism and global capitalism posed in the introduction. My empirical introduction to Part III above points precisely to their amalgamation, while the following inquiry intervenes exactly in the point of their fusion. In regard to the seemingly mutually exclusive structures of global capitalism and religious

[260] For a theoretical explanation of Lacanian mechanisms constituting the ideological order, see Methodology chapter; chapter 4 for their particular role in the Iranian fantasy.

fundamentalism, Farhadpour and Mehrgan (2010, 132) wrote: "[the] opposition in Iran is faced with the unprecedented, hard task of fighting on two fronts: against religious fanaticism and the authoritarian factions in a semi-democratic government, as well as against Iran's integration into global capitalism (as a backward, raw material producing country)." In light of my empirical analysis above, their comment should be read alongside of Saeed Rahnema (2009, unpaginated): "The Ayatollahs on both sides are 'market-oriented capitalists,' so are the leaders of the Islamic Guard [IRGC], who run industries, control trade monopolies, and are major land developers."

A closer consideration reveals that those two battle fronts in Iran should not be read as mutually exclusive, but as an interdepended phenomenon. As with the perceived ideological oscillation of the Iranian social order between spiritual harmony and theocratic tyranny explored in the introduction to Part II, it seems that the clerical regime oscillates between superficially conflicting positions of global capitalism and religious fundamentalism. However, the seemingly antagonistic progressive and regressive options should not be read as opposing possibilities, but as an inseparable formation. Iran's exclusion from the regular global trade pushes the country to make economic deals on the black market, where it sells its resources cheaply and buys commodities at inflated prices.[261] If the logic of capital points to relentless commodification and valorisation in the name of profit, we could argue that Iran is then its perfect embodiment, as more capital is extracted from the country precisely on the backdrop of its ban from the established international trade. Iran is therefore not excluded from the global market on the basis of its political backwardness, but is on the contrary integrated in the global economy exactly as a backward, regressive country to be exploited. Religious fundamentalism, political instability, and social repression only consolidate Iran's subordinate position in the anonymous hierarchy of global capital. Immersed into the deregulated capitalist logic, Iran's economy seems to operate under a constant state of crisis. In other words, capitalism and a semi-totalitarian theocratic republicanism in Iran are the two sides of the same coin. The main question surfacing from this observation is how the libidinal balance between these seemingly antagonistic structures is achieved.

[261] The JCPOA nuclear agreement in 2015 has removed the UN approved international sanctions, but unilateral sanctions imposed by the US are still impeding Iran's ability to trade. See introduction to Part III.

To further explore this issue, I will build on the introduction to Part III and the knowledge emerged in the preceding chapters. Introduction to Part II and chapter five revealed how the Regime's sustainability model manages elite conflict through multiple institutional power centres. That is important to keep in mind when considering the organisation of Iranian political economy. In that sense, the capitalist drive, fully explored below, seems to integrate different political factions, economic power centres, and social groups through a variety of state institutions. The Regime seems to have created an arena of competing factions for political and economic influence, where it managed to distance itself from the administrative governing by confining the political struggles to the Master Signifier (S1) 'Islamic Revolution.'[262] Furthermore, the analysis of the libidinal sustainability of the ideological order in Iran in chapter six revealed that the dialectical overlap of *objet a* and S1 consolidates the fantasy structure by producing ideological enjoyment for the subject.[263] It is precisely the divine dimension of *objet a* that the competing factions try to interpret in their advantage under the meaning of S1. The key is to point to their overlap, which provides consistency to an object or policy with the meaning of fantasy and simultaneously lends legitimacy to the political project of the Islamic revolution. While the logic behind the acceptance of certain social, political, cultural, or economic policies rests on pragmatic reasons, their inclusion in the symbolic network is managed precisely through such an overlap. We should therefore take a closer look at how the object and meaning overlap in capitalist fantasy and ideology in Iran.

7.1. *Objet a* and the Master Signifier in capitalist ideology

As discussed in the Methodology chapter, the subject sustains the fantasy construction by following a particular object of desire. This fascinating object, the *objet a*, mediates between the positive objects in reality and the symbolic structure of the ideological edifice. As an object of fantasy, it plays an important socio-political role by being minimally embodied in empirical objects. In the ideological fantasy in Iran, it represents

[262] See Methodology chapter for a theoretical explanation of S1; chapter 4 for its emergence in Iran; chapter 5 for its political role.

[263] See Methodology chapter for a theoretical analysis of *objet a*; chapter 4 for its emergence in Iran; chapter 5 for its socio-political role; chapter 6 for its role in sustainability of Iranian fantasy. For a theoretical analysis of ideological enjoyment, see Methodology chapter; chapter 3 for its role in religious-national structure; chapter 6 for its role in the sustainability of fantasy in Iran.

the divine Shi'a dimension of the socio-symbolic order and simultaneously permeates political subjectivity. Its role is to fill the lack in the symbolic structure, which enables the subject to perceive the ideological edifice as consistent. That is the reason why the divine *objet a* must be attached to political or economic policies if they are to gain legitimacy, since they need to reflect the divine dimension of both the socio-symbolic order and the subject. It is crucial to think of the function of *objet a* as the element that plugs the socio-symbolic signification and simultaneously embodies its very inconsistency. It therefore at the same time enables and prevents the full identity of the subject, who is condemned to the mediation of this ambiguous inconsistency (Vighi 2012, 101; Žižek 2008b, 69, 178-180).

A closer look at the ambiguous role of *objet a* reveals a double fracture beneath its enchanting appearance. If *objet a* represents the ontological inconsistency of any socio-symbolic order, it simultaneously also produces an endless fantasmatic lure that is strengthening rather than undermining such order. The proper task of *objet a* therefore lies precisely in its ambiguous role between representing a potentially devastating inconsistency and the promise of harmonious stability. In this particular sense, capitalist rationality seems to have transformed the lack embodied in the object from an inaccessible and potentially subversive remainder of symbolisation, to an effective seal of the signifying operation. That is to say, *objet a* in capitalist rationality is increasingly filling the lack in the symbolic structure, rather than embodying its inconsistency.[264] The neutralisation of the subversive potential in *objet a* therefore lends further consistency to the ideological order by filling its gaps in the symbolic structure (Feldner and Vighi 2015, 69-70, 73). As revealed in chapter six, the ideological fantasy in Iran must equally eliminate the subversive potential of *objet a*, which as a consequence sustains the social order on the backdrop of an increasingly authoritarian Other.

The function of *objet a* in the capitalist drive and in the ideology in Iran seems to point to its similar socio-political role in both structures. It appears that *objet a* successfully conceals the gaps in the symbolic edifice of capitalism as well as in the fantasy in Iran,

[264] In the advent of scientific rationality of the University discourse that led to the ruse of capitalism, Lacan pointed to the critical historicisation of *objet a*. This is achieved by making its constitutive negativity in the form of entropic waste less and less available by valorising it *via* the commodity form. In this sense, the desire sliding from object to object in capitalist rationality should be conceived as a cruel master demanding more obedience to the superego injunction 'Enjoy!' (Feldner and Vighi 2015, 71, 78).

rather than simultaneously standing for a disturbing element with subversive potential. To fill the gaps in the Iranian symbolic construction, *objet a* oscillates between an array of objects embodying the divine Shi'a dimension of the Nation, which is reflected in social, political or economic aspects of Iranian social reality. Simultaneously, the neutralisation of its subversive potential allows the capitalist rationale to extract a certain surplus-value from these objects. This extraction is possible when the object-commodity identified by *objet a* is inscribed in the symbolic network through the meaning of S1 'Islamic Revolution.' In comparison, both *objet a* and S1 conceal the gap whose radical disavowal determines the fantasmatic formation of a meaningful world. However, despite both embodying a lack, they perform a different function. According to Žižek (2012b, 599), the key difference lies in their quilting role, where S1 indicates "the point at which the signifier falls into the signified," while "*objet a* is on the side of the signifier, it fills in the lack in/of the signifier." *Objet a* might therefore expose the subject's relation to lack in the symbolic structure more explicitly; however, it simultaneously also perpetually reproduces the fantasmatic lure that fills the very ontological lack it exposes.

If the task of *objet a* in the capitalist matrix is to bring forward new objects and simultaneously cloak their subversive potential, the crucial dialectical function of S1 is then to bind and materialise the overlap of subject and object. In other words, S1 quilts or sutures the subject's ontological incompleteness and enables the emergence of subjectivity as well as objectivity, which provides a coherent appearance of the ideological edifice (Feldner and Vighi 2015, 67). S1 therefore provides meaning to the object entering the fantasy frame, which inevitably serves the established relations of power. The dialectical overlap of S1 and *objet a* in Iranian fantasy immersed in capitalist drive seems to allow for valorisation and commodification of objects that fit the socio-symbolic structure of Iranian fantasy. This overlap then inscribes the objects into the Iranian symbolic structure, or conversely exclude them if the overlap fails. We can observe this dynamics in the examples of foreign companies entering the Iranian market. As discussed in the introduction to Part III, Coca-Cola, TAV Airports, Turkcell and other companies were pushed out of the Iranian market, because they represented an economic threat to the Iranian elites (see Maloney 2015, 213, 232-233; Pesaran 2011, 153-159). The way to prevent their market share was precisely by pointing to a short-circuit between S1 and *objet a*, namely the object's incompatibility with the meaning of

fantasy. In other words, when the elites close to the Regime protect their economic interests, they can point to the discrepancy between S1 and *objet a* for a certain company, commodity, or policy. The incompatibility of the object-commodity with the meaning of Iranian fantasy is interpreted as threatening to Iranian culture, national interests or security. On the contrary, when the economic prosperity of the domestic elite is assured or the pragmatic interests of the state met, a similar dialectical overlap is made to point to the consistency of a certain policy or commodity with the socio-symbolic order. The overlap of S1 and *objet a* therefore provides compatibility between the object-commodity and the meaning of the symbolic network in which the object is inscribed. This consistency produces a certain enjoyment for the political subjectivity in Iran. Since ideological enjoyment ties the subject to a socio-symbolic order, it can also help us reveal how it fused the ideological order in Iran with the global capitalist matrix.

7.2. Enjoyment: the overlap of lack and excess in Iran

As I have shown in chapter six, every form of power implements a certain mode of enjoyment in the political subjectivity from which it draws its efficiency. The same holds true for the power of capital, and, as we observed in the introduction to Part III, the Iranian anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist discourse does not directly translate into an alternative organisation of political economy. Furthermore, it also appears that such discourse does not obstruct the capitalist commodification of everyday life; on the contrary, it functions within capitalist rationality. How can a discourse of defiance serve the logic it is supposedly resisting? On the basis of the protest movements in 1968, Lacan pointed out that any resistance within the ruling capitalist ideology cannot provide an authentic subversion and is more likely to end up as a valorised degeneration (see Lacan 2006b, seminar on the 20th November 1968).[265] Can we not read the Iranian anti-capitalist resistance declared in the political arena in the same way? We should not overlook that the plurality of identities in liberal capitalism are fixed in the overall economic framework, whereby capital transcends territory and political positions as obstacles to unconstrained commodification. Iran simply found itself immersed in a

[265] Lacan warned that the form of the praised student protests in 1968 only addressed a new master, since the protests were already unwittingly exhibited in a shopping window. The very form of transgressions against the ruling system was already inscribed in the capitalist rationale of commodification and valorisation. “The regime is putting you on display. It says ‘look at them enjoying!’” (Lacan 2007, 208).

socio-economic matrix that can domesticate and integrate lack and excess by turning it into surplus-value. As revealed in the introductions to Part II and Part III, the Regime has carefully interpreted Islamic doctrines within capitalist dynamics and turned a blind eye in favour of capital accumulation.[266] The capitalist rationality perforating the ideological order in Iran must therefore conduce to the production of ideological enjoyment to keep such fusion sustainable.

Despite the fervent anti-capitalist discourse that characterised its beginnings, the Regime's attitude to socio-economic policy has largely been pragmatic in order to assure economic stability and, more to the point, to retain Authority.[267] The capitalist drive of the political economy in Iran favours capital accumulation, which produces paradoxical results in a country with strict observation of public rules. In this sense, Iran is rife with transgressive behaviours, where illegal parties in the deserts and alcohol sold at flower shops are public secrets, while capitalist excesses such as up to date Apple stores, expensive Western cars, an open display of forbidden satellite dishes, or the use of Western internet platforms are everywhere to be seen. Even the Supreme Leader covertly uses the forbidden Twitter to reach audience beyond Iranian borders by commenting on foreign policy. The side-effect of these paradoxes is a thriving parallel black economy, beneficial to capital turnover. These phenomena only confirm the idea that capitalist rationality can equally commodify transgressions to tame the subversive potential of *objet a*. We should therefore conceive the desire in its perpetual drifting from object to object in capitalist matrix as an unconscious master, who identifies more and more objects for the subject to consume. The master keeps the subjects subjugated through the ideological injunction 'Enjoy!,' which unwittingly forces the subject to increasingly consume the proliferated objects. By looking closely at these phenomena, we can observe how variety is not produced through institutional power, but by capitalism through markets inundated with commodities. In this regard, even the proliferation of the so-called Western freedoms and transgressions are valorised as niche markets in an attempt to extract the surplus-value they bring. The economic form

[266] See the introduction to Part III for debates and further readings on the organisation of political economy in the aftermath of the Revolution.

[267] Religious institutions do not prohibit desires, but, on the contrary, function as their very guarantee by controlling and channelling the excess of *jouissance*. Even the transgressions of desires that thrive within religious framework do not pose any real threats to its Authority. See Methodology chapter for further reading.

hijacks it to intensify the profit potential and, in the process, conflates the capitalist power dynamics with the dynamics of resistance (Massumi 2003, 224; Feldner and Vighi 2015, 78).

Subjects are therefore pushed to experience all kinds of transgressions, insofar as they are neutralised in advance and limited to the Authority of the Regime. What subjects in ideology overlook is how capitalism thrives on their excitement through consumerism and how this excitement is one of capital's profiteering patterns regardless of its content. From the point of view of capital in Iran, religious and national excess must be perceived as always available and at the same time restricted (see Feldner and Vighi 2015, 84-86; Vighi 2012, 28). The Iranian Regime seems to retain its hegemony precisely by keeping the capitalist matrix in place and uses religion to appease the rising anxiety of capitalist modernity. The fusion of religious and political structures in a national framework also opens up new niches for commodification by hijacking and valorising the surplus-enjoyment such peculiar structure produces. This enjoyment is produced and commodified due to the overlap of lack and excess observed in the above dialectical functions of *objet a* and S1. But how does the ideological order in Iran produce enjoyment on the backdrop of capitalist rationality?

To discern if the enjoyment in the capitalist fantasy and ideology in Iran is based on the same libidinal modality, we should look at how the overlapping dialectics of *objet a* and S1 produce enjoyment in both structures. I have shown in chapters five and six that their overlap provides the Iranian fantasy with stability by taming the subversive function of *objet a*, while it also solidifies the Authority of the Regime. A successful inscription of the object into the fantasy frame therefore provides a consistent experience of the social order and its meaning to the subject. We can extrapolate this logic to economic policies, commodities, or business deals mentioned in the introduction to Part III, which must minimally embody the divine dimension of *objet a* in order to fit the fantasy frame. If this dimension is portrayed as subversive, like in the Coca-Cola or airport operator TAV examples, it can fail to coincide with S1 and thus exclude the object-commodity from the symbolic network. Despite these decisions being made on pragmatic socio-economic grounds rather than dogmatic religious beliefs, the object-commodity in Iranian political economy must nonetheless minimally embody the divine dimension of *objet a*. This allows for a successful overlap with the meaning of the S1 'Islamic Revolution' that binds the object and subject of fantasy. This overlap is registered by

the unconscious agency of the social order, the big Other, which sustains the libidinal structure of fantasy.[268]

The dialectics of *objet a* and S1 play a specific social and political role in the global capitalist mode of production, not only in Iran. We can argue that the mode of capitalist drive tends to function by commodifying *objet a*, which now increasingly functions as S1, closing the signification loop of the capitalist ideological fantasy. This suggests that the enjoyment attached to the commodity paradoxically occupies the place of S1, while the positive object becomes its compulsive enjoyment (Feldner and Vighi 2015, 71). In this disposition, the function of the lack embodied in *objet a* translates in the superego injunction to enjoy *via* the object, an arrangement also found in the structure of perversion as articulated by Lacan.[269] It appears to be precisely this lack in the object from which capitalist ideology harvests its power and I will address its commodification in the segment on perversion below. A successful overlap of S1 and *objet a* in the capitalist matrix therefore tames the latter's subversive potential in a capitalist commodity and seems to simultaneously enable an extraction of surplus-value from the objects in Iranian fantasy.

Let us elucidate the above process more clearly in the framework of the capitalist fantasy in Iran. Once the divine dimension of *objet a* is recognised by the Other, the policy or commodity can be identified as consubstantial with the meaning of the socio-symbolic order (S1). The consistency of a certain commodity or policy with the meaning of ideology in Iran then produces enjoyment, which simultaneously lends legitimacy to the political authority of the Regime. Consuming a certain commodity, implementing or following a certain policy is therefore a way of displaying loyalty to the S1 'Islamic Revolution.' The enjoyment attached to the commodity or policy thus paradoxically functions through the meaning of S1, while the commodity itself becomes its compulsive enjoyment. In other words, the subject enjoys the Islamic revolution

[268] For the theoretical explanation of the Lacanian big Other, see Methodology chapter; chapter 4 for its emergence in Iranian fantasy; chapter 5 for its political role in Iran; chapter 6 for its role in libidinal sustainability of ideology in Iran.

[269] The pervert instrumentalises himself through the object perceived as missing in the Other. By strengthening the Other, by working for the Other's enjoyment, the latter provides the pervert with libidinal consistency, i.e. a sustainable identity. I will approach the capitalist matrix through perversion in the subchapter below. The function of perversion for the sustainability and reproduction of ideology in Iran was analysed in chapter 6.

through the commodity that was inscribed into the socio-symbolic order by the overlap of S1 and *objet a*. Conversely, this commodity itself starts to represent the enjoyment attached to the Islamic revolution, so the more one consumes the commodity or supports the policy, the more one displays its loyalty to the Islamic revolution. This process reveals how Iranian fantasy inscribes a certain object-commodity in the symbolic structure that benefits the capital turnover, as seen in the examples of transgressions or foreign businesses entering Iranian market. The way subjects relate to the object of fantasy also determines the libidinal modality of enjoyment sustaining the fantasy structure. As revealed in chapter six, Iranian ideology produces a form of conservative enjoyment by sustaining the libidinal network of fantasy through a perverse engagement that eliminates the potential inconsistencies surfaced by *objet a*. The capitalist matrix seems to equally base the enjoyment on perverse structures by commodifying the disruptive lack in *objet a*. However, this creates a potentially subversive enjoyment, as seen in the example of commodified transgressions. To reveal the potential libidinal consubstantiality of the two matrixes, I will analyse the modality of enjoyment in capitalism and juxtapose it with the enjoyment in ideology in Iran.

7.3. Capitalism as perversion

The above considerations have finally brought us to two crucial insights for further inquiry: first, *objet a* in both capitalist fantasy and ideology in Iran seems to successfully seal the ruptures in the socio-symbolic edifice; second, within capitalist rationality, *objet a* starts to occupy the position of S1, where the injunction to enjoy is coupled with the ever-changing object of desire.[270] These considerations show that the ideological stability of capitalist matrix as well as the one in Iran is achieved by a particular approach to the deadlock embodied in the object of fantasy. How does the subject mediate lack *qua* deadlock in the capitalist fantasy in Iran? The analysis of such mediation can reveal how the two matrixes establish a libidinal connection through the particular object of desire. We should therefore look at the way capitalist ideology relates to the object of fantasy and see if the libidinal strategy of dealing with its lack is

[270] These considerations also signal that Capital itself occupies the position of the Master in the subject's unconscious. This analysis can also be approached by analysing the four discourses described by Lacan particularly in Seminar XVI (2006b) and Seminar XVII (2007). See also Zupančič 2006.

consubstantial with its perverse disavowal in ideology in Iran.[271] I will analyse the subject's relation to the object in capitalist fantasy and juxtapose it with the relation in ideology in Iran. Such approach conversely also reveals the subject's libidinal investments sustaining the ideological order in Iran, which seems to be permeated with both religious and capitalist structures. How precisely does the capitalist ideology organise the subject's relation to the lack in the object of desire?

As Lacan pointed out in his references to Marx's critique of political economy in *Seminar XVII* (2007, 80-83), the capitalist discourse is a fundamentally perverse discourse because it relies on the accumulation of *jouissance*. A closer look also reveals that *jouissance* cannot be amassed precisely because it relies on lack. Since lack cannot be accumulated, the subjects in capitalism organise their relation to the lack in the object and ultimately to *jouissance* through perverse disavowal, which I will address shortly. Capitalist rationality thus seduces the subject into believing that he is enjoying the real *a*, the lack as accumulated *jouissance*, through the object-commodity.[272] This discourse is therefore perverse exactly because it functions under the pretence of producing lack in the guise of accumulated *jouissance*, while it merely produces its valorised imitation. A perverse libidinal matrix therefore enables capitalism to achieve its ultimate goal – the endless accumulation of surplus-value. In this sense, consumer society derives its meaning from a mode of production and consumption that gains its power by selling enjoyment that is ultimately empty. As Lacan (2007, 81) argued, what Marx really rejects in surplus-value is precisely the plundering of surplus-*jouissance*. Surplus-value in capitalist ideology is produced by the above described overlap between the objects and the meaning of fantasy. Their dialectics inscribe the object into the symbolic network, while the capitalist rationality valorises it.

Let us reiterate that the *objet a* under capitalist discourse identifies a variety of objects that start to function as objects of desire from which surplus-value can be extracted. The above analysis reveals that *objet a* manages to cover the ambiguity it represents, the lack embodied in a commodity, when it is successfully inscribed into the social order through S1. That is to say, *objet a* attaches itself to a certain object-commodity, which

[271] The analysis in chapter 6 shows that the lack in the symbolic edifice of the ideological fantasy in Iran is disavowed through perverse libidinal structures.

[272] This is also what Marx had in mind with his notion of 'commodity fetishism.' For its analysis, see Methodology chapter; Marx 1982, 164-165; Vighi 2012, 33-35; Lacan 2007; Žižek 2008a, chapter 3.

tricks the subject into believing he can attain the object of desire. The object still embodies the negativity of the Real, but the point of its articulation is drastically reduced by capitalist fantasy through commodification and valorisation. The reason behind capitalist persuasiveness is the subjects' belief that what they are really getting is what they perceive as lacking, i.e. what they really want. A desperate attempt to attain the object of desire under capitalism therefore leads the subject to purchase its embodied lack. In other words, since capitalism produces an endless stream of commodities according to desires that are structurally condemned to failure, what the subjects in capitalist ideology therefore really get is the lack of things. This process should be read alongside the capitalist discourse of production; it is able to produce more and more commodities available for purchase, because the subjects believe that they are actually getting what they want. Since the object fails to bring satisfaction to the subject, desire slides to another object available for purchase. As Alenka Zupančič (2006, 170) put it: "The revolution related to capitalism is none other than this: it found the means of making the waste count. Surplus value is nothing else but the waste or loss that counts, and the value of which is constantly being added to or included in the mass of capital."

How does the above critique resonate with the libidinal organisation of political economy in Iran? Let us not forget that the capitalist drive valorises all types of object-commodities inscribed into the symbolic network. Importantly, the objects of desire identified by *objet a* in the capitalist fantasy in Iran are equally merely substitutes for the divine dimension of the Nation subjects seek to attain. Capitalist ideology in Iranian framework therefore seeks to convince the subjects that the object of desire they are desperately searching for is permeated with the divine *objet a*, while in reality what they really get is exactly its embodied lack. This allows me to argue that the subject of ideology in Iran instrumentalises himself to fill the lack in the symbolic structure by consuming the objects that are supposed to plug the hole in the socio-symbolic signification. What the subject overlooks is that the failure of the object to bring satisfaction has been valorised by capitalist ideology. In other words, the Iranian subject attempts to fill the ontological lack of the symbolic edifice with the valorised object that would supposedly provide a consistent experience of social reality.

The anticipated paradox presenting itself at this point is that the subject seems to be well aware of the truth behind above dynamics, but finds reasons to suspend its symbolic

efficiency. The subject suspends this knowledge by establishing a fetishist distance towards it ('I know very well, but…' – the position of the pervert).[273] Can we not discern the same dynamics in the fetishist relation to money? The subject is well aware that money as such is a piece of paper with numbers on it but endows it with an aura of fetishist belief due to its structural role in capitalist society. The subject then deals with the lack in such object through disavowal, which points to a case of implicit perversion. The perverted subject believes himself to be omnipotent, but, in reality, fetishist disavowal enables an ideological distance that causes the subject to overlook the dynamics in which he is an instrument to the enjoyment of Capital. As Feldner and Vighi (2015, 78) put it, the subject as agent in the discourse of the Capitalist is unable to grasp the truth *qua* S1, the point where mastery reappears in the guise of injunction to enjoy.[274] The much neglected Lacanian discourse of the Capitalist (see Lacan 1978) reveals a perverse situation, where the self-alienated subject believing in his own omnipotence is in the place of the agent, in the command and production of knowledge. The subject is then duped into believing he can access the truth *qua* mastery, creating a discourse where the gaps opened by the intrusions of the Real are suspended. To produce ideological enjoyment, the lack embodied in the object is mediated and neutralised through disavowal. The same relation to the lack in the object has been revealed in the perverse structures of Iranian fantasy in chapter six, where it is equally suspended through fetishist disavowal.

The above dynamics have profound consequences for subjectivity immersed in the capitalist matrix. As a social mode of production, capitalism operates on the background of counting and exchanging loss for the purpose of producing more value by hijacking human unconscious. While forcing desire to morph into a blind dynamic of production and consumption, it simultaneously disregards its social consequences. Capitalism seems to serve only its own inherent logic of commodification and valorisation, which by itself erodes the symbolic authority of the social order. The more the subject enjoys its power, the emptier it becomes, since the true object-cause of desire *qua* lack keeps

[273] Mannoni's formula '*Je sais bien mais quand*-même … - *I know very well, but …'* has been addressed in the framework of fetishist disavowal in Methodology chapter. For further reading on fetishism and pervert's disavowal, see Freud 1965; Lacan 2007; Mannoni 1969; Žižek 2008a, chapter 3; for the political and libidinal role of fetish in ideology in Iran, see chapters 5 and 6.

[274] For further readings, see Feldner and Vighi 2015; Lacan 2007; 2006b; 1978; Zupančič 2006.

eluding him. The capitalist genius lies precisely in the neutralisation of this split through fetishist disavowal, which provides the unwitting subject with the illusory access to knowledge (Feldner and Vighi 2015, 79-81).[275] Despite being aware of the truth, the fetishist suspension enables the perverse subjects to believe they are really attaining the accumulated *jouissance* through the object of desire, which perpetuates the capitalist matrix.

In light of the above, chapter six has shown that the prevailing libidinal modality sustaining ideology in Iran is also structured around perversion. That brings us to the central point of this inquiry: it appears that the way subjects disavow the lack in the dominant hegemonic order in Iran is consubstantial with the disavowal of lack in capitalist fantasy. That is to say, the unconscious libidinal structure supporting the ideology in Iran and the capitalist fantasy have the same libidinal strategy of dealing with its inherent impossibility. The libidinal relation of the subject to the lack in the object in capitalist ideology seems to be consubstantial with the relation to the lack in the object in ideology in Iran.[276] Importantly, in both cases, this relation points us to the logic of the perverse disavowal as a way to solve the deadlock of lack. The Iranian subject thus finds himself in a paradoxical position, where the very capitalist rationality the domestic ideological discourse claims to fight against coalesces with ideological fantasy in Iran on the level of the unconscious. We can therefore read both religion in its perverse political return and capitalism as two faces of modernity, where lack is disguised as plenitude.

7.4. The libidinal balance of religio-capitalist fantasy

The above analysis reveals how the capitalist drive commodifies and valorises a variety of categories and objects through commodity fetishism. It simultaneously elucidates the way ideology in Iran inscribes commodities or policies into the symbolic network of meaning through the dialectical overlap of *objet a* and S1. As observed in the examples of foreign companies entering the Iranian market, this overlap can also fail and be used as a political strategy of the domestic elite to protect their economic interests. Most

[275] This short-circuit is exactly why Lacan claimed that capitalism is "[w]ildly clever but headed for a blowout" (1978, 11-12). Inserting into the desiring subject the illusion of autonomy *via* S1 while pursuing relentless valorisation creates a discourse that ultimately valorises human category itself and is in danger of imploding.

[276] See analysis developed in chapter 6.

importantly, the libidinal structure of the Iranian fantasy as well as the capitalist matrix both depend on perversion to disavow their inherent lack and maintain the consistency of the socio-symbolic order. The same libidinal strategy of dealing with the deadlock of lack also points to the same libidinal modality of enjoyment sustaining the socio-symbolic structure.

The ideological enjoyment sustaining the religio-capitalist fantasy in Iran points at the libidinal compatibility of religious populism and global capitalism, rather than their mutual exclusion. For Iranian and capitalist matrixes to be complementary, they must be fused together on the background of enjoyment as the ultimate support of any ideology. How precisely is such fusion achieved? As shown on the examples of companies and policies above, the enjoyment in the capitalist fantasy in Iran is produced when the divine dimension of the Nation embodied in *objet a* overlaps with the S1 'Islamic Revolution.' That inscribes a certain object-commodity into the socio-symbolic order and establishes a particular libidinal balance. By consuming the object, be it a commodity or policy, the subject displays his devotion to the Revolution. In this sense, the whole religio-capitalist fantasy construction in Iran is maintained on the background of a successful mediation of its inherent antagonisms. As chapter six revealed, this mediation sustains a perverse order, where the subject instrumentalises himself in the place of the object missing in the Other. That is to say, the perverse subject in Iran supports the Other by instrumentalising himself through the divine Shi'a dimension of the Nation. Conversely, a strong Other provides identity and a consistent experience of the social order to the subject; at the same time, it provides legitimacy to the Regime, who claims to be the Other's materialisation. The above exploration shows that the capitalist fantasy is equally supported by a perverse libidinal strategy. The way the subject relates to the object of fantasy therefore reveals its basic psychic structure and with it the libidinal modality of enjoyment sustaining the capitalist ideological edifice in Iran. The ideological matrix of capitalism and the one in Iran are therefore fused into one by the underlying enjoyment they produce through perverse structures.

The ideological fantasy in Iran seems to have found a new way to mediate the inherent antagonisms of global capitalism. These two ideological constructions in fact support each other through the same libidinal strategy to solve the deadlock of lack. While the fantasy in Iran strives to eliminate the lack in the symbolic structure, the capitalist fantasy neutralises it through commodification and valorisation. That is to say, ideology

in Iran successfully neutralises the lack in the object, while capitalist rationality valorises it and points to new objects for commodification. Their fusion elucidates that the way capitalist rationality neutralises the lack in the object and identifies new objects of desire for consumption is consubstantial to the way Iranian political subjectivity neutralises the lack in the objects of fantasy. The compatibility of the capitalist matrix and the ideology in Iran seems to allow for the neutralisation of the inherent lack through both the capitalist object-commodity, as well as the repressive state apparatuses.[277] The potentially subversive lack embodied in the capitalist commodity in Iran is therefore neutralised in advance by being confined to the limits of the dominant Authority, as well as valorised by capitalist drive to benefit the capital turnover. What the capitalist drive in the framework of ideology in Iran seems to enable to the Iranian subject is to fill the lack in the Other also by consuming commodities or supporting policies. The commodification of a potentially subversive lack in the Iranian socio-symbolic structure is therefore beneficial to both the stability of ideological fantasy, as well as the elite reaping the seeds of profit. The subsequent relation to the object of desire and the production of ideological enjoyment is thus already a result of the capitalist ideology in Iran. The unconscious ideological mechanisms of the socio-symbolic structure in Iran revealed in chapter four thus simultaneously shape and fuse the capitalist matrix with the ideology in Iran. This fusion is then maintained unconsciously by different ideological practices that found a way to suspend and contextualise the raw intrusion of capitalism in the social order.

The above considerations again raise the issue of interpellation analysed in chapter five. How does a seemingly contradictory fusion of revolutionary politics and capitalist structures interpellate the Iranian subject into its socio-symbolic order? I adapted the experimental psychology of Jean-Léon Beavouis in subchapter 5.1. to categorise the libidinal modality of interpellation in Iran. As the analysis revealed, interpellation always imposes a certain injunction on the subject and totalises it by successfully concealing the social relations of domination. In the framework of ideological fantasy in Iran, the totalitarian mode of interpellation evokes a higher Cause or a supreme Good, which is larger than the subject's individual interest. Its ideological command would thus be: 'Obey and thus serve your divine Nation!' Introduction to Part II and chapter

[277] See analysis developed in chapter 6.

five both argue that Iranian political order is far from purely totalitarian by analysing how its political system oscillates between 'theo-democratic-totalitarian' features. The analysis of capitalist rationale now exposes us to a different type of ideological injunction discerned in the liberal mode of interpellation ('Enjoy!'), where the injunction is made by referencing the kernel of the subject's ideological inner nature. This allows me to argue that the fusion of totalitarian and liberal mode of interpellation materialised in the framework of the Iranian ideological fantasy dictates a new injunction in the form of 'Enjoy and thus serve your divine Nation!' An increasingly authoritarian Other in Iran therefore does not want the subject to purely obey, but also to enjoy, namely to enjoy obeying.

Chapter six has further revealed that the Iranian ideological fantasy is sustained by a dialectical relationship of perverse and neurotic structures that balance the system. While the predominant libidinal support for the ideological order in Iran is sustained through perversion, perversion alone can only maintain a fragile balance. A successful mediation with the neurotic structures sustains the libidinal balance in Iran that provides a consistent experience of social reality. In political terms, the perverse structures need the neurotic intervention to prevent the system from sliding into totalitarianism, where it faces self-destruction. The social order simultaneously finds itself in the capitalist drive for valorisation, which corrodes its symbolic authority. While capitalism undermines the political project of the Islamic revolution, their paradoxical fusion also offers the Regime a leverage of authority through capital. To maintain a functional systemic balance, the Regime must therefore appease the anxiety of neurotic structures brought about by capitalist modernity. How is this social anxiety mediated in Iran?

The mediation of social anxiety seems to be achieved precisely through capital, supported by the instrumentalisation of religion that reinforces the Regime's symbolic authority over the social order. As in many western liberal democracies, the neurotic political structures demand a safety net for the capitalist anxiety. In this sense, the numerous religious foundations for the 'disinherited and oppressed' mentioned in the introduction to Part III essentially play the role of the social state, keeping the neurotic appeased and balancing the system. We can read Ahmadinejad's policy of 'justice shares' distributed among the country's poor in the same way. By allocating the crumbs of oil wealth to specific groups through identity politics, Ahmadinejad managed to secure a wide constituency backing his populist agenda. An important underlying factor

through which both Ahmadinejad and various foundations justify and solidify their position is precisely through perverse utilisation of religious discourse. We can once again turn to Lacan, who has already warned that religion is offered as a symbolic safety net to appease the rising anxiety of modernity by drowning its symptoms in religious meaning (Lacan 2013, 64-66). Religion thus provides capitalism with substance by giving meaning to the social anxiety the latter necessarily produces. Despite their antagonistic appearance, religious and capitalist structures are therefore not mutually exclusive, but form an intricate libidinal structure supported through perversion.

The religio-capitalist ideological fantasy in Iran is therefore locked in a desperate struggle to maintain a fragile balance of the deteriorating symbolic authority caused by capitalist modernity. This anxiety is channelled through religious rituals and practices, while their content is perverted to suit specific state policies. Religion was therefore instrumentalised to occupy the position of politics, giving the socio-symbolic order its perverse characteristics.[278] As pointed out at the beginning, religious features of the socio-symbolic order in Iran should not be read as the opposing pole of the political economy, if we are to discern their function within capitalist rationality. As Marx argued (1981, 358): "The *true barrier* to capitalist production is *capital itself*. It is that capital and its self-valorisation appear as the starting and the finishing point, as the motive and purpose of production." The function of religion within capitalist drive should be read in the same way. Contrary to first impression, it appears to be precisely the religious dimension that opened new opportunities for commodification and valorisation under the capitalist drive, while simultaneously establishing a new libidinal balance for the social anxiety such fusion created. As observed above, the religio-national framework in Iran is thus not only being appropriated by the political elites of the Regime, but also valorised by capitalism as a market niche. It appears that the valorisation inscribed in the unconscious capitalist matrix goes hand in hand with different political factions, military institutions and the religious establishment, who utilise religious practices and rituals to their socio-economic advantage. The peculiar balance of the ideological order in Iran shows that a compulsive and valorised stance within the capitalist matrix seems more likely to announce new forms of authoritarian political power, whose ultimate role is to keep the capitalist matrix in place. As

[278] See chapters 4 and 5.

Benjamin (2005, 261) wrote, religion itself "did not encourage the emergence of capitalism, but rather changed itself into capitalism." We could thus say that the Iranian socio-political system found a new way to mediate and balance the anxiety of capitalistic modernity and is as such more a symptom of the future, rather than of the past.

8. Conclusion

This chapter aims to synthesise the main arguments and findings of the thesis in order to answer the research questions posed in the Introduction. The findings and assumptions across different chapters are integrated into new observations and juxtaposed with the existing literature to point out the contribution of this research to both the critique of ideology informed by theoretical psychoanalysis, as well as the empirical research on the Islamic Republic of Iran. This thesis represents a first attempt to analyse ideology in the Islamic Republic with a psychoanalytic approach. A new model for analysis has been developed in the Methodology chapter to focus the inquiry on the conditions of possibility enabling and sustaining the ideological balance in Iran. Such conflation has also opened up a new way to conduct research on social phenomena with the psychoanalytic change of perspective and represents a first attempt at literature on the Islamic Republic springing from the combined approach.

This research has embarked on the analysis of the Islamic Republic from an entirely unique point of view, set off by the change of perspective to the libidinal dimension of ideology. This dimension cannot be approached solely through empirical explorations, as the latter are unable to address neither the ideological form enabling social experience in the Islamic Republic nor the ideological balance sustaining this experience. The psychoanalytic critique of ideology emphasises its libidinal constitution by shifting the perspective beyond the empirical frame to the unconscious dimension of the ideological structure. The main obstacle encountered in the research is a lack of literature that would engage directly with the study of the libidinal balance of ideology in Iran. While there is a growing interest on both the theory of psychoanalytic critique of ideology and the studies of the various empirical aspects of the Islamic Republic, conflating the two has never been attempted. This research therefore aims to bridge the gap between them by introducing a new type of socio-political analysis of Iran. It has simultaneously showed how psychoanalysis as a method of inquiry can be utilised to

examine social and political power structures that differ from those of liberal democracy.[279]

A new model for analysis has been developed in the Methodology chapter with the analytic focus on the libidinal dimension of ideology in the Islamic Republic, while simultaneously answering the underlying question of its sustainability through political subjectivity. The central aim of this research has been to analyse the libidinal structure of the ideological order in Iran, which simultaneously revealed how the subjects are unconsciously embedded in it. This thesis has elucidated the subject's engagement in ideological rituals and explained the libidinal interconnections between ideology, institutions, and subjects. While this research has engaged with relevant social, political, cultural and historical aspects of the Islamic Republic, it does not attempt to add to the empirical originality of those studies. It also does not try to dispute the validity of specific empirical accounts of the historical development of Iran, but rather seeks to enrich those accounts from an ontological perspective. Nonetheless, it does at times contravene simplistic empirical conclusions, the most important of which I will address in the framework of research questions below. Empirical inquiries accompanying each part of the thesis serve to contextualise the most important aspects of the history of the Islamic Republic for the psychoanalytic intervention, which discerns how the unconscious ideological matrix in Iran sustains and transfers its grip through political subjectivity. However, this research has not engaged with clinical practices most commonly associated with psychoanalysis. It has developed its arguments on the basis of primary and secondary literature dealing with theoretical psychoanalysis developed by Jacques Lacan. By engaging with the analysis of ideological balance in the Islamic Republic, this inquiry falls in the relatively untapped, if not neglected, domain of social psychoanalysis.

This research oscillates between four different research questions, the combination of which discerns the ideological balance in the Islamic Republic. These questions permeate all of the three overlapping research domains explored in this thesis: the political subjectivity, the theologico-political structure of the state, and the political

[279] The majority of psychoanalytic interventions have been made in the framework of liberal democracy and its dynamics, such as those of Slavoj Žižek (2008b; 2014a; 2016), Alain Badiou (2007), Alenka Zupančič (2000; 2006), Ernesto Laclau (1996; 2014), Mladen Dolar (1993) and others.

economy. The battle to mediate the ideological contradictions rages in all of the three domains and this thesis has strived to answer the question of how these antagonisms are negotiated on an unconscious level. Their successful mediation enables Iranian subjects to experience social reality without its inherent contradictions.

The first research question concerns itself with the approach to ideology in order to analyse it on the libidinal level. The answer has been provided with the help of Žižek's (2012a, 9-18) disposition of ideology on three different levels (Doctrine, Belief, Ritual), which establishes a potent conceptual approach to ideology critique.[280] On the level of Doctrine, the arguments and ideas striving to convince the subjects of their truth have been introduced in the empirical analyses to each of the three parts; combined, they form a narrative level of ideology in Iran. The level of Belief analyses different rituals and practices that materialise the ideas of the Doctrine. These ideas are provided with meaning through the repetition of such practices, which creates unconscious beliefs in the ideological order as described by Pascal (Pascal 2006, 216; Žižek 2008b, 31-39). The Regime has embedded religious practices and rituals in the framework of the state, implicitly merging religious and national identity. Such an arrangement further solidifies the unconscious relations to the state's authority and legitimacy in all of the three research domains exploring subjectivity, the state, and the economy. It provides the Islamic Republic with its unique institutional outlook and the organisation of political economy, while also creating frictions between the declared doctrines and their realisation. We should note that the inconsistencies of the social order also reflect the inconsistencies of the political subjectivity. These are observed on the level of ideological Ritual, which reveals the libidinal structure of the ideological order and elucidates the libidinal economy of political subjectivity sustaining it. Ideological Ritual discerns how different inherent contradictions of the socio-symbolic order in Iran are mediated through subjectivity in order to sustain its libidinal ideological structure. The first research question exploring the approach to the study of ideology in Iran has therefore divided ideology on three different, but complementary, levels, which allow for a libidinal analysis.

Equipped with the tools to approach the libidinal dimension of ideology, the second question immerses into the inquiry of what keeps the meaning of ideological fantasy in

[280] See the Methodology chapter; Žižek 2012a.

Iran consistent. The search for the answer begins in the first part of the thesis that analyses how the religious framework provides the subject with identity through the dialectics of time and space (Benjamin 1992, 247-255; Žižek 2000, 111-112). As Ann Lambton observed (2004, 145-150), it is impossible to understand contemporary Iran without the understanding of the Shi'a political theology towards political authority, the social and political changes in 19th century Persia, and the intrusion of global powers in the country. Since Shi'a religion shapes its identity by distinguishing it from the Sunni Islam branch, it is important to understand the events around Karbala (680 AD), which led to the split within Islam. The ethos of Shi'a religion relies on this split for its religious, social and political discourse, as well as cultural practices, which also makes it an important source of national discourse (Momen 1985, 33; Mottahedeh 2008, 61). The domination of the Sunni over Shi'a branch established a resistance to Authority that was pushed into the unconscious through religious rituals and created a mechanism for its overthrow, which I have called the Karbala matrix.[281] The Karbala matrix is a mechanism for an unconscious substitution of signifiers invested in Authority. Its dialectics provide a perpetual resistance to Authority by interpreting specific socio-historic circumstances within the framework of the trauma at Karbala. That is to say, the meaning of a specific socio-historic content is applied to the Karbala eulogy through religious rituals, which establish parallels between the unjust Sunni authority responsible for Shi'a subjugation and the Authority in a given socio-historic context.[282] How this process functions in the unconscious symbolic network of signifiers has been explained with the Lacanian metonymic slippage of meaning in chapter four (Lacan 2006a, 421-423).

Shi'a Islam thus started to serve as a framework for the renegotiation of identity and as an empty container for the articulation of new meanings derived from the hegemonic struggles for power. It intervened in the subjective libidinal economy and with it in the

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[281] Shi'a doctrines consider any Authority as a mere substitution of the 12th Imam, which is as such unjust and should therefore be resisted. The unconscious relation to Authority is evoked *via* rituals and passion plays through which religious revolutionaries mobilised the masses in the 1979 revolution. However, the Karbala matrix now creates tensions for the Iranian regime, despite the Shi'a clergy itself occupying the place of Authority. See Introduction to Part I; chapter 3; Lambton 2004; Keddie 2004; Dabashi 2011.

[282] The stories of subjugated heroes served to both amplify the religious fervour of the Revolution, as well as provide martyrs for the war with Iraq by presenting the war as the battle of Karbala. See chapters 3 and 4.

politics of enjoyment. The signifier Islam acquires its temporal meaning through ideological struggles, where social antagonisms insist on a particular signified content. This content is then inscribed in the relation to the signifier and contributes to the legitimacy of the prevailing ideology (Zimeri 2008, 5-11). This process is perhaps clearest in the 1979 Islamic revolution analysed in chapter four. During the Revolution, the signifier Islam was utilised for the particular content of the hegemonic struggle against the Pahlavi monarchy through the tautological return to 'Islamic tradition.' This signifier, together with the rituals of the Karbala matrix calling for the substitution of Authority, offered an explosive socio-political tool to ayatollah Khomeini, who became the leader of the Revolution. Other struggles for power were either suppressed or reinterpreted within the Shi'a framework (see Khomeini 1981a, 8-11). The Revolution itself was interpreted through the signifier Islam, suturing the entire Nation into its framework and effectively nationalising Shi'ism. Religious identity was fused with national identity as explained in chapter three and formed an ideological order in the framework of the emerging state as described in chapter four. We can already spot the hypnotic function of the Master Signifier (S1) at work and chapter four has elucidated the way S1 was produced as 'Islamic Revolution,' which helped establish the Islamic Republic.[283] The Lacanian S1 represents an overarching meaning for the network of signifiers in an ideological order. The Iranian ideological field of meaning therefore acquires its consistency through S1 'Islamic Revolution,' totalising the meaning of the entire ideological order. Other signifiers acquire meaning by serving a certain socio-political structure *via* S1, therefore disturbing this signifier would disturb the meaning of the entire ideological fantasy.

The analysis of the underlying meaning of ideology in Iran bears several important consequences. Firstly, the Islamic Republic of Iran was born out of the revolutionary upheaval, which shaped its institutional, legal and economic framework *via* the S1 'Islamic revolution.' That means public policy, economic decisions, legal apparatus, or political agreements must overlap with S1, which provides the underlying meaning to the ideological order and to some extent the trajectory of the state. This points to

[283] The Master Signifier (S1) captures the underlying meaning of the socio-symbolic order and was produced in the Islamic revolution *via* the tautological return to 'its true Islamic identity.' See Methodology chapter for the explanation of S1; chapter 4 for its emergence in ideology in Iran; chapter 5 for its political function; chapter 6 for its libidinal role; chapter 7 for its function in political economy.

important implications for domestic policy makers and their international counterparts in applying or negotiating policy. Secondly, the same empty meaning of S1 allows the Regime to hold individuals accountable for 'anti-revolutionary' action or 'defying religious norms' to counter domestic opposition, which the Regime finds threatening to its ideological fantasy. On the other hand, S1 is also used as the justification for rewarding particular interest groups within the state's nomenclature. Thirdly, by fusing religious and national identity, the Regime is positioned in the unconscious as an embodiment of the religious dimension *via* the rituals it prescribed in the framework of the state. A revolt against the Regime is then simultaneously interpreted as a revolt against Islam and the Islamic self. Finally, these dynamics also point to the misguided empirical conclusions of several recognised authors on Iran. For example, Keddie (2004; 2006) and particularly Roy (2004) rightly argue that the roles of religious bodies of the state and particularly that of the Supreme Leader are increasingly political. This led them to advocate that politics is overtaking the obsolete religious dimension. What they tend to overlook is that S1 emerged *via* the tautological return to 'Islamic tradition' as a critique of modern society by offering itself as a place of resistance. The Iranian regime of course uses religious discourse to further its political goals, but this should not be read as political dimension utilising religious discourse. On the contrary, the rise of global demagogy *qua* religion is obviously intervening in the political domain and not *vice versa*, where the perverse utilisation of religion serves as a substitute for politics.

The third research question – From where does the ideological order in Iran derive its power? – is inextricably connected to the previous inquiry, while the answer provides the basis to address the final question on ideological balance. It also points to the analysis of power structures that have toppled the last Pahlavi monarchy and now dominate over the Islamic Republic. In order to answer the question on the libidinal level, I have utilised the Lacanian concepts developed in the Methodology chapter that have allowed me to approach the ideological matrix in Iran from the perspective of the unconscious. Chapter three has explored the fusion of national and religious identity *via* ideological enjoyment, which provides the last libidinal support of ideology, while chapter four has taken a closer look at how the fusion of religious and national enjoyment formed an ideological order in the framework of the Islamic Republic. The first thing to point out is that the Revolution announced ontological changes of the

ideological matrix, which shapes the social reality in Iran and keeps the ideological structure functional. The Revolution represented an opportunity to redefine the very concept of the Nation within a religious framework. The tautological return to its 'true tradition' was based on Islamic identity, perceived as under threat from the Pahlavi monarchy. It connected Shi'ism in the place of 'Persianisation,' wisely taken over from the Shah's ethno-nationalist ideology as a form of integrative force (Ansari 2013, 5-15; Roy 2004, 653). When the Revolution was safely embedded in the framework of the religious establishment, a new desire for the divine Shi'a Nation triggered a new ideological fantasy that replaced the fantasy of the Pahlavi monarchy.[284]

Crucially, chapter four has shown that the Islamic revolution did not merely signal a shift of power from one ruling class to another. On the contrary, it restructured the fundamental conditions sustaining society, politics, the economy, and the legal system of the new state, often with ambiguous and confusing outcomes. These ontological shifts, explained through the Lacanian reading of Badiou's theory of the Event, enabled the re-articulation of the socio-symbolic order through the emergence of a new S1 revealed above (Badiou 2012a, 362-364; Vighi and Feldner 2007, 169-171, 177-178; Zupančič 2000, 234-238). The symbolic network of signifiers providing the meaning to the ideological order was totalised by a new S1, which glued the subject to the enjoyment of the emerging social order. The new S1 did not only displace the ideological order of the Pahlavi monarchy, but changed its structural principles, i.e. the acceptance of the terms of the big Other, which fundamentally changed the entire social order.[285] The big Other as a symbolic field of meaning provides a consistent experience of the socio-symbolic order to the subject. The subject conversely supports the new order *via* the ideological enjoyment provided by a stable Other. The Other's libidinal consistency is therefore sustained by the subject's investment in it, insofar as the Other provides a solid, consistent experience of meaning to the subject (Žižek 2001, 109-110; 2008d, 151-155). The more the Other appears consistent, the more powerful is the ideological enjoyment tying the subject to the social order.

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[284] For the theory of desire, see Methodology chapter; for its function in ideology in Iran, see chapter 4.

[285] The big Other represents the unconscious dimension of the social order that guarantees the consistency of social experience. It provides identity to the subject and mediates the relations between them by sustaining a network of signifiers that provide meaning to the ideological fantasy. See Methodology chapter for further reading; chapter 4 for its immergence in the Islamic Republic; chapter 5 for its political function; chapter 6 for its libidinal function.

The ideological order in Iran therefore derives its power from the unconscious ideological enjoyment the subject experiences through the seemingly unique and stable social order. How is such unconscious enjoyment produced? Every social or national construction asserts its perceived uniqueness through the supposedly naturalised features of that nation, which the ideological structure in the Islamic Republic identifies in the religious framework. When the Iranian subject is interpellated by the Other into the socio-symbolic order, these unique features serve as a basis for identification among its subjects.[286] They are condensed in the unconscious psychic apparatus in a certain object of enjoyment, the *objet petit a*, around which all ideologies are structured.[287] *Objet a* plays an important socio-political role by filling the gaps in the ideological structure in order to provide it with consistency. As chapter five has revealed, the Regime tries to address the subject *via* the Other particularly through the office of the Supreme Leader by pointing to the object's divine dimension as unique to the Iranian nation. The specific institutional disposition and the double function of the Supreme Leader points the subject to a Cause for interpellation, further reinforced by the Regime's assertion that it has an answer to the Other's burdening question.[288] The claim to be the Other's earthly materialisation solidifies the consistency of the social order promoted by the Regime. A dialectical overlap of the divine *objet a* and the underlying meaning of fantasy *via* S1 is registered in the symbolic network of signifiers, which produces enjoyment upon the coherent socio-symbolic order. It was precisely the *objet a* Khomeini managed to point out to the revolutionary subject, which allowed him to collapse Shi'a theology with the notion of the ancient Iranian nation and insist on the Islamic government (Khomeini 1981, 8, 10; Vighi 2012, 101-102; Žižek 2008a, 10, 105, 276; 2008d, 148). *Objet a* therefore represents the kernel of the unconscious enjoyment around which ideology in Iran is structured and forms relations between the subjects *via* the Other. The way subjects relate to the lack in the object of desire defines

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[286] The subject's unconscious interpellation into the Iranian ideological order is analysed in subchapters 5.1. and 6.2.

[287] *Objet a* embodies the disturbing leftovers from the process of symbolisation, which point to its double role: it is an object that fills the gaps in the socio-symbolic order, while it is simultaneously also the impossible object of desire, which disturbs the ideological construction. See Methodology chapter for a theoretical explanation; chapter 4 for its emergence in the Islamic Republic; chapter 5 for its political role; chapter 6 for its role in the sustainability of fantasy; chapter 7 for its role in political economy.

[288] For the analysis of the institutional dichotomy and its consequences in Iran, see subchapter 5.3.2; for the analysis of the double political and religious function of the Supreme Leader, see subchapter 5.4.

the modality of ideological enjoyment sustaining the entire fantasy, which is at the heart of the next research question.

What consequences can we extract from the analysis of ideological enjoyment? The way ideological enjoyment unconsciously ties the subject to the socio-symbolic order is immensely important for any socio-political formation. Let us not forget that every power implements a mode of enjoyment into political subjectivity, which establishes a particular subject. The Iranian Regime draws its efficiency from the production of ideological enjoyment, which serves as a social link between the subjects of ideology. As chapter five has further elucidated, the unique features surrounding the ideological enjoyment of the social order in Iran are materialised in the framework of the state and presented through its unique political arrangement.[289] The political dichotomy of clerical and republican institutions is promoted as one of the Nation's unique features, functioning as a catalyst of their progress. The libidinal connection to the tautological tradition therefore represents the framework within which progress itself takes place in their eyes. In this sense, the dichotomy of the political system, responsible for the Western labelling of Iran as 'fundamental' or 'ideological,' is a direct result of the Revolution and simultaneously its biggest legacy. The Regime appears stable because it represents itself as the materialisation of the divine will and is positioned as the mediator between the Other and the subjects. The political system is represented as the materialisation of the Nation's divine dimension and provides continuity to the Regime, who equates it with its own survival. These unconscious libidinal attachments can rally Iranians of all political leanings against a perceived external threat to their ideological enjoyment. The politics of regime change pursued by the US and regional rivals for hegemony are therefore more likely to unite Iranians despite their disagreement with the Regime over the management of the state. The functioning of the unconscious ideological matrix can thus shed light on how ideology operates in Iran, which can help devise more effective and efficient policy.

The final research question touches the peculiar vitality of the ideological matrix above: how is the ideological balance in the revolutionary state and its political economy achieved? I will formulate the answer in two parts, first by discerning the libidinal

[289] See the introduction to Part II for a description of the Iranian political system; subchapters 5.3. and 5.4. for the analysis of the political dichotomy; chapter 6 for the libidinal analysis of its sustainability.

economy of the subjects immersed in the ideological order, and, secondly, by analysing how that structure coincides with the structure of political economy. For the first part, I have interrogated the subject's libidinal response to the interpellation into a split ideological order with totalitarian features in chapter five. Chapter six has further revealed how the subject is interpellated by the Other *via* an object of desire, the *objet petit a*, and how the subject's relation to that object determines his basic psychic structure. I have analysed how the neurotic and perverse structures respond to the inconsistency of the Other, which depends on their relation to the lack embodied in the object of desire.[290] The neurotic constantly doubts the object of fantasy as the kernel of his identity and resists the dominant form of symbolic identification tying him to the ideological enjoyment. The pervert, on the other hand, instrumentalises himself in the position of the object that would fill the lack in the Other and conversely strengthens the signifiers constituting his identity. In other words, the neurotic represses the knowledge of the Other's inconsistency, while the pervert disavows it by filling the Other through the object in a desperate attempt to make it consistent. Inevitably, both neurotic repression and perverse disavowal are ways to sustain the Other, who provides libidinal consistency to the subject sustaining the ideological order (Lacan 1997, 174; 1994, 185; 2006a, 432, 653; 2014, 46, 49; Žižek 2008a, 44-45; 2008d, 101, 234).

Different ways of dealing with lack has crucial consequences in terms of the unconscious relation to Authority for both types of subjectivity. The neurotic's basic libidinal notion is that the authority of the Other, the social order sustained by desire for the Shi'a Nation, is not legitimate and the Other is profiteering from his sacrifice (Žižek 2008a, 44-45). We can recognise the neurotic structure of the unconscious Karbala matrix constantly doubting the legitimacy of Authority. The Karbala matrix provides a mechanism for the substitution of Authority, despite the Shi'a establishment now occupying its place. The neurotic's position can be discerned particularly in relation to the Regime's appropriation of the Other and the manipulation of *objet a* to realise the political project of the Islamic revolution. The Regime positioned itself between the subject and the Other by claiming to be the latter's representation, as well as having the knowledge to materialise the divine dimension of the Nation. On the other hand, a weak

[290] See chapter 6 for an exploration of neurosis and perversion, the way these psychic structures relate to the inconsistency of the Other, and how their dialectics sustain the libidinal balance of the ideological order in Iran.

Other cannot provide strong enough signifiers to keep the identity of the pervert consistent. Lacan described the pervert's relation to Authority in his famous text *Kant avec Sade* (2006a), where the pervert enforces the legitimacy and authority of the Other, because the Other provides him with libidinal consistency, with a stable identity. To sustain it, the pervert becomes the executioner of the Other's will, of the Other's desire (Lacan 2006a, 652, 662). He therefore puts himself in the position of the object that would materialise the Other's desire for a divine Shi'a Nation promoted by the Regime in the framework of the state. The pervert positions himself as an executor of the Other's Law, as the mediator between the divine authority of the Other and the subjects of the Law (Žižek 2001, 138). The dominant libidinal power structure sustaining the ideological order in Iran therefore bears perverse characteristics.

The libidinal dimension of ideology in Iran seems to revolve around the dialectics between the neurotic and perverse structures that sustain the balance of the entire fantasy. The relation to the lack in the object of fantasy, to the divine dimension of the Nation, appears to be exposed by the neurotic's constant doubt. The latter is caught in the ambiguous interplay of *objet a* as both the object that fills the lack in the symbolic structure, as well as the one pointing to its inconsistency. The Regime senses the neurotic's threat of castration undermining the consistency of the Other, which threatens the pervert's identity in the position of Authority. The potentially subversive side of *objet a* threatening the pervert's consistency is tamed through the apparatuses and institutions of the state.[291] The Regime invites the Nation to eliminate the subversive neurotic elements threatening the consistency of their common ideological fantasy. This can be observed in the form of power paradoxes like the paramilitary *Basij* organisation or the judiciary's show trials, which accuse the Iranian other of counter-revolutionary or 'heretical' guilt through the ideological emptiness of S1. Once the threat exposing the lack in the Other is eliminated, the latter is again experienced as a solid and powerful

[291] A number of peculiar state apparatuses ultimately serve to sustain the ideological fantasy, such as particular armed branches like the *Quds* forces operating abroad, or special judicial branches like the *Islamic Revolutionary Court* and the *Special Clerical Court* dealing with domestic offences undermining the Islamic Republic. There are also a number of intelligence and security services operating in and outside the symbolic authority of the state such as the paramilitary *Basij* organisation, which serves as an example of the perverse state apparatuses. See the introduction to Part II for the analysis of the Iranian political system; chapter 5 for the analysis of the office of the Supreme Leader and the systemic dichotomy; chapter 6 for the analysis of the libidinal dialectics between neurotic and perverse structures sustaining the ideological order.

agency, which reinforces the signifiers constituting the symbolic network of meaning and produces enjoyment. However, perversion alone can only maintain a very feeble balance and needs the neurotic mediation to sustain the ideological structure in Iran. How does capitalism as a perverse socio-symbolic matrix fit in this picture?[292]

On the surface, it appears that the Iranian political economy with its anti-capitalist and anti-imperial rhetoric is organised outside the eroding capitalist framework. However, I have shown in chapter seven that the ideological oscillation between the seemingly mutually exclusive option of religious fundamentalism and global capitalism are in fact two sides of the same coin. Iran is integrated into the global capitalist matrix on the basis of its exclusion and serves the global capital as a country to be exploited, which paradoxically also empowers the domestic elite. Iran's embargo on the established global trade pushes it on the black market, where more capital can be extracted from the country.[293] Political and social repression with international instability only cement Iran's subordinate position in the anonymous hierarchy of global capital. However, the socio-symbolic order based on religious foundations seems to have acquired a new libidinal balance with the perverse capitalist matrix. The ideological fantasy in Iran as well as the capitalist rationality must tame the subversive potential of *objet a* to gain consistency, which is achieved through the discourse of perversion in both cases. While the ideological balance in the socio-symbolic matrix in Iran is achieved by eliminating the threat of castration pointing to its lack, the capitalist rationality neutralises the lack by commodifying it in an array of objects that function as objects of desire and fill the gaps in fantasy.[294] That is to say, *objet a* without its subversive potential brought forward by capitalist rationality can enter the ideological fantasy in Iran to fill the lack in its symbolic structure. In the Iranian capitalist rationality, *objet a* endows the object-commodity with the divine dimension of the Iranian fantasy, which allows for an

[292] For capitalism and perversion, see chapter 7; Feldner and Vighi 2015; Žižek 2014a and 2016; Lacan 2007; Zupančič 2006.

[293] Despite the lifting of international economic sanctions following the 2015 Nuclear agreement, Iran still experiences great difficulties in accessing and trading on the global market due to the unilateral US economic sanctions.

[294] The capitalist matrix commodifies the lack in *objet a* that paradoxically starts to occupy the position of S1, which closes the signification loop in capitalist rationality. See chapter 7 for further reading; Feldner and Vighi 2015.

overlap with the underlying meaning of fantasy *via* S1 'Islamic Revolution.'[295] A dialectical overlap of *objet a* and S1 produces enjoyment upon the consistent appearance of the ideological fantasy and simultaneously allows for valorisation and commodification of a variety of categories and objects through the capitalist rationality.

The Iranian subject thus finds itself in a contradictory position, where the eroding capitalist rationality coalesces with the religious framework that supposedly provides him with a consistent identity and libidinal stability. By participating in economic practices, consuming a certain commodity, implementing or following a certain policy therefore also displays the loyalty to the Islamic revolution (S1), which consolidates the Other providing identity to the subject. The enjoyment attached to commodity or policy thus paradoxically occupies the place of S1, while the commodity itself becomes its compulsive enjoyment. In other words, the subject enjoys the Islamic revolution through the object inscribed into the socio-symbolic order *via* the overlap of S1 and *objet a*. Conversely, this object itself starts to represent the enjoyment attached to the Islamic revolution, so the more one consumes the commodity or supports the policy, the more one displays his loyalty to the Islamic revolution.[296] The way subjectivity relates to the object of fantasy and disavows its lack seems to be consubstantial in both the capitalist matrix and the ideology in Iran, pointing to the same libidinal strategy of sustaining the Other.[297] The perverse modality of enjoyment produced in the ideological fantasy in Iran becomes consubstantial with the perverse modality of enjoyment

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[295] The economic decisions on foreign investment or companies entering Iran are of course made on pragmatic grounds. The key is to register them through the meaning of ideological fantasy with an overlap of *objet a* and S1 that points to the consubstantiality of fantasy with the objects entering it. This mechanism can also be used by the domestic economic players such as the military corporation IRGC or large religious foundations to protect their interests. They can argue for the incompatibility of *objet a* and S1, warning that certain companies or products would endanger the political project of the Islamic Republic, as it happened to Coca-Cola and Turkcell telecom group. Conversely, turning a blind eye in favour of capital accumulation produces a thriving black economy. See chapter 7 for the analysis of this process; Maloney 2015, 213, 232-233; Pesaran 2011, 153-159.

[296] We can observe a promotion of commodities through the divine dimension of the Nation for example in domestic car production, Islamic banking, voluntary religious tax, or by following specific policies. Conversely, the exposed lack of *objet a* in a certain policy or commodity can cause it to be banned, as happened to foreign companies trying to enter the Iranian market. This practise can also be observed before the inception of the Islamic Republic, for example in the successful 1891-1892 Tobacco protest, when the religious establishment declared the use of tobacco as un-Islamic to protest against British monopoly over its trade (Keddie 2006, 61-62).

[297] The way the subject relates to the object of fantasy and ultimately to ideological enjoyment is analysed in chapter 6; the way object relates to the capitalist matrix in the Iranian framework is analysed in chapter 7.

produced in the capitalist matrix. The political power in Iran therefore draws its efficiency from the production of enjoyment that is their mutual result.

What conclusions can we draw from the exploration of the libidinal structures in Iran? The above points to a new libidinal balance achieved through the fusion of the ideological fantasy in Iran and the capitalist matrix, which has revealed a libidinal consubstantiality of religion and capitalism. The deterioration of the symbolic authority and the social anxiety caused by capitalist modernity is drowned in religious meaning by instrumentalising religion to occupy the place of politics (Lacan 2013, 64-66). Its content is perverted to suit the specific socio-economic order, where the capitalist proliferation of objects seems to be inscribed in the relation of the Iranian political subjectivity towards the objects of desire. The fusion of capitalist matrix and ideology in Iran points to an intriguing overlap in the Other, where religion helps to contextualise the capitalist anxiety. The fusion of the two perverse structures appears solid on the surface, but maintains a very fragile libidinal balance. The whole goal of perversion is a desperate attempt to materialise the Other, which is normally presupposed only unconsciously. Perversion attempts to present the Other as a concrete and powerful agency, and moves from the efficiency of the virtual to the presumed efficiency of the 'really existing' authoritarian Other. Further dialectical mediation with the neurotic political structures is a way to deal with the lack of the socio-symbolic order in Iran and strengthen the Other to balance the system. The fusion of liberal capitalism and a totalitarian mode of enjoyment seems to have produced a new injunction in the form of 'Enjoy and thus serve your divine Nation!.' The increasingly authoritarian Other does not want the subject simply to obey, but also to enjoy, namely to enjoy obeying.[298]

The Other of the ideological structure in Iran has therefore revealed itself on three levels, where the response to the gradual weakening of the neurotic symbolic efficiency is supported with perversion. Although the system operates through a perverse instrumentalisation of religion, the Regime additionally supports the ideological order through the dialectics with the neurotic political structures, since perverse structures alone are too fragile. Perverse structures appear solid on the surface, but need the neurotic to balance the system and prevent it from sliding into totalitarianism, where it faces self-destruction. That on the other hand also represents a libidinal bribe for the

[298] For the analysis of the liberal and totalitarian modes of interpellation in Iran, see subchapter 5.1.

neurotic subject, who now gets some satisfaction by receiving crumbs of enjoyment *via* identity politics. However, since perversion is a feeble structure, the Other is becoming increasingly authoritarian in order to maintain the libidinal consistency of the pervert, who sustains the ideological fantasy.

Telling in this sense are the supressed mass protests and riots that erupted in the last days of December 2017.[299] The conservative perverse structures in power experienced the protests as a threat to the consistency of the ideological structure on the backdrop of the Nuclear agreement that has already shaken their identity, as discussed in chapter six. What started as a protest against the rise of prices for basic commodities quickly translated into the discontent with the Regime as a whole and can be read as the 'return of the repressed' social and political aspirations of the Green movement in 2009. The protests were exacerbated by the audacious new economic plan of Rouhani's government that revealed large sums of money directed to different religious foundations and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), while relying on austerity for ordinary citizens. Adding to the multi-layered social frustrations are the unfulfilled economic promises of the JCPOA nuclear agreement and the structural wall erected after the Revolution between the 'insiders' and the 'outsiders' that seems to be insurmountable for most Iranians. The lifting of sanctions with partial revitalisation of trade and investment has almost exclusively benefited the IRGC and the Supreme Leader's economic leverages due to the specific organisation of economy analysed in Part III of the thesis. The protests may have waned down, but the same unaltered structural conditions that generated them in the first place continue to fuel the ongoing discontent and pose a veritable threat to the Regime.

It seems that the political struggle in Iran is always complicated by a struggle over cultural policy, which remains key to social control. The causes for unrest in Iran are unsurprisingly structural as well as contingent and have been met with various degrees of state intervention. The authoritarian capitalist mixture has not alleviated the socio-economic misery of Iranian citizens, neither has it weaken the semi-totalitarian political dichotomy at the core of the Regime that monopolised economic and political power in

[299] As of mid-January 2018, the protests have waned down, leaving at least 22 people dead and about 3.700 arrested according to a parliament member Mahmoud Sadeghi *via* the state-run news agency ICANA. It should be added that Iran experiences far more small-scale demonstrations by workers or students than reported in the international media. See Fatollah-Nejad 2018.

its own hands. While the logic of the capital might bring greater choice in terms of consumption, this shift does not directly translate into a greater social and political liberalisation. That can be discerned in the state's prescribed reading of religion and its rituals strengthening the Other, along with the state's control over its citizens' public and private life, where the political and social messages reverberate between the lines. In that sense, external pressure to push the country in a more 'moderate' direction after the 2015 Nuclear agreement can be interpreted as foreign intervention to undermine the Islamic Republic and will be met with fierce resistance from the perverse structures in power. The Regime equates the continuity of the system with its own survival and such policy can as well push Iran in the opposite direction. Any development on the domestic front should be achieved from within, where the international community offers the usual game of carrots and sticks through foreign policy, but does not influence the internal mechanism of decision making.

To conclude on a wider point, the compulsive and valorised stance within the perverse capitalist matrix is more likely to announce new forms of totalitarian political power to achieve its goals. We can observe a rapid weakening of the efficiency of neurotic political structures in all corners of the world at least since the 2008 global financial meltdown. These structures are increasingly supported with a type of perversion that comes in the shape of global capitalism, as well as a return of religion as a substitute for politics. We can thus read both religion in its perverse political return and capitalism as two faces of modernity, where lack is disguised as plenitude. In the face of capitalist anxiety, religion in Iran ultimately presents the same safety net as liberal democracy does in the West. In that sense, Iran might better represent a symptom of the future, rather than of the past. Further research is therefore needed to elucidate the structure of social anxiety produced by capitalist rationality. The increasing intervention of perverse structures point to a more authoritarian world order, where this research illuminates one possible balance in the Iranian example. This research would benefit from further engagement into the wary libidinal balance between capitalism and religion to discern its consequences on the level of social reality and the pertaining political decisions. Since capitalism by default erodes the social order, is there a tipping point for religion's ability to mediate capitalist anxiety? What other possible structures are forming in the background to support the consistency of the social order and what kind of socio-

political order are they announcing? What can the world learn from the Iranian experience?

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