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Ahmad Moftizadeh and the Idea of the Islamic Government: A Discursive Tradition Analysis in the Field of Political Islam

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Abstract: This article explores the idea of political Islam as a discursive tradition within the context of Iranian Kurdistan. It challenges the prevailing essentialist and universalist approaches commonly used in the analysis of political Islam, advocating for a more adaptable and comprehensive interpretation. By conceptualizing political Islam as a discursive tradition, this study sheds light on the complex interconnections, configurations, and historical contingencies influencing Islamist discourses and movements. The paper argues that political Islam should be examined in relation to other phenomena and discourses, acknowledging its dynamic nature within specific temporal and spatial contexts. Focusing on an influential yet underexplored Islamist discursive tradition in Iranian Kurdistan during the 1970s and 1980s, the research acknowledges the hybrid nature of Islamist discourses, drawing from diverse traditions to fulfill particular objectives. In particular, it explores the perspectives of Ahmad Moftizadeh, a Sunni Kurdish Islamist and the founder of the Maktab Quran (MQ). This study investigates Moftizadeh's views on the Islamic government, positioning it within the framework of discursive tradition. It analyzes his core categories and inquiries within Islamist thought, notably emphasizing Moftizadeh's alignment of the Islamic government with the Islamic tradition of the Shura, highlighting its central role in the Islamist discursive tradition.

Keywords: political Islam; discursive tradition; Talal Asad; Islamism; the Islamic government; Ahmad Moftizadeh; Iranian Kurdistan; the Shura



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1. Introduction

Political Islamist thoughts are primarily constructed around specific categories and largely based on Islamic interpretative traditions existing in particular times and places, formulated by specific figures who strive to justify their ideas in relation to the sacred texts and traditions of Islam, as well as historical, social, and political conditions. These thoughts, mainly revolving around various relationships between Islam and the public sphere, politics, and generally the public and collective dimensions of Islam, have over time transformed into traditions within various discourses and ideologies. They have been reconstructed, reinterpreted, and revived multiple times in different periods based on specific historical-social conditions and the emergence of new interpretative systems. Around certain Islamic concepts, categories, or traditions, they undergo reconfiguration, taking on a fresh perspective and nature.

No one could have anticipated that the lectures of Ayatollah Khomeini in Najaf regarding Islamic government would later become the foundation for constructing an Islamist government in contemporary Iran. Similarly, the thoughts of a simple Egyptian teacher, a resident of an Arab village, or a former Iraqi prisoner in American prisons in Iraq would shape the most significant currents of contemporary Islamist thought and movements. The thoughts of these figures are also constructed on a kind of interpretative and referential regime specific to the imagined Islamic traditions and various perceptions

and interpretations of Islam, the earliest Islam, the Prophet, time, place, etc., on the one hand (identity), and a kind of perception of the Other(s) on the other hand (difference) (Euben and Zaman 2009). These dynamics themselves represent a vital aspect of contemporary Islam, especially in the process of Islamic societies confronting the modern world and the emergence of new issues and questions. They serve as the foundation for the formation of some of the most complex and diverse Islamist thoughts.

On this basis, political Islam and Islamist thoughts—the terms political Islam and Islamism used interchangeably in this article—are themselves part of the general Islamic tradition and, in relation to certain exigencies and issues generated for Muslim societies in the contemporary world, revolve and construct around specific concepts and categories such as Islamic government, Islamic law, Islamic ethics, Homo Islamicus, the Ummah, the leader, Islamic liberation, Islamic economy, and many other individual and collective phenomena that inherently carry the Islamic attribute. Furthermore, in competition with certain rival discourses within and outside the Islamic tradition, and based on a specific type of reference and argument emphasizing certain traditions within Islamic teachings and principles, they have been constructed by specific groups. This approach towards political Islam raises fundamental questions about its quiddity and nature, questioning whether it is truly Islamic or non-Islamic, modern or ancient, along with the same inquiries about its elements, components, traits, and diverse determinations and manifestations (Ayooob and Lussier 2020; Cesari 2018; March 2015).

The dominance of these questions, alongside some other fundamental discussions and predicaments, has become the origin of problematizing the understanding and interpretation of political Islam and Islamist thoughts, as well as delineating a comprehensive and overarching image regarding the concept of political Islam in relation to its internal and historical diversities. This paper claims that by considering political Islam as a discursive tradition, one can develop a more dynamic and refined approach to understanding and interpreting the intertwined discourses and internal focal points of Islamist thought beyond essentialist or constructivist approaches. Political Islam, as a discursive tradition, is neither a mere invention nor a repetitive tradition of Islamic teachings. Instead, it consists of configurations that are constructed by specific individuals and groups in the mutual and intertwined relationships between the perceived Islamic tradition and socio-historical conditions. Essentially, this comprehension can offer a meaningful depiction of the traits of Islamist thought and movements within their historical context, thereby presenting a comprehensive overview of the Islamist discursive tradition in the contemporary era.

In particular, this paper aims to examine one of the central concepts of political Islam, namely Islamic government, within the framework of a prominent Islamist discourse in Iranian Kurdistan. It seeks to analyze the thoughts of Ahmad Moftizadeh, a prominent figure in this region, relying on the idea of political Islam as a discursive tradition. By considering political Islam within the dynamics of Islamist discursive tradition, one can observe how this special discourse, overlooked in studies on contemporary intellectual history in Iran, especially in the context of political Islam, holds specific implications. Following the presentation of some theoretical discussions around the idea of political Islam as a discursive tradition and also some historical background about Ahmad Moftizadeh and his activities, the article will particularly focus on his speeches regarding the concept of the Islamic government and the centrality of the Shura in it. It will delineate how this concept is intricately woven into discursive relations with Islamic tradition on one side and, on the other side, the historical-political conditions of Iran, Kurdistan, and the world, shaping as a discourse in relation to rival discourses, emphasizing its central significance, and providing justification.

2. Political Islam as a Discursive Tradition

Since the inception of the term of political Islam in the 1940s (Jeffery 1942) and its peak utilization in the closing decades of the twentieth century, the terms of political Islam and Islamism have been inherently problematic and contentious in terms of their definition,

nature, and examples (Asad 2003; Hashemi 2021; Hurd 2008; Ismail 2003; Jong and Ali 2023; March 2015; Schwedler 2011; Tausch 2021, 2023; Varisco 2009). Scholars and thinkers, alongside policymakers, security and intelligence experts, and mainstream media, have employed these terms in examining and addressing specific realities. The scope of using these terms has been so extensive that many conceptualizations of this phenomenon exhibit numerous historical and conceptual contradictions and conflicts (Ayoob and Lussier 2020; Denoeux 2002; Volpi 2011).

In academic discourse, political Islam primarily refers to tendencies, movements, discourses, policies, practices, etc., advocating for a prominent position for Islam in the public sphere, especially in politics in the modern era. This influential position encompasses a wide range, from the establishment of Sharia law to the establishment of an Islamic government, state, and governance, the Caliphate, the reconstruction of Dar al-Islam or the early Islamic community, the ummah, and conferring a unique status to selected religious groups such as religious scholars or certain Islamist groups, interpreters, Islamic jurists, or even Islamic reformers. Establishing this distinct religious community or extensive reference to Islamic tradition to justify a particular lifestyle, religiosity, law, state, politics, economy, culture, beliefs, body, subjectivity, time, space, etc., with broad social, political, and general implications, serves various purposes. These agendas include the implementation of religious duties, the establishment of a model of an Islamic government, Islamic utopia or a progressive society, the struggle against tyranny, colonialism, imperialism, corrupt governments, domination, inequality, the West, discrimination, etc., which are pursued by various Islamists in different times and places (Arjomand 1995; Ayoob 2004; Ayoob and Lussier 2020; Ayubi 1991; Bayat 2013; Cesari 2018; Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Esposito 1991; Ghamari-Tabrizi 2008; Hirschkind 2013; Kepel 2002; Mandaville 2014; March 2015; Moaddel 2002; Roy 1994; Volpi 2011). Therefore, various and extensive manifestations of Islamist politics and Islamist ideologies have been found among Muslims in different societies in recent times. However, these diversities, which are essentially meaningful based on the specificity of these phenomena, are often neglected and disregarded in simplistic, reductionist, essentialist, or even biased analyses and categorizations, or in exclusionary perspectives (Burgat 2019; Hurd 2008; Jong and Ali 2023; Martin and Barzegar 2009; Schwedler 2011).

In a deeper confrontation, it can be asserted that this problematic situation primarily arises within the epistemological domain and revolves around certain theoretical disputes regarding the essence and quiddity of political Islam (Asad 2003; Cesari 2018; Jong and Ali 2023; March 2015; Martin and Barzegar 2009). In existing studies, political Islam is either conceptualized within foundationalist approaches based on essentialist and given categories such as secularism, modernity, and the notions of the state or nation, along with somewhat transcendent historical and predominantly theological interpretations of Islamic traditions and teachings, or, in non-foundationalist perspectives, its dependent existence is negated, reduced to secondary phenomena, and confined to socio-economic frameworks. In anti-foundationalist perspectives that fundamentally suspend the conceptualization of political Islam and Islamism, the intricate nature of this phenomenon is portrayed as an artificial and false construct. It is asserted that this characterization arises from specific colonial, imperial, and Islamophobic conditions, along with the repercussions of Christian, modern, imperial, or national epistemes imposed on Islam, and so forth (for more details in this regard, see Jong 2023a; Jong and Ali 2023).

In this field, a pivotal debate centers on the nature of political Islam, especially in scrutinizing diverse ideologies among Islamists, holding a significant position in the study of political Islam and its various manifestations, particularly the discourses of Islamists. This dispute is about the antiquity or novelty and the modernity of political Islam, considering both its essence and its referential/justificatory/reasoning frameworks (Al-Azmeh 2009; Esposito 1991, 1997; Ghamari-Tabrizi 2008; Göle 2017; Hirschkind 2013; Jong and Ali 2023; Lewis 1976; March 2015; Roy 1994; Salvatore 1999). This, in turn, contributes to the increasingly problematic nature of political Islam in contrast to the political developments

in other religions. The question arises whether political Islam and its specific relationship with politics and the public sphere, as well as its ideological and discursive foundations, are rooted in Islamic tradition, possessing a religious nature, or if it is an innovation outside the Islamic tradition, possessing a non-Islamic nature. Should we speak about the multifaceted relationships between Islam and politics? If so, is this plurality based on tradition or historical-societal contexts? What causes the problematic nature of this relationship? What is meant by Islamic tradition when political Islam is conceptualized in relation to it? Does tradition solely emphasize the religious-theological and non-historical aspects of Islam, or can it encompass historical indications and certain evolutionary trends? To what extent has political Islam been a longstanding phenomenon in Islamic history, or is it a more recent phenomenon in Islamic societies and for Muslim intellectuals? Regarding Islamic tradition, how can we discuss Islamic movements such as reformist, modernist, legalist, scripturalist, and various configurations of political Islam? Can this debate be considered a false and invalid conflict in relation to the inclusive realities of Islamic movements, or does it genuinely reflect conflicting viewpoints? What fundamentally causes the differentiation of the discourses and ideologies of Islamists, and how are their regimes of reference and their resources distinguished and defined in the face of the complexities of the external world? Is political Islam a universal and transcendent phenomenon, or is it a singular and entirely historical one? In relation to modernity and political Islam, can political Islam be considered an alternative modernity or a species among multiple modernities?

Numerous conceptual disputes exist regarding the nature and different aspects of the reference points of political Islam among various intellectuals, forming the basis for the diverse definitions of political Islam and various approaches in this field. Core issues such as the establishment of an Islamic state, violence among Islamists, women's issues, the ummah, the Islamic law, authority of sacred texts and tradition, Ijtihad or modes of interpretation, justice, authentic Islam, and others are among the most essential thematic elements at the heart of this central debate in political Islam and its relation to Islamic tradition.

This paper contends that by prioritizing the idea of discursive tradition and considering it as an analytical tool, many of the debates within the studies of political Islam and Islamist ideologies, especially the mentioned debate regarding the relationship between Islamic tradition and political Islam, can be addressed and suspended. Talal Asad (2009) frames the idea of discursive tradition within a conceptual conflict in Islamic studies between approaches that address and make sense of Islam either based on the tradition and Islamic theology, i.e., a high Islam emanates from the sacred texts in theological jurisprudential systems and a kind of essentialist, clerical, universalist, and foundationalist Islam, or based on lived Islam, i.e., a lived Islam of ordinary Muslims in historical, singular, and practical terms, which falls into the pitfalls of constructionism and anti/non-foundationalism. By suspending this dichotomy, he attempts to formulate an approach that navigates between tradition and experience, essentialism and constructivism, and universalism and singularism in the anthropological inquiry of Islam. Since these approaches also dominate the field of political Islam, the concept of discursive tradition can carry particular implications for the analysis of political Islam, especially regarding the mentioned conceptual conflict.

Talal Asad's idea of a discursive tradition, particularly within the context of Islamic studies, is a complex and nuanced framework that amalgamates Foucauldian discourse analysis and MacIntyre's understanding of tradition (Asad 2003, 2009, 2015; Iqbal 2017). As articulated by Asad in his seminal work, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam" (Asad 2009), he defines Islam as a 'discursive tradition,' urging scholars to approach the study of Islam by considering the concept of a discursive tradition that encompasses both the Islamic tradition and various regimes of reference and arguing, Islamic reasoning, as well as the social-historical conditions and context to which this tradition refers and draws upon. In adapting MacIntyre's notion of tradition, Asad characterizes a discursive tradition as an ongoing set of interlinked discourses and practices that have persisted over time (Asad 2009; Enayat 2017; Iqbal 2017). It is not a static or fixed entity but rather a dynamic process

that requires constant reflection on the past for an understanding and reformulation of the present and future. This conceptualization is essential for comprehending the intricate relationship between language, power, and the construction of knowledge within Islamic societies. Asad explicitly defines an Islamic discursive tradition as a “tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present” (Asad 2009, p. 14). This implies that the tradition is not confined to mere adherence to historical practices but involves a continuous engagement with foundational texts and teachings while addressing the contemporary challenges and realities faced by Muslim communities (Anjum 2007). Crucially, Asad rejects a literalist interpretation of foundational texts within this tradition. Unlike rigid adherence or blind imitation of predecessors, a discursive tradition is characterized by an ever-evolving set of doctrines and practices. While there is a sense of continuity, it is not devoid of change or adaptation to contemporary contexts. This understanding aligns with Asad’s skepticism towards the influential notion of the ‘invention of tradition’ (Asad 2003). Therefore, the discursive tradition encompasses the lived Islam of Muslims, including their specific and diverse rationality, as well as the higher Islam and theological Islam of theologians, jurists, and their interpretive regimes, but it moves beyond them at another level.

Furthermore, the concept of an Islamic discursive tradition draws on Foucault’s insights by acknowledging that tradition is not only constituted and reconstituted by an ongoing dialogue between the past and the present but is also influenced by power relations, conflicts, and contestations (Asad 2009; Enayat 2017; Iqbal 2017). Asad navigates the delicate balance between essentialist and relativist/constructivist conceptions, arguing for the importance of ‘orthodoxy’ in Islam while framing it as a distinctive relationship of power (Asad 2009). Orthodoxy, according to Asad, is crucial to all Muslim traditions and is fundamentally a relationship of power (Anjum 2007). The capacity to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct or religious practices, as well as to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones, defines the domain of orthodoxy (Asad 2009). This orthodoxy, evident in specific times and places, mainly delineates fundamental categories and binaries, including heterodoxy, spirituality, authority, sacred/profane, the personal/the public, the religious/the non-religious, transcendent/immanent, etc. This assertion challenges Western scholars who deny the existence of orthodoxy in Islam due to the absence of a formal clergy (mostly in Sunni tradition), emphasizing the agency of practitioners in shaping and defining correct beliefs and practices. Asad’s concept of an Islamic discursive tradition, therefore, is a productive attempt to view Islam as a processual tradition. It rejects static, ahistorical, and universal interpretations and encourages a nuanced understanding of Islam’s development over time (Anjum 2007). However, it also raises critical questions about the nature of orthodoxy, the role of power in defining it, and the potential tensions between resisting relativism and acknowledging the influence of political and religious authorities (Enayat 2017).

The idea of Islam as a discursive tradition, in general, provides a nuanced perspective for analyzing political Islam (Asad 2003; Hurd 2008; Ismail 2003; Mahmood 2005). Political Islam itself constitutes a part of the Islamic discursive tradition, serving as a form of discourse that is constructed within a network of social configurations and various references to Islamic tradition and interpretative frameworks, addressing the challenges of temporal and spatial conditions (for the idea of configuration, see Jong 2022, 2023a, 2023b). Similar to the discursive tradition in Islam, where Islamic tradition is invoked and justified in relation to certain issues and debates, and is positioned alongside or against other traditions, drawing on various regimes of references and reasoning and according to certain existing traditions, contemporary Islamists also attempt to reinterpret, highlight, or revive certain aspects of their alleged Islamic tradition and justify their dominant position in the face of public and political issues. This intermingling, manifested in various frameworks of configurations and justificatory regimes, leads to an understanding of Islamist ideologies not based on given doctrines or universal questions but within discursive traditions and in

accordance with their historical-social conditions. In this context, many questions regarding the modernity or Islamic nature, as well as the non-Islamic nature of political Islam, and the relationship between Islam and politics, become contingent, and their priority will be suspended. This viewpoint recognizes that political Islam is not a uniform and universal phenomenon but encompasses diverse discourses shaped by historical, social, and cultural contexts. It challenges essentialist approaches—that attempt to reduce the complexity of this phenomenon under one or two simple categories or principles—and emphasizes understanding the complexity of political Islamist discourses. This perspective views political Islam as a dynamic space where various actors engage in ongoing debates, negotiations, and reinterpretations of Islamic principles and teachings concerning political, social, and public objectives. Essentially, many dominant categories in the discursive tradition of political Islam have been constructed and reconstructed in various discursive conflicts, debates, and exchanges throughout contemporary history. By framing political Islam as a discursive tradition, it moves beyond simplistic categorizations such as a movement, ideology, or religious nationalism, or anti-imperialism, anti-westernism, anti-modernism, or even alternative modernity, and then asks about its compatibility with the modern world or democracy. This approach encourages a comprehensive analysis of political Islamist discourses, considering their historical development and interactions with sociopolitical contexts from a post-foundationalist perspective. Scholars are prompted to critically examine power dynamics, ideological influences, and historical contingencies shaping political Islamic discourses (Jong and Ali 2023).

This perspective also has implications for understanding political Islamist thoughts, emphasizing their dynamic nature within a historical context and their interaction with diverse groups and ideological orientations. Political Islamists engage in debates, negotiations, and interactions with various groups and interpret Islamic tradition within existing traditions and denominations. The encounter between political Islam and other discourses necessitates defining political Islam in relation to these groups and discourses, highlighting the relational construction of different parts of the Islamic tradition. Political Islamists navigate their discourse by drawing upon Islamic texts, historical precedents, dominant regimes of Islamic interpretations in different traditions, and distinct conceptions of religious authorities while responding to contemporary sociopolitical challenges (Ramadan 2008). Their discourse reflects a complex interplay between tradition and innovation, addressing concerns within the broader framework of Islam. Furthermore, political Islamists engage with diverse ideological currents and social movements, influencing debates on governance, social justice, gender relations, economic policies, and the role of religion in public life. Within the discursive tradition, dominant teachings and categories in Islamic tradition are referenced and retrieved by Islamists in specific temporal and spatial conditions. Therefore, categories such as Islamist time and space, Islamist modes of argumentation/reasoning/reference, Islamist utopian or imagined Islamic community, Islamist authority, the nature of Islamist power and the method of interpreting Islamic sacred texts, the Islamist order and grammar of discourses, among others, are all constructed within the frameworks of Islamist discursive tradition in a mutually constitutive relationship. Hence, neither Islamic government, nor the Sharia, nor jihad, nor the Caliphate, nor enjoining good and forbidding evil, nor the struggle against arrogance and colonization, nor reform and renewal, nor mere reference to sacred texts and pure Islam, nor Salafism, nor the absolute authority of the jurist (Velayat-e Faqih) serve as the nodal point of the discursive tradition of political Islam. They have only gained significance within various discourses and configurations in specific times and spaces, as well as in different relations to rival discourses. Although power/knowledge relations may lead to the strengthening and stability of these discourses over time under specific conditions (Al-Azmeh 2009; Esposito 1991; Euben and Zaman 2009). Perhaps only family resemblances between Islamist discourses and configurations can relatively exhibit a level of universality around certain categories and discussions in political Islam. However, all of these are meaningful solely within the framework of the discursive tradition of political Islam.

One of the consequences of considering political Islam as a discursive tradition is decentralizing the dominant discourses, acknowledging the overlooked discourses in the studies of political Islam, and making sense of them based on their singularity, particularly in relation to Islamic traditions. In this conceptualization, the historicity of Islamist phenomena and ideologies is preserved, encompassing both the internal specific and singular features and the universal or affiliative aspect that constitutes a distinct entity like political Islam. Here, Islamist discourses and ideologies are formulated based on various vertical and horizontal referential relationships, including historical referential relationships with Islamic tradition, concurrent relationships with social contexts, and other discourses, whether within the discursive tradition of political Islam or within the Islamic discursive tradition itself—such as modernists, reformists, traditionalists, Sufis, Ulama, and Salafis—or outside of this tradition (Denoeux 2002; Esposito 1997; Euben and Zaman 2009). Understanding the grammar of these regimes of references, their systems of reasoning and justifying, and considering them as contingent configurations constituted temporarily in specific historical contexts is key to interpreting Islamist ideologies based on the idea of a discursive tradition.

Islamism in Iranian Kurdistan holds prominence within the region, but its scholarly examination has been limited due to the dominance of Kurdish nationalist and Marxist discourses on the one hand, and the scant attention given to Islamist currents in neighboring countries and regions such as Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq on the other hand. However, it is crucial to recognize that this discursive tradition is intricately connected to a complex web of relationships and ideologies. The expansion of Kurdish regions in various Islamic countries and the diverse intellectual and cultural exchanges have led to the formation of unique and blended intellectual and cultural traditions. The Islamist tradition in Iranian Kurdistan has also taken shape in this manner, and the idea of the discursive tradition can effectively highlight the distinctive features of these discourses in comparison to others in the process of their articulations. Based on essentialist approaches or even with the precedence of Islamic theology, many distinctive and innovative aspects of the Islamic discourse tradition in Kurdistan have been overlooked or inaccurately categorized under one of the existing categories outlined in the field of political Islam studies, often adopting reductionist and essentialist approaches.

The paper specifically focuses on the ideas of Ahmad Moftizadeh (1932–1992), a Sunni Kurdish Islamist and the founder of the Maktab Quran (MQ). By analyzing and revisiting Moftizadeh's thoughts preserved in speeches and writings in Kurdish and Persian at the MQ, especially his speeches on Islamic government (Moftizadeh 1979), this study aims to examine his conception of political Islam within the framework of a discursive tradition. Ahmad Moftizadeh has been one of the most significant Islamists in Iranian Kurdistan, providing detailed articulation of many categories of the Islamist discursive tradition in this region and beyond. Consequently, this paper not only briefly discusses Islamism in Kurdistan and Moftizadeh's life but also explores the conceptual implications of considering political Islam as a discursive tradition. Furthermore, it delves into the analysis of Moftizadeh's ideas, particularly his formulation of political Islam through prioritization of the Islamic government and its articulation around the Islamic tradition of the Shura, while addressing his central categories and regime of reference and reasoning within the realm of Islamist thought and in contrast to other discourses.

3. Ahmad Moftizadeh and Iranian Kurdistan

Iranian Kurdistan refers to a region in the northwest of Iran, which includes the four provinces of Ilam, Kermanshah, Kurdistan, and parts of West Azerbaijan, and is known as the historical homeland of the Kurdish-speaking people. Except for the people of Ilam and the southern parts of Kermanshah, which follow the Shia religion, the majority of Kurds in other parts of Kurdistan are Sunnis. These linguistic-religious characteristics have given a distinguished identity to the Kurds in their relation to the other ethno-religious groups of Iran, who mainly follow the Shiite religion and speak other languages. Iranian Kurdistan, since the 1940s up until the Iranian revolution in 1979, has witnessed the emergence of

several modern political discourses that emphasize the distinct national identity of the Kurds and their right to establish an autonomous political entity. Some consider the first political manifestation of these discourses to be the establishment of a party entitled Society for the Revival of Kurdistan (Komeley Jiyanewey Kurdistan, or JK), which was established in the early 1940s in Mahabad. JK, which was advocating a radical leftist discourse, was dissolved in 1945 and replaced by the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI). Following a more conservative agenda at the beginning, KDPI has increasingly approached a radical leftist discourse since the late 1950s (Vali 2020, p. 125). Apart from KDPI, the main political manifestation of the Left in Kurdistan was the Society of the Revolutionary Toilers of Kurdistan (commonly shortened as Komala), which was founded around 1969 and remained as an underground movement until the 1979 revolution (Vali 2020, pp. 147–48).

Since the middle of the 1970s, a new discourse has emerged in Kurdistan whose core component is Islamic symbolism. The founder of this discourse was Ahmad Moftizadeh (also known as kak Ahmad) (1932–1992), a former member of KDPI and the son of a prominent religious family in Sanandaj. Moftizadeh underwent a significant intellectual transformation during the early 1960s, moving away from nationalist ideas. In the subsequent years, he dedicated himself to articulating his new approach, emphasizing an Islamic spirituality that advocated abstaining from political activities and concentrating on spiritual purification. However, with the rise of political Islam in the 1970s in Iran, he became increasingly drawn to this movement. The content of his speeches during this period revolved around themes and categories such as the Islamic Revolution, Islamic government, and the Islamic economy. As the Iranian Revolution drew nearer, the tone of his speeches became less cautious, and their revolutionary and political undertones became more pronounced. In 1977, Moftizadeh, along with a group of like-minded individuals, founded a school in Marivan, which they named the “Madrasay Quran” (The School of Qur’an). The School of Quran, which quickly opened branches in other Kurdish cities, offered free Islamic education and, in contrast to traditional religious schools, also welcomed female students. In the years leading up to the Iranian Revolution, these schools transformed into hubs for Islamic education and propaganda in the Iranian Kurdish cities. Educating thousands on the eve of the revolution, it turned to a movement called Maktab Qur’an (MQ) and became the closest ally of the Shiite revolutionaries in Sunni Kurdistan (Ezzatyar 2016).

However, his relationship with secular Kurdish groups quickly deteriorated. Regardless of the historical details that illustrate the progression of this divide, the ideological gap between Moftizadeh and secular Kurdish currents did not offer a promising outlook for reconciliation. Moftizadeh distanced himself from the Islamic discourse of his earlier years, which emphasized spirituality and abstaining from politics. Instead, he gravitated towards Islamist radicalism, aligning himself closely with figures like Sayyid Qutb. The rhetoric of this period revolved around the rejection of secularism and the emphasis on Islamist politics. Moftizadeh saw the Islamic government as the solution to various national and class-based discriminations. Such positions, especially those held by Moftizadeh, brought him into tension with Marxist groups. With leftist movements gaining control of the political landscape in Sanandaj, pressure on supporters of the Maktab Quran increased. In the autumn of 1979, Moftizadeh found himself compelled to leave Kurdistan province and migrate to Kermanshah (Ezzatyar 2016, pp. 146–47).

During that period, Moftizadeh was a supporter of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. In contrast to secular Kurdish groups, who had no amicable relations with the Shiite revolutionaries, he aligned himself closely with the latter. His association with the figures of this current can be traced back to the time of his imprisonment in Qezelqaleh prison in 1964. Shortly after Ayatollah Khomeini’s return to Iran in 1979, Moftizadeh visited him in Tehran. In general, his interactions during the initial negotiations with Shiite revolutionaries were positive, and he demonstrated solidarity with their requests to address national and religious injustices in Kurdistan. Until the late summer of 1979, Moftizadeh still maintained

hope for the establishment of a form of consultative government and the recognition of equal rights for Sunni Muslims in Iran. However, designating Twelver Shiite Islam as the official religion of Iran in Article Twelve of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran ultimately leads to his political disagreement with the ruling revolutionaries. Subsequently, Moftizadeh withdrew from official political activities and initiated efforts to organize Sunni Iranians into a non-state council known as the *Shams*. The first Shams Congress was held in 1981 in Tehran, with the participation of religious and Islamist Sunni figures from different parts of Iran. The ruling Islamist regime did not recognize the anniversary of this assembly favorably, and in 1982, Moftizadeh, along with some of his supporters, was imprisoned in Kermanshah. The Maktab Quran was severely restricted and marginalized by the Shia Islamist government, as well as by its opposing Kurdish movements, and its leader remained in prison until 1992. Several months after his release, Ahmad Moftizadeh passed away due to illnesses resulting from the years of incarceration and pressure (Ezzatyar 2016; Van Bruinessen 2017).

MQ, despite the death of its leader in 1992 and its intellectual-political ups and downs since then, reorganized itself as a non-political religious movement. The group's agenda since then has been predicated on Moftizadeh's approach in the last years of his life, emphasizing the withdrawal from official politics and concentration on proselytizing (Dawah) and spiritual purification (Moftizadeh 1990). Consequently, MQ has turned away from official political activities and even participation in governmental elections and instead has focused on re-Islamizing society through a bottom-up process. Despite the lack of official statistics on the number of MQ's followers in Iranian Kurdistan, their presence and activities are evident all over the Sunni areas of Kurdistan. The visibility of their presence and activities shows that they are among the most influential groups in this region.

4. Establishing an Islamic Society through the Islamic Government and the Shura

Ahmad Moftizadeh delivered various speeches and works throughout his intellectual life on different aspects of Islamic thought. These works themselves signify his intellectual transformation during various periods of his intellectual life. However, his speech regarding the Islamic government holds a special place within his body of work (Moftizadeh 1979). This speech presents both a comprehensive and detailed view of Moftizadeh's Islamic thought and is situated within a significantly important historical period in contemporary Iran. This collection of speeches began in December 1978 during the revolutionary days in Iran, just a month before the complete downfall of the Pahlavi regime in Iran and the victory of the revolution amid challenges regarding the revolutionary regime in Iran. During that period, various revolutionary groups and movements, including nationalists, different leftist and Marxist groups, Kurdish nationalists, Kurdish workers' and Marxist parties, and diverse religious groups ranging from traditionalists to political Islamists, both within Iran and specifically in Iranian Kurdistan and beyond, engaged in intense political struggles. Amidst these political battles, they were involved in a profound discursive conflict, each seeking to interpret the existing conditions and outline their desired state. Moftizadeh's speech on the Islamic government precisely unfolded within this fervent intellectual context.

The speeches were started on 23 December 1978, at Amin Mosque in Sanandaj, Kurdistan, Iran, as an introduction to an ideal model for the future Islamic government in Iran (Moftizadeh 1979). In the process of introducing the elements, principles, and characteristics of the Islamic government, Moftizadeh presents various concepts, categories, and theories. Throughout his speeches, he endeavors to provide substantiated sources of Quranic verses or historical narratives from early Islam, aiming to validate his ideas about Islamic tradition.

Reviewing his ideas and analyzing them regarding the central themes of political thought, as well as in relation to various other intellectual currents, can serve as an excellent example of Islamist thought, providing a precise representation of the idea of political Islam as a discursive tradition. Furthermore, while examining his ideas, we will delve into the

central aspects of Moftizadeh's notion regarding the Islamic government and its elements, pillars, and attributes.

In the specialized version of Islamist thought, Moftizadeh situates the contemporary situation of Iran, the national struggles against the Pahlavi regime, and the anti-colonialist movements of the Iranian people within the broader context of Islamic history. Various types of referring to Islamic tradition are evident in both critiquing rival or alternative ideas and justifying certain ideas or entities throughout this discourse. His ultimate goal is the establishment of a unified Ummah or monotheistic society (Tawhidi), which should be understood historically and discursively. The central category in his monotheistic society (Tawhidi) is an Islamic government, which he justifies in contrast to other forms of government, such as individual or group tyranny, democratic republic, and sultanic democracy or democratic monarchies, prevalent during that period, using ideologies like nationalism, communism, and monarchy as points of comparison. By emphasizing the Islamic tradition of the Shura and referencing other traditions, he attempts to justify this form of government (which encompasses almost all elements and features of a modern government) based on Islamic tradition. This type of referencing for justifying an Islamic government and the centrality of the Shura is also in contention with other traditions that prioritize aspects like the return of the early Islamic community, the establishment of Sharia, and the rule of religious Islamic elites, scholars, or mujahideen. Similarly, reference groups, interpretative regimes, and other related factors are identified within various regimes of reference. This kind of confrontation, perhaps hastily labeled as a form of modernization or Islamization, could be considered a form of religious council democracy or even seen as an authoritarian government focusing on certain Islamic groups. However, the crucial point is that Moftizadeh's discourse is based on the idea of a discursive tradition, a tradition consisting of several indeterminate and multifaceted discourses and configurations that make it challenging to categorize easily under the given categories. This is because in one aspect of these configurations, they may appear strongly democratic, and in another aspect or another configuration, they may seem intensely authoritarian. A thorough exploration and understanding of his thought in various dimensions regarding the idea of an Islamic government, as well as the various nuanced articulations, categories, and discursive references, can effectively elucidate the discursiveness of his ideology.

Ahmad Moftizadeh's interpretative and argumentative tradition is predominantly influenced by the Shafi'i jurisprudential method, where facts and arguments are directly extracted from the Quran through rational interpretation. The idea of Islamic government and the majority of its components are similarly extracted from within the Quran and justified based on this method. On the other hand, his influence on the dominant ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood during that period shapes his particular attention to the tradition of the Shura. Consequently, he precisely articulates his idea of Islamic government within these existing traditions, considering the contemporary historical conditions of Iran, Iranian Kurdistan, and the Islamic world. The exact impact of the dominance of interpretative traditions, along with distinct social conditions, has effectively differentiated various conceptualizations of the idea of Islamic government among Islamist thinkers. Moftizadeh's notion of Islamic government, for instance, distinctly differs from Ayatollah Khomeini's interpretation of political Islam and the Islamic government within the Shia jurisprudential tradition. Despite some similarities, Moftizadeh's idea, grounded in the Shafi'i jurisprudential tradition and influenced by other Islamist thinkers like Maududi and Qutb, contrasts fundamentally with Khomeini's distinct interpretation rooted in Shia jurisprudence, considering a unique understanding of Shia mysticism, the conceptualization of Velayat, and the central authority of Marja'iyya, or religious authorities, during the occultation of the Twelfth Imam for Shia Muslims. If Moftizadeh's conceptualization of Islamic governance is rooted in the notion of the Shura (council) and a somewhat non-institutionalized religion, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in contrast, solidly establishes the foundation of Islamic governance through precisely institutionalized religion and a hierarchical Shiite authority. This foundation, coupled with the dominance of a specific

aristocratic clergy around the absolute authority of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist (Velayat-e Faqih), is well-entrenched within the very fabric of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Moftizadeh's speech on "the Islamic Government", later published as a booklet, contains a foreword, an introduction, and two sections comprising foundations, fundamentals, framework, and characteristics of the Islamic government, as well as the attributes of the Islamic government in comparison to other governments (Moftizadeh 1979). In the discussions of the foreword, the prevalent narrative dominance of Islamists is evident in Moftizadeh's work. He perceives Islam as a comprehensive program to address existing problems and liberate Muslims from tyranny and colonialism. According to his belief, the Muslim nations (in plural) of Iran are in a particular historical situation. In this scenario, Muslim nations are engaged in a revolutionary movement against their primary enemy, the Pahlavi monarchy regime, and their secondary foe, anti-Islamic forces. In his view, the ultimate goal of this revolutionary movement is the establishment of an Islamic government. However, he contends that centuries-long domination of tyranny and colonialism has hindered a proper understanding of the essence of an Islamic government. Hence, on the verge of the Iranian revolution, he prioritizes introducing the elements, foundations, and characteristics of this government as his agenda (Moftizadeh 1979, p. 5).

In the introductory section (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 7–15), where Moftizadeh addresses his fundamental idea regarding history and political Islam, one can also readily find recurring narratives and categories among Islamists. Like Sayyid Qutb (Qutb 1990), Ali Shariati (Rahnema 2013; Shariati 1979), Maududi (Maududi 1977), and many Muslim Marxists, he initially outlines a general logic for history. These historical narratives are divided into three periods: the pre-Islamic Jahiliyyah era, the mission of the Prophet of Islam and the establishment of the Islamic community by him and his followers, and finally, the decline of Islamic tradition and the onset of the history of decay in Islamic societies. For all these thinkers, this decline manifests in various cultural, political, and social forms, ranging from monarchy, tyranny, regression, and aristocracy to modernity, the West, cultural invasion, modernization, colonialism, democracy, the US, and more, across different epochs. However, for them, the present situation is a critical and pivotal moment that, through recourse to Islam and reliance on Islamic texts, traditions, and sacred Islamic history, can liberate Muslim societies from their decayed state and restore some of their traditions in the present era. This narrative of revival is also intricately articulated in various discursive traditions across different periods.

For Ahmad Moftizadeh, the history of Islamic civilization, from the perspective of Islamic sociology, represents a struggle and contradiction between the monotheistic society (Tawhid) and the earthly tyrannical society (Taghut)—between a small group of oppressors (mūtrifīn), and the majority of the people, namely the oppressed (mūstaz'afīn). The earthly tyrannical society (Taghut) embodies inequality, corruption, and a stratified society with various forms of social, political, cultural, and economic boundaries. It is a society where the arrogant minority, through wealth, power, and deception, exploits and plunders the rights, toil, and spiritual and material labor of the hardworking majority, leaving nothing but deprivation, fatigue, and suffering for them. Overall, the mission or duty of prophets throughout history, according to Moftizadeh, has been to dismantle the foundations of this tyrannical and class-based system through the ideology of egalitarian monotheism (Tawhid). In a monotheistic society, as per Moftizadeh, with the prevalence of justice and rights for all humans, all these discriminations and inequalities collapse, and individuals are equal in all material and spiritual aspects. For him, equality stands against the interpretations of racists and various social and geographical boundaries such as nations, tribes, cultures, and so forth. In his view, these divisions and boundaries are all acquired and superficial, having artificially emerged under historical and environmental conditions over centuries. However, in his belief, the sole factor distinguishing individuals in a monotheistic society is piety (Taqwa), which relates to the spiritual (not material) and voluntary relationship between humans and God (Moftizadeh 1979, p. 7).

However, the oppressors (*mūtrīfīn*) also rise against the transformation of the status quo as well as the mission of the prophets, using various strategies of *zar* and *zur* (gold and coercion) to confront them. Whenever these exploiters faced political and military defeat and were compelled to submit to justice and equality, they again resorted to the most dangerous weapons, namely *tazvir* (deception), to confront the divine message of the prophets. They attempt either to obstruct the formation of a monotheistic society or to annihilate it (Moftizadeh 1979, p. 8).

Ahmad Moftizadeh believed this historical logic precisely elucidates the history of Islam. Fourteen centuries ago, prior to Muhammad's emergence in Hejaz, this land, and perhaps the entire world, was dominated comprehensively by the oppressors (*mūtrīfīn*) and the arrogant (*mūstakberīn*). The mission of the Prophet was an all-encompassing revolution, an unrelenting uprising and struggle, a relentless *jihad* with his life and wealth against the ruling exploitative system, aiming for the emancipation of oppressed humanity. Through sacrifices and immense suffering, he managed to establish the monotheistic society (*Tawhīdī*) fourteen centuries ago (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 8–9).

In his booklet on the Islamic government, Ahmad Moftizadeh asserts that following the death of the Islamic Prophet, particularly after the assassination of the third caliph, the arrogant and corrupt, who had suffered a severe defeat, once again initiated their efforts to destroy the monotheistic society by reinstating a renewed society of exploitation and tyranny. However, they commenced this agenda in the post-Prophet era with a new strategy. In this approach, they either aimed to obliterate the divine message's principle or attempted to distort the essence and truth of the divine message through deceiving the people and erasing its justifying, revolutionary, and anti-class nature. According to Moftizadeh, they knew that as long as the divine message held sway in society and in the hearts of the people, they could not perpetrate any oppression or injustice, thus failing to pursue their malevolent aims of exploiting the populace (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 9–10).

According to Moftizadeh, God precisely sent the Quran to humanity at a time when humanity had reached intellectual maturity to comprehend divine truths and to preserve and safeguard its teachings. Hence, the primary goal of the oppressors (*mūtrīfīn*) was to alienate and estrange the followers of the Quran from the essence of the Quran itself, from the content and teachings of the Quran, from the historical reality the Quran created, and to transform its nature. Consequently, Moftizadeh believes that over the past fourteen centuries, the elite devised stratagems, fabricated myths around Quranic verses, imposed lies and superstitions on Quranic verses, concocted narratives, established various religious boundaries and sects within Islam, and ultimately reduced Islam to an empty and neutral religion in the guise of a set of formal rituals, ceremonies, religious inclinations, and everyday traditions (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 10–11).

As per Moftizadeh's perspective, the most crucial and perilous stratagem of the enemies of the people (Muslims) and Islam was to separate religion from statecraft, governance, and societal politics. This policy, which began during the post-caliphate era and intensified in modern times through colonization, propelled the vast, unified Muslim society toward idolatry, corruption, and societal decadence. In his opinion, the Umayyad aristocracy, the Iranian monarchy, and later the Abbasid authoritarianism were all manifestations of the decline of Islam. Their primary focus was to propagate the notion of "Islam being separate from politics", which, according to him, has been the root cause of deviation and the degradation of Islam in recent centuries. This separation, particularly evident after the decline of Islam in Andalusia during the Crusades and the Mongol invasions, has primarily manifested itself through colonization (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 11–12).

Moftizadeh argues that this alienation from the Quran, above all else, has led to an unawareness among Muslims, especially among Muslim fighters (*mujahideen*) and Islamic scholars, regarding the political aspects and liberating potential of Islam, along with the capability and possibility of establishing an Islamic government. This unawareness has resulted in their deviation and failure in their efforts in recent centuries. Therefore, in his view, understanding the true foundations of religion, distinguishing real Islam from its

outward, hereditary, aristocratic, and nominal versions, and introducing the capacities of Islam in constructing a government will be the foremost concerns of Muslims in the present era. Ultimately, he advocates for the establishment of an Islamic government and endeavors to identify its pillars and characteristics. In subsequent sections of his speeches, he delves into the specific facets of the concept of the Islamic government and its structure concerning rival ideologies and structures (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 12–15).

In the opening discussions of the first section of this pamphlet, Moftizadeh strives to present a comprehensive interpretation of Islam as a program encompassing all aspects of human life, much like other Islamists (Roy 1994). According to him, what makes Islam eternal is its fundamental principles and standards for human issues, ranging from the most personal matters to significant international concerns, offering solutions for all human needs. However, it is the duty of individuals, amid diverse circumstances, to extract and deduce necessary laws and rules from these principles and general standards using their intellectual capacities. He emphasizes that government is one of these human issues for which Islam holds general principles and standards—principles that never become obsolete and that humanity perpetually needs to derive laws of governance from any circumstance or era (Moftizadeh 1979, p. 17). It is here that Moftizadeh introduces his model for the Islamic government—a model rooted in a regime of reference to Islamic tradition and relying on a special interpretive system. In this paradigm, Islam represents a divine-human system in which the foundations and fundamental principles of life are entrusted to humans by God. Humans, created imperfectly, can create their ideal society by referencing and interpreting these principles. Here, the reference to the Quran and tradition should be made directly by Muslims themselves, without any intermediaries, including religious scholars and jurists. Therefore, each Muslim is obliged to act based on their awareness, conceptions, and resources regarding the correct implementation or non-implementation of Islamic laws and rules, both general principles and accepted interpretative forms. This leads to the principle of public sovereignty, where the ultimate governing force over the Ummah or nation is the people themselves, with no intermediary authority or ruling class among religious scholars or politicians (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 19–20).

However, according to him, considering the diversity of social spheres and the necessity for the organization and regulation of society, coupled with the potential for various interpretations of sacred principles and laws by different individuals, this broad yet decentralized and unstructured movement should be centralized and organized by the people themselves and their will. Throughout history, various political systems have emerged in response to this need. However, according to Moftizadeh, the most people-oriented system of governing society is solely the system of the Islamic government.

In Ahmad Moftizadeh's conception of the Islamic government, the dispersed power of the people is consolidated into a single pillar or authority, namely "the Shura" or consultative council, which he likens to parliaments found in democratic governments. However, he contends that the Islamic Shura, unlike these parliaments, is entirely and absolutely more grassroots. He then attempts to delineate the distinct features and pillars of his ideal Islamic government in multifaceted comparisons with modern democracies, aiming to demonstrate the superiority, progressiveness, and grassroots nature of the Islamic government compared to others (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 26–27).

According to him, centuries before modern humans embraced the model of democracy, God had introduced the concept of the "Shura" (consultative council) for the liberation of Muslim people (Moftizadeh 1979, p. 27). The Prophet of Islam, in his struggles against earthly tyrants, practically implemented this council during the Islamic era, nurturing dedicated forces to participate in it. Therefore, this ideal model had been pre-existing for Muslims. However, following the reign of the third caliph and the onset of internal corruption within Islamic civilization, the effective and committed forces behind the idea of the Shura dissipated. The aristocracy of the Umayyads and the Persian monarchy replaced the most people-oriented form of governance, the Islamic government (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 37–38).

In the Islamic government, the Shura (consultative council) holds absolute and central authority. As Moftizadeh puts it, the Shura consists of individuals meeting certain criteria, where collective decisions are made based on the strength of reasoning and its conformity with Quranic principles. This council is composed of individuals nurtured by revolutionary ideologies, possessing familiarity with the Islamic system and Quranic teachings, and demonstrating sincerity and dedication to this system and its implementation within Islamic society. All members of this council have equal political rights and are mandated to make decisions solely through consultation and discussion on societal matters in accordance with the principles and standards of Islamic teachings (Moftizadeh 1979, p. 27).

In his view, the primary function of the Shura is to derive contemporary laws and rules from fundamental Islamic principles and standards. Other governing bodies needed for managing various societal affairs under different circumstances are all secondary. Their diversity, organizational structure, as well as the extent of their powers and authorities—such as their existence, suitability, and scope—are all subject to the decision of the principal pillar, namely the Shura. The Islamic council, at various levels and for different segments of society, always serves as the principal and ultimate decision-making entity, considering the particular circumstances. As Moftizadeh articulates, this central pillar, to which the Quran has entrusted all the authorities of governing Islamic society, is the main foundation for legislation at different levels and oversight of its implementation. Hence, its authority in legislation and decision making, guided by Quranic teachings, is limitless and comprehensive (Moftizadeh 1979).

He attempts to outline around eight specific facets, comparing various aspects of the Islamic governmental council with parliaments in democratic governments. His aim is to demonstrate how, with the assistance of the Quran and the Prophet, Muslims fourteen centuries ago devised and implemented one of the most progressive and democratic political systems in humanity, to an extent that no democracy thus far can rival in terms of its degree of inclusiveness and people's centrality (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 28–38).

In his speech, Moftizadeh highlights a crucial distinction between general democracy and particular democracy, an oversight he claims has been ignored in Western democracies, resulting in the conflation of these two dimensions. He argues that this merging, in reality, strips the democratic nature from Western governments, portraying it as a deceitful and populist game. However, he believes that this distinction has been well integrated within the institution of the Shura, or Islamic Council. According to him, in general democracy, the public dimension of democracy entails considering and addressing the aspirations, desires, needs, and emotions of the majority of people, regardless of social distinctions and the interests of a particular class or group in major decision making and governance. However, in this particular aspect, especially in executive decision making, the votes and opinions of the majority are not the primary basis. Rather, the demands of the people should be examined by conscientious and dedicated experts, and their expert opinion should serve as the basis for decision making. In the Islamic Council, with the presence of dedicated experts familiar with Islamic principles, both of these dimensions are well accounted for (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 25–27).

Moftizadeh's eight focal points for distinguishing between the Shura or the Islamic Council and the Parliament in Western democracies are: 1. Limits of power and authority; 2. Membership eligibility; 3. Number of members and their proportion; 4. Tenure of the council; 5. Quality over quantity in decision making; 6. Oversight mechanisms on the council; 7. Assigning tasks to qualified individuals; 8. Multiple and regional councils (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 28–38).

According to Moftizadeh, while in Western democracies the parliament is merely one pillar of governance and other elements might wield influence over decisions or its will, in an Islamic government, the Shura stands as the sole and absolute power. The council in Islamic society holds the entirety of the society's authority, having no other formal origins or existence, and the presence or absence of any other force depends entirely on the council's discretion. Unlike Western parliaments, in the Islamic Council, membership

is a natural condition rather than a promotional one. In an Islamic government, a council member is someone who, through their behavioral history and ethical traits (focused on the past), has gained the general trust of the Muslim people, and neither the people nor the worthy have seen betrayal or error in them. This distinguished background, coupled with religious knowledge and awareness of important societal matters, are the foremost conditions required for membership in the Islamic Council. This stands in contrast to democratic systems where parliament members are either appointed in a party-driven or legislative manner, or through various promotional tactics, promises, and future plans that will be carried out after being elected. In this scenario, qualified individuals might fail due to insufficient financial resources or promotional initiatives (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 28–31).

In Moftizadeh's view, in the Islamic Council (be it the Supreme Islamic Council of the country or other councils), the number of members is not absolute or fixed relative to the total population of a country or a specific region. The only criterion is the qualification for membership. Therefore, if society and its administration become completely Islamic, then in such a region, for instance, with a population of one million, where a hundred individuals meet the qualifications for council membership, naturally all would become members of that council. Conversely, another region with the same population might not even have two qualified individuals. Moreover, members of the Supreme Council and even various regions are as committed to other regions as they are to their own country or region. Entrance and exit to the council, like the number of its members, are not governed by any law and can fluctuate; at one time, there might be a hundred members, while at another time, there might be fewer. At any given moment, individuals may meet the membership criteria and join the council without any legal restrictions, according to Moftizadeh. Conversely, as he articulates, in the parliaments of non-Islamic governments, the number of council members is fixed and predetermined based on the population of different regions, also set for fixed terms in advance. This can lead to the exclusion of individuals who are qualified to serve the community due to predetermined limitations or require them to wait until the end of a parliamentary term, depriving society of their services. Additionally, those elected into parliament through elections might be ineffective, corrupt, or fail to fulfill their promises, causing society to bear the consequences of their presence until the end of their term. In contrast, in the Islamic Council, an individual who remains qualified for council membership and has not committed any transgressions can continue to serve on the council (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 31–34).

Ahmad Moftizadeh argues that the most significant factor distinguishing the Islamic Councils from Western parliaments in democracy lies in prioritizing quality over quantity in decision making and legislation. Unlike other parliaments, the basis for accepting a vote in the Islamic Council rests on its strength and compatibility with general principles and regulations derived from the Quran and tradition, as well as the needs and conditions of the present time, rather than the consensus of the majority. Moftizadeh claims that if all members agree on a decision and, at one point, one member presents an opposing view, everyone is obliged to hear out his argument. If valid, it should be accepted and the previous vote invalidated. However, if conflicting arguments hold equal weight and no superiority is established, only then does the majority's vote hold value, particularly the majority of experts, not an absolute or minoritarian majority. In this scenario, it is quality that grants value to quantity.

According to Moftizadeh, based on the principles of public governance and civil responsibility, every individual within the Islamic community has oversight over the Islamic Council. If a member commits an offense, anyone aware of it not only has the right but is obligated to bring them to question, and upon proven wrongdoing, that Council member is automatically dismissed without formalities. In the Islamic government, no authority is exempt from accountability, and individuals within the community can demand accountability from them at any time. Moftizadeh believes this embodies the true realization of public governance and popular will, not the formal and superficial aspects seen in Western democracies (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 34–35).

In Moftizadeh's perspective on Islamic government, the Islamic Council determines all structures, institutions, social and governmental organizations, and even suitable individuals for governmental and executive roles based on existing conditions and necessities. According to his viewpoint, beyond the Supreme Islamic Council of the entire country, in a multicultural, multi-religious, and multi-national society such as Iran, regional councils that also encompass the demands of various religions and cultures should be established. Fundamentally, in his belief, the council is, according to the teachings of the Quran, a progressive system for managing and governing Islamic society. Nonetheless, it is advisable that a representative from the Supreme Council participate in regional councils to both be informed about their opinions and supervise their performance according to Islamic standards. Consequently, while the Supreme Council contributes to formulating the general laws of the country and defining subsidiary institutions, multiple regional councils are responsible for the approval and implementation of laws in specific areas, always in line with the overarching laws of the country (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 35–37).

Moftizadeh, after highlighting the centrality, characteristics, and functioning of the council in the Islamic government, seeks to address its historical aspect: the disappearance of the Shura and the ensuing schism within the unified Islamic community, and how the widespread formation of councils can potentially restore unity to Islam and Islamic societies. According to him, corruption in the Islamic world began after the end of the Islamic caliphate (especially after the rule of the third caliphate) and with the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty, causing the dissolution of the council system. Consequently, under the dominance of despotic regimes and the absence of the possibility for Islamic scholars to reach consensus for consultation and legislation based on Islamic principles, the Islamic community fell into disunity. Despite repeated warnings in the Quran and Hadith against disunity, Muslims diverged into numerous major and minor branches and different Islamic sects, jurisprudence schools, and denominations (Moftizadeh 1979, p. 37).

However, he argues that by reinstating Islamic councils, while each regional council, after establishing common principles, formulates specific laws according to the religion of that region, within the Supreme Council, scholars and authorities from different Islamic sects scrutinize the evidence of each sect on any given subject and accept whichever aligns more with the Quran and Hadith. Consequently, this effort progressively increases the number of cases and arguments accepted by all Islamic denominations and jurisprudence schools and diminishes their differences. Clearly, when a law is formulated and legitimated in this manner, both regional councils and the general Muslim population accept it because their religious references and trusted figures have embraced and confirmed it. He believes that this method could be a revolutionary effort, gradually steering Muslims away from division, and ultimately leading them towards unity. Over time, the fabricated names of Islamic sects, denominations, and factions will vanish, leaving only the sacred name of Islam, and everyone will identify as pure and equal Muslims (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 37–38). In the end, he states in this regard that “in this way, one of the most dangerous triggers for creating conflict and turmoil, instigated by both internal and external enemies of Islam, will be taken away. It will pave the path towards the unity of the Islamic world and, consequently, the salvation of the world from the clutches of both red and black imperialism and their dangerous weapon, Zionism” (Moftizadeh 1979, p. 38).

Moftizadeh also considers four other pillars of the Islamic government, which are directly managed by councils: 1. The Judiciary—which operates entirely according to jurisprudential sources. 2. The State—holding the greatest responsibilities for managing society after the council. Moftizadeh regards the Islamic caliphate system as equal with the state as the executive branch, and a variation in it (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 71–72). 3. The Defense Force or Islamic Army—tasked with defending Islam and Muslims worldwide. 4. The Financial Ministry or the Ministry of Bait al-Mal—intended to function based on the principles of a monotheist economy (Tawhidi). He deems Islamic treatment and education (Moftizadeh 1978b) and a monotheist economy (Tawhidi) (Moftizadeh 1978a) as the three fundamental pillars of the Islamic community, or ummah, following the Shura (Moftizadeh

1979). Similar to many Islamic proponents, his ultimate goal is the revolutionary movement toward establishing an Islamic government and subsequently Islamizing the entire society through these three aforementioned core pillars, all guided by a direct reference to and contemporary interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah as the ultimate model he seeks to establish and adhere to (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 39–45).

He also seeks, in the appendix added to the booklet containing his speech on Islamic government, to underscore the distinctive and overarching characteristics of an Islamic government in contrast to individual dictatorship, group or party dictatorship, democratic republics, and democratic monarchies (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 115–25). Ultimately, he enumerates four characteristics of the Islamic government. He believes that:

An Islamic government is a divine people's government. It stands against both individual and collective dictatorships and also against democratic governments. The level of its people-centric approach and the genuine happiness of each individual within it is the measure of its distinction (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 47–49).

In an Islamic government, each member of the ummah considers themselves rulers of society and the government. Criticizing the government is the duty of every Muslim based on the principle of public sovereignty and *Al-Amr bi al-Maruf wa'l-Nahy an al-Munkar*. This allows for the real influence and genuine will of each individual within the political and social system (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 49–50).

The Islamic government is both transnational and global. According to Moftizadeh, an Islamic government instills a spirit of sacrifice and dedication toward Muslim people in other lands. However, non-religious governments are driven by a sense of plunder, exploitation, and their own national, group, or ethnic interests. The Islamic government holds responsibility for all Muslims worldwide (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 50–52).

The ultimate characteristic of an Islamic government is its non-partisanship, people-centeredness, populism, and absence of internal differentiation. It directly engages with the masses (Muslims) without any discrimination or intermediary, and the majority of Muslim people also oversee it, participating in legislation and governance without discrimination (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 52–53).

5. Moftizadeh, the Islamic Government and Other Discourses

Moftizadeh's notion of an Islamic government, due to its emphasis on the precedence of the Islamic Council and the significance placed on the governance and will of Muslims in constructing a unified society, may differ from other similar notions among different Islamists (Euben and Zaman 2009) by being more moderate, more democratic, more inclusive, and fostering greater freedom and progress. However, the fundamental question that arises regarding his proposed model of the Islamic government, akin to many Islamists, is precisely what is meant by Islam and being a Muslim? And what are the position and rights of non-Muslims within this system? This ostensibly attractive system, claimed to surpass Western democracies, is exclusively designed for Muslim believers, providing no place for non-Muslims or the diverse forms of Islamic religiosity within it. This precisely encapsulates the totalitarian essence of modern Islamist thinkers and ideologues, meticulously outlined in various discursive traditions. Ultimately, this system aims to rescue the oppressed people from earthly tyranny by returning to the Quran and Islamic traditions. Human values such as humanity, freedom, justice, progress, prosperity, and happiness, among others, are all predetermined within this religious framework based on specific principles and preconceptions. The sole duty of Muslims is to interpret and implement these principles in various eras. However, what about those who do not adhere to this tradition or have a different conception of it? Moftizadeh straightforwardly expresses the universal desire of almost all Islamists, from the most liberal to the most fundamentalist, openly and candidly: in one of his digressions regarding various Islamic sects and denominations, he reveals that, "I wish for a day when we are all only 'Muslim,' and our way of life is solely 'Islam,' casting aside these unfamiliar and external names from the Quran and the creations of centuries of division . . ." (Moftizadeh 1979, p. 67).

Similar to many Islamists (Al-Turabi 2009; Khomeini 2005; Maududi 1977), his idea of an Islamic government and its components and characteristics is entirely abstract and ahistorical. Given the substantial intellectual overlaps with numerous prevailing thoughts within Shiite Islam, the realization of the Islamic Republic of Iran can be regarded as a yardstick for practically examining many of his ideas. In Iran's Islamist government, numerous Islamic councils have been formed, centered around specialists and adherents of Islamic teachings aligned with the criteria Moftizadeh had in mind. However, the outcome of these councils, after decades under the dominance of the Iranian Islamist regime, has resulted in extremely corrupt, undemocratic, integrity-obsessed, contaminated, and ineffective forms of governance and government. This holds true for many Islamist regimes and groups—even the most progressive ones that emerged after the Arab Spring in Islamic societies—that had the opportunity to seize power and form states. This occurs while Islamists may interpret Islam ideologically as a liberating force, an active agent for public mobilization, and as a basis for transient and superficial transformations in many Islamic societies.

On the other hand, the exclusive authority of the Shura (as both an interpretative and legislative institution as well as a leadership and executive Islamic body) in line with fundamental Islamic principles and Quranic teachings remains unclear. If a conflict arises between contemporary demands and Quranic principles, which should the Shura prioritize? Should it, like the regimes of Velayat Faqih (the Guardianship of the Faqih) designed by Ayatollah Khomeini and his advocates, ultimately prioritize the Islamist regime's interests, the authority of the Shura—and concerning the Islamic Republic of Iran, the interests of the ruling aristocratic clergies—over the demands of the public and even Quranic principles? Moftizadeh's significant response to this issue in his speech on Islamic government amplifies the ambiguity of these contradictions. Criticisms, ambiguities, and significant contradictions are identifiable in Moftizadeh's proposed model of the Islamic Council and Islamic government.

Moftizadeh, akin to many Islamists (see: Cesari 2018; Euben and Zaman 2009; Euben 1999; Ghamari-Tabrizi 2008; Kepel 2002; Lewis 1993; Ramadan 2008; Roy 1994, 2007), frames his ideal model of the Islamic government within a regime of differentiation. He fundamentally contrasts an Islamic government with Western democracy, claiming superiority in terms of its democratic criteria. However, the subject and structures of these two systems are entirely different. His comprehension of Western democratic parliaments is superficial, simplistic, ahistorical, and ideological. This abstract perception is clearly visible in the reconfiguration by various Islamists in their regimes of othering. Terms like "non-Muslim", "infidel", "modern", "Western", "the US", "colonialist", "imperialism", and others are entirely ahistorical and conceptual constructs in the minds of many of these Islamists, fashioned to justify their ideology through this alterity (Euben and Zaman 2009; Kepel 2002; Ramadan 2008; Roy 1994). Moftizadeh's critiques of the eight axes mentioned aptly highlight this issue.

Moftizadeh's critique of democracy and the institution of Western parliamentary democracy differs significantly from that of other Islamists—those who fundamentally reject democratic values and freedoms—and he does acknowledge some of the values of a democratic and parliamentary system. Moreover, he seeks to propose a more progressive and advanced model. However, his abstract model of the Shura, fraught with internal contradictions, is by no means comparable to the democratic system, which has undergone centuries of trial, error, and implementation in the real world.

As demonstrated in theoretical discussions, the Islamist discursive traditions have been articulated in contrast to many other discursive traditions. Moftizadeh's discursive traditions are precisely framed in this manner. Apart from Western democracy and global imperialism, Moftizadeh's Islamic government stands against socialism, Marxism, and nationalism. He regards the Marxist Soviet system as a symbol of collective despotism and a form of unreal and fake council, believing it, like other forms of socialism, to be profoundly inhumane and anti-religion (Moftizadeh 1979). In his other works, particularly

in the fields of Islamic treatment and education (Moftizadeh 1978b) and the monotheist economy (Tawhidi) (Moftizadeh 1978a), he endeavors to position himself by emphasizing his own perspective of the Islamic government against the dominant Marxist movements in Kurdistan.

Conversely, he directly criticizes nationalism in a generalized form, indirectly critiquing Kurdish nationalism. Although he advocated for a distinctive council for Iranian Kurdistan and its relative independence, he believed that by centralizing an Islamic government, the gradual elimination of economic, cultural, and political distinctions and discriminations would occur, forming a unified Islamic nation in Iran. He introduces nationalism as a form of prioritizing the internal border in distinguishing between Islamic and non-Islamic governments, describing a political regime wherein self-absorption in geographical and national terms prevails, and their fundamental logic in international systems, both in times of peace and war, involves some form of exploitation and imposition upon other societies. In these governments, land, or an inhuman variable, defines the behavior and decision making of nations. However, in his view, an Islamic government fundamentally disregards geographical borders and national territories. This government embodies a worldwide Muslim community where Islam and humanity are the fundamental, unified essence. However, earthly tyrannical governments have divided territories through political-geographical walls, creating divisions among people due to the exploitation of their forces, subjecting them to compliance with these divisions in various large and small external and conflicting entities. These artificial delineations have manifested in numerous divisions based on nationality, race, religion, and social classes. Consequently, according to Moftizadeh's belief, after the establishment of an Islamic society, the triple social injustices, namely class-based, religious, and national (and ethnic) oppressions, dissipate, paving the way for the creation of an Islamic cosmopolitan society (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 50–52).

In various speeches, Moftizadeh critiques traditional Islam and the conservative approach to Islam, akin to many other Islamists (Euben and Zaman 2009; Qutb 1990). For instance, in some instances, he attributes the unawareness of the political and social capacities of Islam, even among religious scholars and clerics, to the dominance of traditional Islam (Moftizadeh 1979). Conversely, at other times, he vehemently criticizes and challenges the notion that the involvement of Islam and scholars in politics leads to corruption and the decadence of religion (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 66–67). Throughout his diverse works, he extensively criticizes the prevalent traditional Islam in Kurdistan—which was dominant among traditional Kurdish mullas, Moftis, or clerics and religious circles at that time, embroiled in a conservative interpretation primarily based on literal and jurisprudential aspects of religion, emphasizing the necessity for a contemporary but provisional interpretation of religion to suit contemporary circumstances. He opposes even the modernists in this context. Additionally, he believes that the Quran has established all the necessary principles and measures for life in all circumstances. He advocates that Muslims should extract and deduce specific laws and rules for contemporary issues and events. However, these laws are provisional as they are derived from imperfect humans. Hence, according to him, it is not the Sharia but the Quran that embodies the Islamic law and constitution of a Muslim society. Laws are formulated temporarily based on our historical capacities and our contemporary needs by an Islamic council, subject to change over time. Therefore, the Quran and the Sunnah take precedence over contemporary affairs, not the other way around (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 111–13).

In line with some Islamists (Euben and Zaman 2009), Moftizadeh strongly criticizes Sufism (here, primarily the Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya orders were present in Kurdistan) and Islamic mystics. He believes that the decline of true Islam and, consequently, people's inability to confront the tyranny of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties led to the emergence of Sufism. In such circumstances, people were trapped in a dual situation: they lacked the power to resist the Umayyads and were unwilling to compromise their faith by collaborating with oppressors. As a result, they chose seclusion and escaped from power, leading to religious introversion and the rise of various forms of Sufism within

Islam. Initially, the fusion of Eastern and Western Sufi sources became a diversion for Muslims, justifying their isolation and avoidance of responsibility at the hands of oppressors while soothing their consciences. Gradually, Sufism became so entrenched that it became an objective and aspiration for many Muslims, even posing a serious threat to the main principles of Islam. At this stage, mysticism and Sufism became an even more serious threat than monarchy in the Islamic world. The oppressors (mūtrifin) themselves attempted to enrich and reinforce Sufism to render religion passive in politics and control its active role, aiming to flourish it throughout the Islamic world (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 65–66).

Ultimately, similar to some Islamists (Euben and Zaman 2009), Moftizadeh is a severe critic of Islamic clerics, mullahs, religious authorities, and Ulama. In Moftizadeh's Islamic government, ulama and clerics do not hold any specific positions. They have a place among other religious specialists. He completely rejects their intermediation in interpreting sacred texts, emphasizing direct reference to and interpretation of the Quran and Islamic tradition. He was one of the most serious critics of the concept of "Guardianship of the Jurist" introduced by Ayatollah Khomeini, viewing it as synonymous with the dictatorship of the Ulama (Faqih) and another form of the Pahlavi dictatorship. In his criticism of Islamic denominations and jurisprudential schools, he explicitly declares his radical critique of clerics and Ulama. He considers Islamic jurisprudence and sects as a form of false religiosity that has led to division and deviation in Islamic history. According to him, these juristic and theological games are entirely contradictory to the essence of true Islam and Quranic teachings, resulting in both the passivity and deviation of Islam and the creation of a false authority system within the vast and longstanding clerical and mercenary apparatus, under the guise of religious ulama and clerics, who claim exclusive authority in understanding the traditions and religious texts (Moftizadeh 1979, pp. 72–74). His emphasis remains on direct and mass reference to the authentic teachings of Islam and the Quran based on contemporary conditions. That is precisely why he named his religious schools in Iranian Kurdistan the "Maktab Quran" (the School of Quran), emphasizing a direct reference to the Quran's teachings and principles.

6. Conclusions

The extensive studies on the political implications of Islam, while providing valuable insights, have not provided a definitive understanding of the complex reality within Muslim societies. The multitude of interpretations, ideologies, and historical developments make it challenging to grasp the true nature of political Islam. Therefore, there is a pressing need for theoretical interrogation and conceptual innovation to navigate this complex landscape. One approach that holds promise is the examination of political Islam as a discursive tradition. The concept of discursive tradition offers a framework for understanding the diverse and evolving nature of Islamist thought in different times and spaces. By analyzing the historical references, competing narratives, and intellectual debates within the discursive tradition, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of political Islam. This theoretical lens can contribute to addressing the existing challenges in the scholarship of Islam and provide a more nuanced perspective on the multifaceted nature of political Islam.

Applying this lens to the case of Islamism in Kurdistan reveals the significance of Ahmad Moftizadeh and his Islamist thought. Moftizadeh's rejection of dominant ideologies and currents in his era and his emphasis on Islamic principles like the Islamic government and the Shura distinguish his thinking within the broader Islamist landscape. His establishment of the Maktab Quran and his writings on Islam, politics, and Kurdistan have played a pivotal role in shaping the development of an Islamist discourse in Kurdistan. Moftizadeh's Islamist thought and his idea of Islamic government offered a unique perspective that challenges traditional clerical Islam, the authority of Ulama, and the passive religion of Sufism, as well as nationalist and Marxist ideologies, through a distinct regime of reference to the Islamic tradition and a special conception of Islam.

The framing of political Islam by Moftizadeh aptly demonstrates the features of political Islam as a discursive tradition. Within the Islamic world, Islamic government is a nodal point within different Islamist discursive traditions. Moftizadeh formulated the idea of an Islamic government around the category of “the Shura” within Islamic tradition. Other Islamic thinkers have articulated various ideas of Islamic government based on diverse references to Islamic tradition, serving as foundational ideologies for the formation of various Islamist regimes. These regimes range from the different forms of Islamist ruling regimes such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, centered around the absolute authority of the Guardianship of the Faqih (Vali faqih), the Islamic emirate in Afghanistan, the Wahhabi governance in Saudi Arabia, to terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, Hamas, Al Shabab, and numerous other Islamist parties and groups worldwide. Within the discursive traditions of Islamist thought, one can also discern different articulations around other themes with different conceptions, such as gender, ethnicity, the body, non-Muslims, jihad, progress, justice, and more, all referenced to Islamic tradition and interpretation. These diverse articulations of political Islam around the category of Islamic government can be considered facets within a discursive tradition, showcasing the complexity, multidimensionality, and ambiguity of political Islam, especially regarding both the Islamic tradition and the historical context of its articulation.

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