

## The Necessity of Semantic Evolution in Civilizational Process in Ayatollah Khamenei's View

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Research Article



### Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the necessity of semantic evolution in the civilizational process in Ayatollah Khamenei's view, with an emphasis on its Quranic origin. The research method is descriptive-analytical, and it discusses two levels of concepts. The first consists of concepts in the national level, such as 'insight', 'explanation jihad', 'insider and outsider', 'cultural NATO', 'resistance economy', and 'software movement'. The second consists of concepts in the transnational level, such as 'civilization', 'historical turning point', 'resistance', and 'new order'. The results showed that Ayatollah Khamenei, with his insistence on resistance against the system of global dominance, created, on the one hand, new genuine concepts and, on the other hand, focused on breaking and criticizing the western secular concepts. In this way, he opened a new different way for the revolutionary individuals and Iran after the Islamic revolution. In passing through the era full of riots and turbulences after the revolution and the crisis after Imam Khomeini's departure, the Iranian Islamic revolution, and even the whole world of resistance, owe much to intelligence, efforts and insistence of Ayatollah Khamenei in preventing

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the infiltration of eclectic meanings into the semantic and identity network of Islamic revolution. Now, it seems that in the continuation of this civilizational movement, and for providing the new semantic masses in the Islamic world, it is essential for the Islamic community (*ummah*) and the Muslim elites in the Islamic world to read the Quran repeatedly and extract new meanings from the Quran and Sunnah to be used in their civilizational process. They must also expand the operation of inquiry on the Quran and use it in interactions between civilizational needs and challenges of the Islamic world on the one hand, and religious texts and Islamic heritage on the other hand. No doubt, this is one of the basic steps in line with freedom from hegemonic meanings of capitalism and secularism of the western world.

**Keywords**

the Quran, civilization, meaning, Ayatollah Khamenei, Islamic Revolution of Iran.

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**Introduction (statement of problem)**

One of the important issues in creation of new meanings in the era of Iranian Islamic revolution is the dominance of conventional and secular meanings and concepts produced continuously in the modern world and pouring on the semantic system of the Islamic world since the last two decades. Meanwhile, one-sided translations from European languages into languages of Islamic world and continual transference of meanings from west into east and passivity of east and Muslims against density of western concepts have created many semantic messes in the Islamic world and have made, to some extent, the dialogue between Islamic civilization and western civilization difficult or even one-sided (imposition of strange meanings on the Muslims' mentality in Islamic societies).

In this situation, the Islamic revolution of Iran has created a revolution in the system of concepts and semantic network that could create new horizons on the part of human, existence, society, and politics, putting a way different from the secular system for the contemporary man. The designers and presenters of those newly founded concepts were the intellectual elites of revolution and especially the two leaders of the revolution. And the elites were influenced by Imam Khomeini's thought and statements in the era of establishment of revolution, and by Ayatollah Khamenei's statements in the era of stability of the revolution. Some of those revolutionary and civilizational meanings are fixed ones extant from our historical past, and some others are related to new conditions of time and place and new social, cultural and political needs, proposed in the post-revolution period in facing with internal conditions and –especially – external atmosphere as well as repeated inquiries from the Islamic sources.

Now, investigating Ayatollah Khamenei's scientific and practical way of life regarding cultural independence, and how he has simultaneously created meanings and broke (and criticized) meanings,

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opening new ways in the thought and civilization of Islamic world, can prepare the ground for our acquisition of cultural independence and religious genuineness in cultural issue. It also can make us more aware and more active in confronting the western culture and its semantic system.

### **Meaning and civilization**

The relationship between civilization and the meanings inside it must be sought in the basic rationality in any civilization. The basic rationality in a civilization is the collection of foundational beliefs related to existence, human beings, and the humane and social values that determine the generality of a social system and the monotheistic or non-monotheistic color, Islamic or non-Islamic taint, and the religious or secular nature of a civilization. These beliefs are not simple and rustic beliefs. Rather, they are complicated and labyrinthine regarding the relationship between the man and God, the man and nature, and the man and man, that all prepare the ground for formation of the social system and civilizational order. The meeting point of ‘civilization’ and ‘meanings’ must be defined and delineated in the same beliefs running in the individual and social life. Basically, the social movements are not formed without considering the meanings and concepts running in the public culture and rationality, and no identity is created in the level of human relations. Many times, one can say that ‘culture’ as the basic rationality is nothing except meaning (the theme and the inner sense) and the concepts institutionalized in the collective mentality of a society.<sup>1</sup> In other words, just as ‘meaning’ is a cultural affair, culture is also something related to meaning. The image a society has of a human being and his nature, the public mentality of a society about the life and

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1. In this regard, Hamid Parsania writes: “The deep and foundational meanings of any culture are as the main fortifications of that culture.” Parsani, H. (2012). *Jahānhāyi Ijtimā’ī*, p. 151.

its nature, and the society's beliefs about God, existence and death are the very things that form the underlined culture of a society and the social systems originated from those basic beliefs. It then specifies the identity of a great civilization on the global level. In this regard, sometimes a meaning is so deep and so influential that the mere imagination of it beings about intellectual and cultural changes. The more these concepts are rational, deep, humane and far-reaching, the more the ground will be prepared for formation of the human relationships in civilizational levels.

### **The civilizational consequences of 'descent of revealed meanings'**

With the advent of Islam and descent of revealed meanings in the Arabian Peninsula, the pillars of the ignorant Arab society collapsed and a new social world emerged. Meanwhile, what Islam changed was not people's language, as it did not change the population geography of the Arabian Peninsula. Rather, it preserved many social relations and arrangements. Islam changed what led to the death of the previous society and the birth of the new world. What Islam changed was the collection of central elements and foundational layers of the Arab ignorant society. These elements included the concepts that formed the ignorant Arab world, concepts such as polytheism, idol, tribe, sword, camel, lust and money. These concepts, while playing an important role in formation of the social system of the Peninsula, determined the social world and Arabs' worldview before Islam (Parsania, 2012, p. 148). Islam placed new semantic ideas in opposition to those meanings and delineated a different route for creation of the religious and monotheistic world. Regarding the semantic ideas brought by Islam in opposition to the concepts of ignorant Arab world, Hamid Parsania writes:

“The Islamic world was formed with a collection of meanings coming down from the heavens of the divine revelation to the vast chest of the last Prophet, running in the historical ground

therefrom. Allah, monotheism, piety, revelation, reason, knowledge, truth, justice, equity, faith, infidelity and hypocrisy are among the central concepts of that semantic system. These meanings that form a coherent and continuous collection are in direct confrontation with some of the concepts in the ignorant society, and are not satisfied except with their elimination, dealing with reconstruction and revival of some of those concepts. Polytheism, idol, oppression, usury as well as the actions, norms, symbols and systems formed around them are among the concepts and phenomena with which Islam struggles evidently. Tribe, clan, covenant, compact, lust, and anger are meanings and concepts whose link with other central meanings and concepts of the polytheism world is cut off. They are, then, reread under the central concepts of the Islamic world in the form of linking with blood relatives, cooperation in piety, chastity and bravery, jihad and martyrdom” (Parsania, 2012, pp. 149-150).

Ali Bayat, a professor in Tehran University, explains that process more precisely and in more details, delineating the semantic relationship of Islam with the meanings in the Arabia Peninsula in four forms of ‘composition of meanings’, ‘invalidating meanings’, ‘confirming the meanings’, and ‘modifying meanings’. He deals with the foundational Islamic principles and meanings with creation of each of which, some meanings and concepts from the polytheistic Arab society are changed. The principle of monotheism challenges the concepts of polytheism and infidelity. The principle of servitude to God challenges arrogance and perversity. Considering the inner and invisible dimensions of Islam challenges formalism (‘They know just an outward aspect of the life of the world.’ Rūm: 7). The principle and concept of eschatology criticizes worldliness (‘Everything is to perish except His Face.’ Qiṣaṣ: 88). The meanings of justice and fairness challenge the concepts of oppression and inequality. Morality and self-

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purification criticize passion and selfishness. Equality and parity confront inequality and discrimination. Finally, *ummah*-centrism based on values and beliefs is offered in opposition to racism and tribalism.<sup>1</sup>

In Bayat's view, "These new meanings, due to their conformation to human's innate nature, rapidly spread in geographical terms and, with all the obstacles and challenges originated from the plurality of cultural-civilizational forms, were accepted by many societies in the world in that age. And, during three centuries, the Islamic civilization found a historical form with the support from intellectual unity originated from the common Islamic meanings and principles. From this perspective, if the teachings were not based on the essence of human's unique nature, Islam would not find a tremendous geographical and historical expansion to unify the human's common cultural-civilizational heritages" (Parsania, 2012, pp. 149-150). This process of composing, invalidating, confirming and modifying the concepts continued throughout history of Islamic civilization. We may even say that the life and dynamism of Islamic civilization in the past was dependent on the life and dynamism of its newly emerged concepts and meanings in any era, and the same process had spread in the history of the Islamic civilization.

### **Islamic Revolution, the alteration of meanings**

The process of emergence and dissolution of meanings continued in the period of Islamic revolution. The Islamic revolution in Iran, from one perspective, was an alteration of meanings that could invalidate some of the conventional and secular concepts under Pahlavi dynasty and propose new concepts in the era of revolution and Islamic republic. In

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1. The answer presented by Ali Bayat (professor of The History of Islamic Civilization and Nations in Faculty of Theology, Tehran University) to the writer's question regarding the relationship between meaning and civilization in the history of Islam.

a conversation on 'The Second Step of Islamic Revolution' and its universal concepts, Mohsen Saleh says, "The resistance movements supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran offered another sample and showed that Islamic Revolution does not get its frameworks from national concepts; rather, it is the translation of the Islamic and humane concepts. And it has as a part of its agenda supporting all humans and all Muslims all over the world" (Saleh, 2020, pp. 92-93). These genuine and newly emergent meanings in the post-revolution period brought about a new security for Iran and even for Islam, and that was "ontological security" (along with physical security). That type of ontological security is nothing except 'security in meaning', 'independence in meaning', and 'originality in meaning' as opposed to 'eclecticism in meaning', 'dependence in meaning', and 'alienation in meaning'; and this security and originality in meaning makes the genuine Islamic identity of civilization possible.

In the regard, it seems that one of the most fundamental evolutions after the Islamic Revolution of Iran was an intelligent confrontation with conventional and secular concepts on the one hand (negative and critical view), and creation of religious and civilizational concepts in the paradigm of Islamic thought (positive and affirmative view). In other words, one of the manifestations of the revolution was not just a revolution in the political structure, but a revolution in the major social concepts and meanings that created a new discourse and a new paradigm. What this article focuses on is the very consideration of the newly founded civilizational concepts presented by Ayatollah Khamenei, which has had considerable effects both in Iran and even in the global level.

### **The semantic challenges of the Islamic revolution with the meanings of western civilization**

What has worried the western world about the Islamic revolution in Iran



is not merely Iran's ballistic missiles. Rather, it is the global and humane concepts of revolutionary Iranians that gradually produce new options in the human relations and narrow the way for modernity, capitalism and globalization of the American meanings, offering Islam as a decisive factor in formulation of the world and civilization. In other words, the main struggle between Iran and America is in presenting the system of concepts of social and political life in the contemporary world.

The meanings and concepts constructed in the period of establishment of the Islamic Republic by the architect of the Iranian revolution, i.e. Imam Khomeini, were effective in the formulation of the civilizational world of revolutionary Iranians. For instance, the concept of *Basāj* (meaning 'mobilization') in Imam Khomeini's literature created a new culture and a different institution in Iran, with a lasting effect both in the period of Sacred Defense and in the people's social and cultural life. As the concept of Jihad and its conformation with 'construction jihad', 'academic jihad', 'cultural jihad' and then jihad in social and civilizational arenas were among the very influential concepts that led to establishment of vital institutions in Islamic Republic of Iran. Another simple and, of course, very far-reaching meaning proposed by Imam Khomeini and much used in global arenas in regard with hegemony system and US government was the phrase 'Great Satan' (in Persina, '*shyṭān buzurg*'). This concept was institutionalized both in Islamic world and in the Western world in regard with the United States. Not only were Imam Khomeini's affirmative opinions influential among the scholars and thinkers in the post-revolution period, but also they were effective in the civilizational

formulation of Constitutional Law.<sup>1</sup>

After Imam Khomeini and after the period of establishment of revolution, and with the onset of Ayatollah Khamenei's leadership in Iran, the political project of revolution (i.e. the time of establishment of government) gradually moved towards the civilizational project. In that stage, civilization for Ayatollah Khamenei was not a luxurious motto, but a serious strategy in the major movement of Islamic Republic in 2021. In that new era, Imam Khomeini's literature – part of which focused on negating the moral dimensions of Western civilization (especially its political and moral dimensions) – continued in Ayatollah Khamenei's speeches. However, gradually, from 1991 (1991) after a decade from the victory of revolution, the affirmative literature of civilization began in his lectures and in 1993, this literature was

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1. What is acquired from the negotiations on Constitutional Law under article 11 is the multilevel nature of the elites in the Constitutional Law. Some are concerned about the creation of an Islamic nation and the most major Islamic regime on the global scale, some stress on creating unity among the Muslims inside and outside the country, and some others stress on creating unity among the Shiites and Sunnites inside Iran. In the negotiations, each of those concerns and opinions had proponents. Some stress on the first civilizational level. Some consider the issues in the level of Islamic world. And some are concerned about the religious issues inside Iran. The Parliament President in the time of the final investigation of the Constitutional Law stressed on the Islamic nature and the universal scope of the revolution. On the other hand, Martyr Beheshti, as one of the designers of the article 11 of the Constitutional Law offered a different and progressive explanation of that article. He interpreted that article with a more special and more civilizational language. From the explanations offered by Ayatollah Meshkini, it is obtained that his perception of that article was not in the civilizational level, but in the level of religious unity. Thus, in the process of those negotiations, in the eighteenth session, he emphasized that instead of the verse 'this is your nation', the verse 'Hold fast, all together, to Allah's cord, and do not be divided' (Āl 'Imrān: 103) be placed (the detailed report of the negotiation of the assembly for final investigation of the Constitutional Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1986, vol. 1, pp. 450-452). Therefore, what is obtained from that article is firstly an emphasis on 'nation' instead of 'civilization' or getting close to the meaning of 'civilization' in the Constitutional Law. Secondly, there is an emphasis on Islamic world instead of 'country' or 'state-nation in Iran'. Thirdly, it is the solidarity and unity on the scale of Islamic world and in various social, political, economic, and cultural arenas.

proposed clearly and vividly. In that period, Ayatollah Khamenei stressed on the dialogue of civilizations in his speech addressed to foreign audience<sup>1</sup> and with the domestic audience, he stressed in establishing civilization and process of constructing a civilization (from 2000/ 2000 on).

### **Ayatollah Khamenei's newly constructed civilizational concepts**

**New national concepts.** Numerous concepts were proposed under Ayatollah Khamenei, which were of great importance and some of which were on the national level, while some others were in the level of Islamic world and on line with formulation of new Islamic civilization. Some examples of those concepts emerged on the national level in Ayatollah Khamenei's view were as follows: **Islamic assistance** (2019/01/27) and a type of cultural assistance (different from social service) for 'cultural preservation', 'religious preservation', 'devotional preservation', and 'moral preservation' of socially hurt individuals. This very innovative look from Ayatollah Khamenei regarding 'cultural assistance' caused that subject to turn – later – into one of the major research and educational projects in Qom seminary schools and Office of Islamic Propagation and caused that center to educate seminary students in the Islamic regime for confronting the harms and socially hurt individuals (such as addicted people).<sup>2</sup>

Another subject proposed on the national level in Iran that could resolve – despite the opposition from some states and statesmen with Ayatollah Khamenei – some issues was the 'resistance economy'<sup>3</sup> for

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1. In 1999, in a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Iranian political representatives abroad, Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized the importance of dialogue with civilizations.

2. For example, see some of the courses on cultural assistance held by the team of cultural assistance in Qom seminary center (Office of Islamic Propagation).

3. See <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=1932>

Iran's confrontation with sanctions from United States and European countries. It practically opened, with the expansion of the concept of resistance into economic spheres, new ways in front of Iran in facing with economic crisis. 'Cultural invasion',<sup>1</sup> 'cultural NATO', and 'cultural raid'<sup>2</sup> are among other important concepts proposed by Ayatollah Khamenei in facing with the cultural issues and western cultural invasions against Iran and the young generation in Iran. Although some of the cultural officials of that time did not take this issue seriously, the revolutionary forces and cultural institutes (known, today, as 'fire at will forces') took it seriously. In facing with foundational questions and necessity of mobility in seminary centers in responding to the major social issues after the revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei dealt with the subject and concept of 'software movement'.<sup>3</sup> He attempted to incite fresh elite capacities for creating a new scientific wave (in the sphere of humanities) and, by preparing the ground for free thought, open the way for scientific innovations and resolving the complexities and issues.

Among other issues proposed on the national level and for solving domestic issues was 'religious democracy'<sup>4</sup> and paying attention to two religious-democratic and divine-human dimensions as well as legitimacy along with acceptability. Agitation (*fitna*) and insight (*baṣīrat*) (2020/01/10), and conforming it to complicated political issues in Iran and in confrontation with domestic agitators during the elections of 2009 as well as instrumental usage of democracy and freedom for democracy in Iran, and the dichotomy of 'insider/ outsider'<sup>5</sup> were

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1. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=1010>

2. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=2247>

3. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=1014>

4. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=2238>

5. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=1105>

among the very important concepts effective in adjusting the arrangements of Iranian society and, sometimes, leading to certain decisions in the arenas of policy-making and decision-making. Among other very important issues proposed by Ayatollah Khamenei on the national level was 'Islamic-Iranian model of progress.'<sup>1</sup> In 1390, he issued a decree for formation of the Center of Islamic-Iranian Model of Progress, and appointed the members of its supreme council. One of the new subjects and concepts Ayatollah Khamenei proposed in relation to JCPOA was 'heroic flexibility',<sup>2</sup> offered for peaceful confrontation or negotiation with the United States and Europe in regard with nuclear power. Recently, in facing with the compact flood of cyberspace and generation of doctrinal and political doubts for destroying hope in Iranian society, he proposed the idea of 'jihad of explanation' (*jihād tab'īn*)<sup>3</sup> as an 'immediate obligation', meaning that we must seek to confront rapidly and densely with the heavy wave of enemy's mental operation in the cyberspace. Another example of these very important subjects on the national level was 'cultural independence'<sup>4</sup> that he proposed along with and on a parallel level with political and economic independence. He said:

"I say today in the contemporary world, any movement, any action, any statement in line with the political independence of countries and nations, in line with the cultural independence of countries and nations, in line with economic independence and development of countries and nations, in line with unity, in line with the authority of Islamic community, in line with promotion of knowledge in Islamic world, in line with growth of the youths

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1. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=1001>

2. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=4952>

3. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=26000>

4. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=2716>

of the Islamic world is a righteous action and a good deed”  
(2019/11/15)<sup>1</sup>

**Transnational concepts.** Ayatollah Khamenei’s newly constructed concepts have been applied typically on a global level for the Islamic world and in line with formulation of modern civilization. Among them, we may refer to various and numerous subjects, each of which has been proposed on the scale of Islamic world and in line with formulation of Islamic civilization. One of these civilizational concepts, proposed in a negative approach to our civilizational rival (i.e. the western – and especially American – civilization), is the concept of ‘hegemony system’. In Ayatollah Khamenei’s view, in the hegemony system, the world is divided into two sections: dominant and dominated; and there is no third front in it (2019/11/27). In this regard, he stresses on the concepts of ‘arrogance’ (*istikbār*), ‘anti-arrogance’ and ‘resistance to arrogance’<sup>2</sup>, and says:

“Our nations, our youths, our scientists, our religious scholars and civil intellectuals, our politicians, parties and communities, must make up that non-honorable and shameful past. They must stand up and resist the bullying, interference and evildoings of the western powers. All what the Islamic Republic of Iran says, which has worried and angered the world of arrogance, is invitation to this resistance; resistance to the United States’ interference and evildoings and other transgressive powers, and taking the control of the future of the Islamic world, with an emphasis on Islamic teachings” (2021/07/19).

Among other important subjects proposed by him in a major global view is the concept of ‘historical turning point’<sup>3</sup> and, more recently,

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1. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=2716>

2. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=4053>

3. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=2605>

New World Order (2022/04/26). Today, we live in era of turbulence in the Islamic world, and realization of those goals requires us to be able to go through the era of turbulence. The political experts evaluate this situation as the point of turbulence, but Ayatollah Khamenei has a more fundamental discussion. He used the concept of 'historical turning point' instead of 'turbulence' for the first time in a meeting with the members of Assembly of Experts. The historical turning point is the very period of developmental transition. In one of his meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei refers to this fact and says:

“Today, the Islamic world is in a critical historical stage. What you see that the Saudi Dynasty is such, Yemen is such, Syria is such, the issues pertaining to the United States, the issues related to Zionism, what they do in the region, the decision they make, their pressure on the Islamic Republic, all are a collection of actions. They are pursuing a goal. Under such a condition, when the Islamic world is passing through a historical turning point, we have some obligations. Each of us has an obligation. We cannot ignore today's needs of the Islamic world. The needs of the Islamic Republic [of Iran] is among those needs as well, because the Islamic Republic is central actor in this great event. Yes, there are many actors. There are many activists in the Islamic world, but the Islamic Republic is a central actor. Certainly, if there was no Islamic Republic, if there was no great Imam Khomeini, there were no such events in the Islamic world, and the arrogant powers would pursue their goals without any obstacle, with no need for so many challenges.” (2017/07/15).

He proposed the same approach in the form of another discussion entitled 'the New International Order' after the war between Russia and Ukraine. He said:

“Today, the world is in the threshold of a new international order, which is forming after the era of the polar order of the world and

the theory of mono-polar world order. And in this era, the United States is increasingly weakened... the events of the recent war on Ukraine must be seen more deeply and in the framework of the formation of new world order following which, there will emerge probably complicated and difficult processes. In such new and complicated conditions, it is the duty of all countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, to have both hardware and software presence in this new order to fulfil the interests and security of the country and not to be marginalized” (2022/04/26).

Another important concept on which Ayatollah Khamenei has insisted for nearly three decades is the concept of ‘civilization’<sup>1</sup> and many conceptualizations in this regard. After the late Imam Khomeini, the concept of civilization continued in Ayatollah Khamenei’s speeches with a newer and perhaps more serious approach. However, from 1991 (1991) on, after a decade of the victory of [Islamic] revolution, the affirmative and positive literature of civilization, alongside the negative literature, became more prominent in Ayatollah Khamenei’s speeches in regard with the western civilization. After that, Huntington’s challenging theory of ‘clash of civilizations’ (in an article in 1996 (1375 SH)) circulated in the United States. Then, in 1996 (1377 SH), that theory was published in the form of a book. In Shahrivar 30, 1377 SH (September, 1998), Iranian president (Khatami), in a reaction to Huntington’s theory, offered the theory of ‘dialogue of civilization’ in the UN. Nevertheless, the civilizational discourse in the Iranian Leader’s literature, started since 1993, continued and Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized the idea of dialogue of civilizations in speeches addressed to foreign audience;<sup>2</sup>and in speeches addressed to domestic audience,

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1. For the subject of ‘new Islamic civilization-making’ in Ayatollah Khamenei’s speeches, see:  
<https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=2634>

2. In 1999, in a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Iranian political representatives abroad,  
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he stressed on establishment of the civilization and the process of constructing a civilization (from 2000/ 2000 on). What Ayatollah Khamenei have said, and sill says, about civilization is not for giving illusive hopes to the Iranian society and the Islamic world. Rather, it is for attracting attentions to the civilizational capacities and grounds in Iran on the one hand, and planning and programming for Iran's progressive future as a civilizational model in today's world on the other hand.

### **'Civilizational circuit' in contrast to 'Thermidor situation'**<sup>1</sup>

In Ayatollah Khamenei's view, the Islamic revolution, on the scale of its second forty years, not only has it been and is it in the Thermidor situation, but also it must enter another circuit – the circuit of 'civilization- making'. The concept of Thermidor was initially proposed by Clarence Crane Brinton in his book entitled *The Anatomy of Revolution* (1996). Thermidor means returning to the normative, cultural, civilizational and political formulations before the revolution. Brinton's idea was that great revolutions such as revolutions in England, France, America, and Russia returned their normative, cultural, civilizational, and political formulations to the time before the revolution. All what Ayatollah Khamenei discussed was that not only we are not and will be not on the Thermidor circuit, but also we will inevitably put in our agendum the conquest of new peaks and must endeavor for that day. In a historical stage, we could form securitization, stability, development, economic growth and reflection on social structure inside the country. In a historical era, we must be

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he stressed on the importance of dialogue with civilizations.

1. In regard with the revolutions of the world, the word "Thermidor" has come to mean a retreat from more radical goals and strategies during a revolution, especially when caused by a replacement of leading personalities.

able to extend this [situation] from the domestic milieu to the regional and international arenas.<sup>1</sup> In Ayatollah Khamenei's view, basically, "the concept of 'arrogance' necessitates that the Muslims and the believers as well as the [Islamic] regime and revolution confront with arrogance, not in expediential, transitional and tactical forms, but in a perpetual form. This is the essence of revolution, and until the revolution exists, this situation also exists" (1989/11/01).

Considering this point, we can pursue the continuation of revolutionary thought and literature in Ayatollah Khamenei's speeches and rightly understand why he continuously makes use of keywords with the theme of 'revolution' such as 'the revolutionary believer youth', 'revolutionary thought', 'remaining revolutionary', 'revolutionary thinking', 'revolutionary acting', 'being revolutionary', 'the cradle of revolution', 'removing revolution', 'revolutionary education', 'revolutionary work', 'dense experience of revolution', 'revolutionary forces', 'non-revolutionary trend', 'revolutionary identity', and 'revolutionary thought'. Thus, "If what occurred does not continue and is not deepened and extended, definitely, this revolution will not be successful." The concept of 'revolution' in Ayatollah Khamenei's literature and that of Imam Khomeini as well as the intellectual personages of revolution such as Martyr Motahhari is quite different from the literature common about revolution and, basically, the revolution of Iran is a unique one similar to the Prophet's Islamic revolution in early days of Islam. Thus, the Supreme Leader's anti-Thermidor answer is quite clear. Just as the birth of Islamic revolution became possible with the revolutionary Islam, the reproduction of Islamic revolution, in opposition to the trend of return of revolution,

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1. See: Ibrahim Muttaqi, *Zhi'upulitik Āshūb wa Mas'alayi Amniyyat dar Jahān Islām in Mas'alahāyi Tamaddunī Jahān Mu'āṣir Islām* in the process of publication in Research Center of Islamic Sciences and Culture.

becomes possible with emphasis on these concepts. "In Islamic revolution, the antidote for return of revolution has been placed inside this revolution itself". In this view, Ayatollah Khamenei makes from the challenge of return an opportunity for semantic expansion of the revolution. In the level of imamate, Imam Khomeini, with a revolutionary reasoning, reproduces and expands the revolutionary meanings and concepts, opens new horizons in the sphere of revolutionary thought, and creates new concepts. In the light of this conceptual opening and expansion, the revolutionary forces find new possibilities for activism and reproduce more perfectionist levels of the Islamic revolution.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Quranic origin of Ayatollah Khamenei's system of concepts**

Where do the national and transnational meanings, negative meanings (So one who disavows fake deities)<sup>2</sup> and positive meanings (and has faith in Allah)<sup>3</sup>, and the cultural and civilizational meanings in the late Imam's and Ayatollah Khamenei's literature come from? With a brief investigation in the works and speeches remained from Imam Khomeini and the Supreme Leader of revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, it is known that the main origin of their literature is the Holy Quran. Now, this article is not seeking to pursue the linguistic discussions and theories of meaning to see where the pre-lingual world in these meanings is and where to search for these meanings. This article is seeking to find the roots of statement of revolution in the history of the thought and performance of the Supreme Leader of Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei. In the history of thought, history of speeches, and history of

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1. See: Mojtaba Namkhah, Nuskhayi Rahabarī barāyi Jilowgīrī az Thermidor Inqilāb Islāmī dar Shabakayi Taḥlīlī Nukhbigān (KHAMENEI.IR).

2. The Quran, Baqara: 256

3. Ibid.

performance of the Authoritative Jurist (*Walī Faqīh*) during Ayatollah Khamenei's leadership, the Quran has served as a road map for the revolution, for passing through the social and political crises, for delineating the future of the revolution, and for the civilizational becoming of the revolution. And this is not his new approach, but his old approach in his book entitled *Ṭarḥ Kullī Andīshayi Islāmī dar Qurān* (The General Design of Islamic Thought in the Quran).<sup>1</sup>

That the Quran has had a central role among the civilizational elites of Islam has already attracted the attention of orientalists. In Marshal Hodgson's view, the special attention Muslims have paid to the verse 110 of Āl 'Imrān ("You are the best nation [ever] brought forth for mankind") motivated them in designing and constructing a successful society, in a way that they could present distinguished prime literary, artistic, scientific, political and cultural institutions and make them universal. In Hodgson's view, although Muslims achieved many successes, they underwent great failures as well; but this win/ lose play for Muslims did not disappoint them from realization of their Quranic life and did not cause them to give up efforts to achieve it. They made efforts for creating a divine society all the time and were hopeful to achieve it (Hodgson, 1974, vol. 1, p. 71).

This rule has been true also for Iran after the Islamic revolution and even for the Islamic world after the Islamic revolution of Iran. In this way, Quran has been one of the important sources in origination of new meanings in the Islamic revolution and in the civilizational movement of the resistance trend in the region under the leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei. In other words, Ayatollah Khamenei always reads the Quran amid the political and civilizational battlefield; he reads the Quran

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1. In that book, one can pursue classified verses on subjects including faith, monotheism, prophethood, wilāyat (authority), especially the discussion on 'links of Islamic nation'.

repeatedly and repeatedly, inquiring the Quran from social and civilizational viewpoints in the round trip between the Quran and the Sunnah from one hand and the Quran and the field of life and evolutions of time on the other hand. He infers, from the Quran, civilizational principles and concepts different from the western secular civilization. There has been no serious research on what has been, in detail, the Quranic evidence for political and revolutionary positions, civilizational mottos and social theories and ideas; however, some of these items can be referred to in this article:

### **The supportive verse on ‘possibility of reproducing the Islamic civilization’**

On the possibility of reproducing the Islamic civilization, Ayatollah Khamenei refers, firstly, to the period of the Prophet's calling to prophethood and says:

“The torch lit by the Holy Prophet illuminated a world in those days. It established [several] civilizations – not just one civilization – in those days. And today, it can do it [again]. In those days, the world had new things: knowledge, progress, Antioch, Rome, Greece, Iran, Hegmatane, and Persepolis. In those days, the world was not quite empty. But when that torch was lit up, when that Sun rose, all candles lost their light and it dominate all of them. *Bi'that* (calling to prophethood) is in this form of manifestation and dominance. This is the torch; this is the Sun; we must appreciate its value; we must liven *bi'that* inside us.” (1994/01/10).

He then continues as follows:

“*Bi'that* is perpetual. Islam's prescription coming down in *bi'that* is perpetual. This *bi'that* is a perpetual affair for the man; and this is the characteristic of the last of the prophets. That is, whenever the universe and the human's life are void of spirituality, these

very teachings that the Holy Quran speaks of can come at any time and fill the gaps” (1991/11/13; 1391, p. 56)

Then, he adduces the verse 55 of Surah Nūr<sup>1</sup> and emphasizes that the perfect realization of divine promise means victory of truth over falsehood and the reconstruction of the Quran’s community and the new Islamic civilization. Regarding that verse and the possibility of the new Islamic civilization, Ayatollah Khamenei explains that the sign of this unbreakable promise is, in the first and the most important step, the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran and the construction of the well-known Islamic regime that turned Iran into a strong headquarter for the thought of the Islamic governance and civilization (2008/09/17).

### **The supportive verse on “decline and downfall of the western civilization”**

Ayatollah Khamenei considers the erosion of the rival front, i.e. the western civilization, as one of the points of hope for us, and – for those who do not accept this idea and deny the decline of the western civilization – adduces the verse 109 of Surah Towba,<sup>2</sup> and says that the western world is today on the edge of the pit. “Of course, the evolutions and events in societies occur gradually. Even the western thinkers have felt this and speak of it. This is another point of hope for us”. (2019/03/01).

The interesting point is that, in the International Conference of the Scholars and Islamic Awakening, Ayatollah Khamenei refers to the

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1. “Allah has promised those of you who have faith and do righteous deeds that He will surely make them successors in the earth, just as He made those who were before them successors, and He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them, and that He will surely change their state to security after their fear, while they worship Me, not ascribing any partners to Me. Whoever is ungrateful after that, it is they who are the transgressors.”
  2. “Is he who founds his building on Godwariness and [the pursuit of Allah’s] pleasure better-off or he who founds his building on the brink of a collapsing bank which collapses with him into the fire of hell? Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot.”

verse 6 of Surah Fath,<sup>1</sup> and maintains that the Islamic civilization is quite possible and is an instance of good faith in God. He believes that considering that civilization as impossible among the Muslims is an instance of suspicion of God, and says:

“The Islamic community, with all diversity in the form of different nations and countries, must achieve the civilizational status favored by the Quran. The main and general features of this civilization are humans’ enjoyment of all material and spiritual capacities endowed by God in the nature and inside them for fulfilling their felicity and transcendence. The apparent array of that civilization can be and must be seen in the public government, in the laws inferred from the Quran, in legal reasoning and answering the new needs of the human beings, in avoiding petrification and reactionary thought as well as heresy and eclecticism, in creating welfare and public wealth, in establishing justice, in being free from the economy based on special privileges and usury and accumulation of wealth, in diffusing the humane morality, in defending the oppressed of the world, in efforts and works and innovations. The legal reasoning and scholarly view of various arenas, from the humanities to the official system of education, and from economy and banking to technological production, and from modern media to art and cinema, and to international relations and the like are all among the essential prerequisites of this civilization-making. The experience has shown that all these are possible tasks and are available for the capabilities of our societies. We must not look at this perspective with a hasty and cynical view. Pessimism to

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1. “That He may punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the polytheists, men and women, who entertain a bad opinion of Allah. For them shall be an adverse turn of fortune: Allah is wrathful with them and He has cursed them, and prepared hell for them and it is an evil destination.”

one's capabilities is disbelief in God's blessings. And ignoring divine assistances and the helps from the laws of creation leads to falling into the abyss of 'those who entertain a bad opinion of Allah'" (2013/02/09).

### **The supportive verse on "civilizational turn and Muslims' civilizational turn"**

By stating that, today, it is the Muslims' turn in the civilizational movement in the world, Ayatollah Khamenei refers to the verse 140 of Surah Āl 'Imrān,<sup>1</sup> and says:

"Today, the duty of the Islamic community is not just to hold celebration in memorial of the Prophet's birth or his *bi'that*. This is a very little thing they do compared to their duty. The Islamic world has the duty, today, to blow – like the Prophet and like Islam itself – a spirit in this world, create a new milieu, and open a new way. We call the phenomenon we are waiting for 'the new Islamic civilization'. It is, basically, different from what the [world] powers think and act about humankind. This does not mean conquering the lands. This does not mean transgressing the nations' rights. This does not mean imposing one's own culture on other nations. This means presenting the divine gift to [other] nations, so that the nations choose the right path with their own free will, their own choice and their own discernment. Once upon a time, the European people could use Muslims' knowledge and philosophy to found a civilization for themselves. The civilization they presented to the world granted beautiful manifestations of technology, speed and ease as well as tools of

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1. "If wounds afflict you, like wounds have already afflicted those people; and We make such vicissitudes rotate among mankind, so that Allah may ascertain those who have faith, and that He may take martyrs from among you, and Allah does not like the wrongdoers."



life to people. But, it did not provide humans' happiness; it did not establish justice. On the contrary, it beat the justice on its head, captivated some nations, made some nations poor, belittled some nations, and it suffered from contradictions within itself... today, it is our turn. Today, it is the turn of Islam. 'and We make such vicissitudes rotate among mankind' (Āl 'Imrān: 140). Today, it is Muslims' turn, who must found, with their efforts, the new Islamic civilization. Just as Europeans, once, made use of Muslims' knowledge, made use of Muslims' experience, made use of Muslims' philosophy, today, we also make use of world knowledge, but with an Islamic spirit and spirituality" (2015/10/08).

### **Conclusion**

For continuation of the revolution and for formulation of the civilizational identity of Islam, we must pursue the creation of meanings and breaking the meanings simultaneously. Accumulation of meanings in the dialectic between the need of the time and the Islamic thought is among the essentials of continuation of revolution, Islamic revolution, and independence in meaning and independence in culture and, even, independence in civilization. In this regard, the scientific way of life of the leaders of the Islamic revolution of Iran, i.e. Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei, shows their attention to this necessity and production of religious meanings and concepts amid the political, social and civilizational fields (in the theological-social approach) in the era after the revolution of Iran. By insistence and resistance against the system of global hegemony, Ayatollah Khamenei created genuine meanings on the one hand, and focused on breaking and criticizing the western secular meanings on the other hand; and in this way, he opened a different way for the revolutionary individuals and post-revolution Iran. Passing through the riotous era after the revolution and critical

periods after Imam Khomeini's departure in Iran, the Iranian revolution and, even, the resistance axis in the Islamic world owe to Ayatollah Khamenei's intelligence, efforts, and insistences in preventing the infiltration of eclectic meanings into the semantic and identity network of the Islamic revolution.

Now, it seems that in the continuation of this civilizational movement and for providing new semantic masses in the Islamic world, it is essential that the Islamic community and the Muslim elites in the Islamic world recite the Quran repeatedly and repeatedly. And in their round trip between the Quran and the Quran, and between the Quran and Sunnah, they must infer new meanings and use them in their civilizational process. It is also necessary to expand the operations of inquiring the Quran and apply them in the round trips between the civilizational needs and challenges of the Islamic world on the one hand, and the religious sources and Islamic heritage on the other hand. And in this dialectic, it is also necessary to extract new meanings from the Quran in line with solving the issues of the Islamic world and reopen new horizons in front of the contemporary Muslims. No doubt, this will be one of the basic steps in line with freedom from the hegemonic meanings of capitalism and secularism of the western world, and it will help us in constructing the Islamic-civilizational rationality and preserving the intellectual and cultural independence as well as a distinct identity in our civilizational becoming.

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