

HAMARTIA: FOUCAULT AND IRAN 1978–1979

(2: SCHOLARSHIP AND SIGNIFICANCE)

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Attribution License.**ABSTRACT**

Against the backdrop of the introduction and analysis of Foucault's Iran writings in the first of two articles, this second article attempts to contribute to an understanding of Foucault's involvement in the revolution in Iran (1978–1979) by 1) employing the concluding suggestions in the first article as premises for 2) an analysis of three explicit contributions (Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson, Ian Almond, and Danny Postel) that have been made recently on this traditionally neglected issue in Foucault scholarship, 3) and, via the notion of an 'ethics of Self-discomfort', arguing for an acknowledgement of the philosophical significance of Foucault's involvement in Iran and his writings from that period.

INTRODUCTION: FOUCAULT SCHOLARSHIP AND 9/11

Against the backdrop of the introduction, contextualisation and discussion of Foucault's Iran writings in the preceding¹ article, I will, in this second article, attempt to move closer to a nuanced understanding of Foucault's presumed *hamartia* regarding his involvement in the Iran revolution of 1978–1979, by engaging three recent secondary texts on the basis of the suggestions or preliminary conclusions in the first article (Beukes 2009). I will therefore use those suggestions² as implicit premises for the analysis and evaluation of these secondary texts, eventually moving toward a rehabilitation of Foucault's unique philosophical grace, via the notion of an 'ethics of Self-discomfort'.

Normally one would not isolate secondary texts in this fashion, except in the case of a review article proper. Yet exactly because this theme has been so understated in the scholarship for more than 20 years, before the events of 9/11 urgently re-introduced the issue of Western Otherness, the avalanche of publications revealing an intense interest in the possible significance of Foucault's modern-critical interpretation of the revolution in Iran 1978–1979 should be considered remarkable. Apart from the introductory remarks and broad orientation provided by Foucault's three pivotal biographers of the 1990s, namely Didier Eribon, James Miller and David Macey, as presented in the first article, I was able to isolate in the archives only two English articles from the period 1979–1998, both addressing Foucault's involvement in Iran on a sober and informative level, not essentially getting into the philosophical intricacies as such (Keating 1997; Stauth 1991).

In 1998 Michiel Leezenberg's groundbreaking article, *Power and political spirituality: Michel Foucault on the Islamic revolution in Iran*, was published (and republished in 2004). It was the first article to thoroughly address the philosophical basis of Foucault's involvement in Iran, on the basis of Leezenberg's exegesis of the notion of 'political spirituality' in Foucault's Iran writings. Yet it was only after 9/11 that the importance of Leezenberg's article manifested itself. Before Leezenberg's 1998 publication, the scholarship, in the English language, only had the relevant sections in the three pivotal biographies and the two sober articles of Stauth and Keating at its disposal. I could not find a single monography on Foucault or a broader Foucault-study in the English language, published after 2002, which did not dedicate a separate section or chapter on Foucault and Iran – and there are quite a few, Afary and Anderson (2005), Postel (2006), Paras (2006), Bernauer (2004) and Leezenberg (2004) being the most prominent examples. What clearly was a source of discomfort and possibly embarrassment in the scholarship for two decades, up to the first publication of Leezenberg's article in 1998, has evidently become a central theme in contemporary Foucault reception. The Iran issue is an open nerve in Foucault scholarship.

1. The leading questions remains: What was Michel Foucault, possibly the most famous European philosopher during the 1970s, trying to achieve in Iran in 1978–1979 as a political journalist, explicitly supporting the cause of the revolting masses, effectively isolating himself from the European intellectual community and Western liberal tradition in the process? Still reflecting on this question, I will attempt to deepen the understanding of and contribute to the debate in Foucault scholarship surrounding the Iran issue. I will discuss the contributions in Foucault research that dealt with this problem over the past five years, a problem which had been largely neglected in the scholarship for more than two decades, juxtaposing these contributions with and weighing them with regard to ten suggestions which were presented as preliminary conclusions from the primary texts in the first article (Beukes 2009). I have isolated three secondary texts, each with a unique perspective on the issue: Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson (2004; 2005), from a predominantly feminist perspective, Ian Almond (2004; 2007), from his critique of 'postmodernism and the new Orientalism', and Danny Postel (2006), re-engaging the issue from within the broader political environment and intellectual landscape in 21st-century Iran.

2. Here follows a condensation of those ten suggestions. I will refer to them in the main text merely as P1 to P10.

Premise 1 (P1): Foucault explicitly supported the cause of the revolting masses in Iran in 1978 on modern-critical grounds.

Premise 2 (P2): Foucault clearly did not foresee nor did he endorse Khomeini's understanding and implementation of what an 'Islamic republic' should be.

Premise 3 (P3): Foucault was justifiably being held accountable by his critics in France for a naive perspective on the vicious potential embedded in any religious fundamentalism.

Premise 4 (P4): Foucault had no clear philosophical objectives for his journalistic expedition.

Premise 5 (P5): Foucault appreciated the spontaneous eruption of resistance in Iran.

Premise 6 (P6): Foucault was fascinated by the violent confrontation with identity.

Premise 7 (P7): Foucault was intrigued by the possibility of a political alternative.

Premise 8 (P8): Foucault compromised his philosophical position by not engaging the legitimate critique of subjects who were systematically crushed as the revolution unfolded.

Premise (P9): Foucault underestimated the hostility with which his reports would be received.

Premise 10 (P10): Foucault's journalistic expedition harmed his reputation.

The events in New York and Washington (and US airspace) on 11 September 2001 were horrible 'in an unmediated sense' (Beukes 2005:1103). Afary and Anderson (2005:167–168) describe the grotesque nature of the event:

Three thousand civilians were killed in those two central spheres of government at the core of the world's remaining monolith, the United States. The events indicated a new stage reached by Islamic terrorism, which until 2001 had succeeded in attacking mainly outposts of the US, with the exception of the relatively low-impact bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993.

(Afary & Anderson 2005:167–168)

The second Bush administration utilised this horrific challenge posed by a secretive and very much non-connected faction in radical Islam, Al Qaeda, to implement its own conservative agenda, with what it called ...

a "global war on terrorism", initiating a level of unparalleled military and "homeland security" build-up, resulting in massive arrests of Muslims in the US (and elsewhere) and a second, aggressively-unilateralist war on the decidedly non-Islamic regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, after swiftly dismantling the Taliban in Afghanistan; undermining in the process a broad contra Al Qaeda alliance; estranging partners such as the majority of countries in Western and Northern Europe, Japan, Russia, China and India and especially its more reluctant partners, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and several other Middle Eastern governments.

(Afary & Anderson 2005:167–168)

This second war on and for several years now in Iraq outraged the Muslim world, fortifying the ranks of radical Islam – radical Islam, both Sunni and Shi'ite, has flourished in Iraq since 2003 (for an elaboration, see Afary & Anderson 2005:168).

Until the events of 9/11, the rise of radical Islam had received little attention from the Western liberal tradition, because leftists have always been unsure what to make of the radical kind of anti-imperialism in those radical Islamic structures (far more radical anti-imperialist than the Marxist Left ever was), unsure what to make of its rejection of Western culture whilst the technological advantages of this culture were being retained (as Foucault's reflections on the Iranian army in September 1978 and the 'cassette tape culture' signifies – Beukes 2009), unsure what to make of the unique kind of 'archaic fascism' in its ranks (Rodinson 2005:268), a fascism very far removed from Leftist discourse. Some anti-imperialists, in my mind, were furthering highly suspect culture-critical claims in their interpretations of the events of 9/11: In 2005, I have argued strongly against what I consider to be the glorification of pure and simple terrorism found in the later works of Jean Baudrillard, and in the works of other anti-imperialists such as Paul Virilio and Slavoj Žižek who, in their attempt to find an anti-globalist premise and an 'aesthetic-sacrificial basis' for the attacks, expressed what I described as a 'morbid, tragic and deeply unphilosophical admiration' for the terrorists (Beukes 2005:1111, 1114).

From the open-sphered reflections of modern-critical philosophy there must be another way – a way pertinently different from, on the one hand, the interventionist policies of the US government in the post-9/11 years, with all the quasi-intellectual speculation provided by its exponents of 'neo-conservative liberalism', and on the other hand, the Baudrillardian kind of anti-imperialism, which devastates, in my mind, the appeal of intellectual responsibility and philosophical ardour I find characteristic of Western philosophy, from Aristotle to Boethius to Gadamer. Indeed, in a time when religion seems more than ever to be inseparable from politics, Foucault's perspectives on power, revolt, Otherness, 'political spirituality' and an 'ethics of Self-discomfort' may provide us with at least some beacons in our search for that illusive other way.

Overview of the scholarship

Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson's natural dissidents of the revolution

Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson's³ groundbreaking book on Foucault in Iran, *Foucault and the Iranian revolution: Gender and*

the seductions of Islamism (2005), constitutes an outstanding contribution to Foucault research, on at least four levels: Firstly, it provides the scholarship with the most thorough account yet of the prologue to Foucault's expeditions to Iran, the expeditions itself and the immediate aftermath of those expeditions (Afary & Anderson 2005:38–68, 69, 105–137; cf. Amsler's review 2006:521). Secondly, it provides the first systematic overview, analysis and annotation of all of Foucault's Iran writings, embedding them with skill and erudition into the broader Foucauldian corpus. Thirdly, for the very first time, Foucault's Iran writings were translated into English and annotated *in toto* by the authors (and Karen de Bruin) and presented in one single compilation. Because only three of Foucault's final fifteen articles on the Iranian Revolution (and none of his interviews with exiles, mullahs and demonstrators) had appeared in English before Afary and Anderson (2005:181–277) translated and republished all of the articles and many of the interviews, they have in the previous two decades generated little discussion in the English-speaking world. Apart from the biographies of Eribon, Miller and Macey as discussed in the first article (Beukes 2009), elsewhere in the English-speaking world, where Foucault's writings on Iran have only been translated in fragments and the French responses to him at the time have not been translated at all, his Iran excursion and the writings stemming from this excursion have been severely understated (see Afary & Anderson 2005:7–9). Fourthly, again for the first time, Foucault's Iran writings are challenged by a feminist reading.

The book consists of two parts: The first part, 'Foucault's discourse: On pinnacles and pitfalls' (Afary & Anderson 2005:13–68), provides an introduction to Foucault's thought, specifically those elements in his philosophy that would again manifest itself in his Iran writings, while the second part, 'Foucault's writings on the Iranian revolution and after', provides a thorough investigation into Foucault's preparation for his Iran visits, the visits themselves as well as the immediate aftermath of the visits, employing several feminist motives in their reading of the events (with the pseudonymed Iranian feminist 'Atoussa H' and the revered Marxist scholar Maxime Rodinson being their most prominent discursive informants), concluding with the translation and annotation of all Foucault's Iran writings, as well as the translation of several of his critics' reactions to those writings.⁴

Concurring that Foucault's philosophical approach to the Iran affair was vague (Afary & Anderson 2005:2–7; P4), the authors do note the clarity of Foucault and the Islamist movement in Iran's relation, in their sharing three distinct passions: (1) an opposition to the imperialist and colonialist policies of the West; (2) a rejection of certain cultural and social aspects of modernity that had transformed social hierarchies in both the East and the West; and (3) the notion of a 'political spirituality' – Foucault recognising the Iranian public's fascination with the seemingly archaic rituals of Shi'ite Islam and being intrigued, if not 'intoxicated' and 'infatuated', by the active participation of clerics in the revolt and the use of religious processions and rituals for ostensibly political concerns (Afary & Anderson 2005:39; see 36, 84). Against the backdrop of these passions, the authors would probably concur with my suggestions (P1, P7) that Foucault's support for the revolting masses should be understood as modern-critical in orientation and that Foucault was intrigued by the nature of the 'political spirituality' that he was convinced was sustaining an alternative absolutely other to

3. Janet Afary is Associate Professor in the Departments of History and Women's Studies at Purdue University. She is also the author of *Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911* and President of the International Society of Iranian Studies. Kevin B. Anderson is associate professor of Political Science and Sociology at Purdue University and also the author of *Lenin, Hegel and Western Marxism: a critical study*.

4. Afary and Anderson's perspectives on Foucault's disposition towards the Iran events are original and gripping: their work reflects clarity of thought and meticulous research into the Foucault archives. Afary and Anderson did the scholarship an immense service by publishing this book: they have provided a register for reference which will stand up to intense scrutiny. Postel (2006:60) is correct when he states that this book can be 'expected to generate a torrent of discussion, debate, reconsideration and intellectual fireworks'.

liberal democracy. But they go further – in my view possibly too far⁵ – arguing that Foucault’s view of the revolution is indeed integrally related to his one-sided hostility to modernity, that his Iran writings in its modern-critical one-sidedness actually raise questions about his overall approach to modernity (Afary & Anderson 2005:6–8). Foucault’s infamous suspicion of utopianism, his hostility to grand narratives and universals and his stress on difference, particularity and singularity rather than totality, would make him less prone, one could reasonably assume, to romanticise any authoritarian politics that promised to refashion ‘from above’ the lives and thought of a people, for their own benefit. However, Afary and Anderson are convinced that Foucault’s Iran writings indicate that he was not immune to the type of illusions that so many Western leftists had held with regard to the Soviet Union and China – although he documented its ‘birth’ in Iran, he himself did not anticipate the birth of yet another modern state where old (religious) technologies of domination could be refashioned and re-institutionalised, and he did not realise how explosive the combination of a traditionalist ideology and modern technologies of organisation, surveillance, warfare and propaganda would be in the end.⁶ They suggest (Afary & Anderson 2005:36, 124) that Foucault’s peculiar Orientalism would have to carry some of the blame in this regard, in the sense that Foucault privileged an idealised, pre-modern past – the period of early Islam – over modernity; his denial of any social or political differentiation among the Iranian people bearing witness to this ‘breathtaking’ error. Afary and Anderson therefore construct a picture of Foucault as not just an anti-modernist, but as a defender of traditional societies: in all his major works, in terms of their reception, Foucault describes the visible improvements of modernising reform as less appealing than what they displaced. I am not

convinced that Foucault’s intense critique of modernity in any way implied that he would uncritically privilege pre-modern societies in his discourse. Again, I think the authors take Foucault to extremes. Foucault was willing to rehabilitate pre-modern notions: In the specific context of contra-modernity, Foucault in this rehabilitating fashion argued for the revival of ‘political spirituality’. In other words: Foucault does not go back, he brings back. He was convinced that some resources of past and present cultures could be utilised strategically and selectively to invigorate the consumed resources of modernity (see Foucault 1991:82). But Afary and Anderson are otherwise correct in their interpretation that Foucault was fascinated by the revolution, not just because it was a challenge to repression or to American imperialism, but because it was an attempt to open a spiritual dimension in politics.

Other Foucault scholars also see promise in his turn toward a ‘political spirituality’. James Bernauer, a Jesuit priest and respected Foucault scholar who teaches philosophy at Boston College and has written several books on Foucault and theology, regards Foucault’s embrace of spirituality as a resource for thinking about how to integrate politics and religion (see Bernauer 2004:77–97).

Religious discourse has an enormous power to move people to take action, to see beyond their immediate self-interest: And Foucault had an ability to see this, to see past the pervasive secularism of French intellectual life, that was quite remarkable. For better or worse, political spirituality is with us, and Foucault was one who helped us to focus our sights on it.

(Bernauer, cited in Yang 2006:D4)

Afary and Anderson’s whole book bears testimony to the validity of my suggestion (P8) that Foucault compromised his philosophical position by not engaging the legitimate critique of subjects who were systematically crushed as the revolution unfolded, especially, for Afary and Anderson, women. Employing ‘Atoussa H’ as their silent and guiding informant (Afary & Anderson 2005:91–94, 142, 181, 209–210), the authors indicate just how far Foucault was removed from understanding what the revolt would hold for the natural dissidents of the revolution, namely women, homosexuals and secularists in general. They argue that Foucault had a highly problematic relationship to feminism, which to them is an intrinsic problem in his philosophy. Foucault never questioned the ‘separate, but equal’ message of the revolutionaries. Foucault explicitly dismissed feminist premonitions that the revolution was headed in a dangerous direction. He seemed to regard such warnings as nothing more than Orientalist attacks on Islam, thereby accentuating his own peculiar Orientalism, compromising a balanced perspective on the revolution (Afary & Anderson 2005:5, 36). More generally, Foucault remained insensitive towards the many ways in which state power affected women, ignoring the fact that those most wounded by (pre-modern) disciplinary practices were often women and children, who were oppressed in the name of tradition, obligation or honour.

Using the letter of ‘Atoussa H’ (1978:209) in her response to Foucault’s support for the revolution as their compass, Afary and Anderson (2005:26–27, 93, 109, 132) argue that there is very little in Foucault’s writings on women or women’s rights – yet at the same time, his ambiguous and often dismissive attitude toward feminism notwithstanding, his theoretical writings on power as ‘everywhere’ had an immense influence on a whole generation of feminist academics, inspiring them via his technologies of the Self not to view women as ‘powerless and innocent victims of patriarchal social structures’ (Afary & Anderson 2005:27). Foucault himself never addressed feminist concerns though, or gay liberation in general, revealing a clinical detachment that for the authors was grounded in a ‘covert androcentricity’ (Afary & Anderson 2005:27). The plight of women and homosexuals is something he glossed over, not only in Iran, but in his work in general (Afary & Anderson 2005:27). That is the reason the authors isolate Foucault’s quick willingness to accept assurances

5. I have to state outright that I find no traces of the four popular myths Esposito (2005:350) discerned in Western responses to the revolution, in Foucault’s Iran writings (namely, that the revolution was 1] narrowly, exclusively religious, 2] that it was, before and after, confused and disorganised, 3] that it followed a predictable, unsophisticatedly religious course, and 4] that there were no Iranian moderates). I do not think that Afary and Anderson give Foucault sufficient credit for the originality of his contra-modern, contra-Western perspectives on the revolution – Foucault did not conform to these Western myths and the Occidental mythmaking about the revolution at the time. In an otherwise balanced and illuminating article, Jonathan Rée (2005:46) throws the gauntlet at Afary and Anderson, exactly for ‘going too far’, accusing them of skewing Foucault, stating about their book that ‘one could hardly have asked for more – one might have asked for less, however’. I do not agree with Rée’s hostile reception of the book: Afary and Anderson’s tone is moderate and their judgements – although arguable in some cases in the sense that they indeed take their reception of Foucault in my opinion to too many polemic heights – are plausible, credible and not extreme in any sense of the word. I consider Rée’s critique important though, because it brings balance into the reception, from a loyalist viewpoint in particular. I therefore quote him at length: ‘(Afary and Anderson’s) summaries of Foucault’s achievements are consistently hostile and tendentious. Noting that he was skeptical about self-congratulatory Western narratives of progress and modernisation, they make the preposterous assertion that “Foucault privileged premodern social relations over modern ones” ... Having constructed an imaginary Foucault intoxicated by “authenticity”, “creativity” and “living dangerously” – notions that have no place in his work except as butts of his teasing paradoxes – Afary and Anderson offer their readers the astonishing assurance that “Foucault’s concept of authenticity meant looking at situations where people lived dangerously and flirted with death, the site where creativity originated”. And having transformed the gentle apostle of radiant uncertainty into a philosophical version of Charles Manson, they credit him with an “uncritical enthusiasm for the Islamist movement of Iran” ... Foucault’s quizzical mixture of excitement and disappointment over Iran, together with his perceptive remarks about corruption as a political issue and the recrudescence of political spirituality in the Muslim world, are passed over in silence as Afary and Anderson condemn him for an “uncritical embrace” of Islamism and try to explain it in terms of a kinky fascination with “limit experiences”, “new forms of creativity” and even (yes, they are serious) the “transgressive powers” of Ayatollah Khomeini ... (Although they) have spent ten years working on their book, it has not been a labor of love ...’ (Rée 2005:46). I am of the opinion that this preoccupation with death, marginality, transgression and ‘living dangerously’ was characteristic of Foucault’s philosophical disposition, as Miller (1993) convincingly argued and Afary and Anderson (2005:23–24, 34, 39, 50, 201, 259) merely emphasised, in a confirmation of my suggestion (P6) that Foucault was convinced that he was witnessing in the streets of Tehran those kind of irrationalities that, for him, would break new boundaries in the understanding of subjectivity.

6. ‘We suggest that Foucault’s Iran writings reveal, albeit in exaggerated form, some problems in his overall perspective, especially its one-sided critique of modernity. In this sense, the Iran writings contribute something important to our understanding of this major social philosopher.’ (Afary & Anderson 2004:3) ‘We think of Foucault as this very cool, unsentimental thinker who would be immune to the revolutionary romanticism that has overtaken intellectuals who covered up Stalin’s atrocities or Mao’s ... but in this case, he abandoned much of his critical perspective in his intoxication with what he saw in Iran. Here was a great philosopher of difference who looked around him in Iran and everywhere saw unanimity’ (Anderson, cited in Yang 2005:D4).

of the revolutionaries regarding the 'separate, but equal' status of these subjects in a new dispensation. In all of his Iran writings, Foucault only once referred to the plight of women, and then only after Khomeini's bloodbath had started to manifest itself in March 1979 (Foucault 1979b:265), and in 'an offhand, almost grudging acknowledgement' (Afary & Anderson 2005:132), even then seemingly offended, even slightly amazed (P9) that his position caused women to take offence. The authors conclude that Foucault's unwillingness to engage the plight and legitimate critique of women and homosexuals (as well as secularists) who were crushed as the revolution unfolded is an intrinsic problem in his work, not restricted to his Iran writings. That is why the authors consider it to be of logical consequence (P3) that Foucault was unable or unwilling to penetrate the repressive dynamics of the religious fundamentalism underlying the revolutionary movement: the consequences on the real, lived lives of the oppressed left him cold (Afary & Anderson 2005:39).

Afary and Anderson's analysis confirms the suggestion (P5) that Foucault appreciated the masses' resistance to established power and the way the dissemination of information assisted the momentum of the revolution. They actually mark it as one of Foucault's 'astute observations' about the revolution, that this seemingly anti-modern movement was heavily dependent on modern means of communication to disseminate its ideas; that, in this regard, a blending of tradition and modernity, of modern means of communication with centuries-old religious convictions and rituals, made it possible to paralyse the modern authoritarian police state of the Shah (Afary & Anderson 2005:98).

The authors have no doubt that Foucault's Iran expedition and the writings that bear witness to that expedition estranged him from the intellectual community in which he was a central and leading figure during the 1970s, and that the incident harmed his reputation irrevocably (P10; Afary & Anderson 2005:121; see 2005:111–127). Foucault was estranged from former theoretical allies, colleagues, feminists and co-activists such as Kate Millet (111), who wrote a 330-page memoir on the affair of Foucault, women and Iran, Claudine Mollard (113), Laya Dunayevskaya (115–116), Simone de Beauvoir (114), Claire Brière and Pierre Blanchet (121–125), Jean Lacouture (127), Bernard Ullmann (127), Pierre Manent (127), and of course, the Broyelles (118–120, 182, 247–250).

It is only on the issue of Foucault's support for the revolution, initially, and the support for Khomeini, eventually – which I described (Beukes 2008:24) as 'ironising', as Foucault 'not being mesmerised', because the horizontal organisation of Shi'ite clergy in his mind would not have allowed the sanctification of one single 'super mullah' (although I did concede that Foucault was in general uncritical of Khomeini and overburdened his critique of modernity in the process) – that Afary and Anderson's reception and my own seem to differ (P2). Afary and Anderson are clear in their conviction that there is no distinction to be made between Foucault's support for the revolting masses and his support for Khomeini, however implicit the support for the latter might have been. For Afary and Anderson, Khomeini became for Foucault the personification of Nietzsche's will to power, a ruthless historical figure with 'saintly self-mastery', the perfect example of going beyond Nietzsche's 'ascetic (Christian) priest' (Afary & Anderson 2005:14, 36–37). I consider this part of their reception as eisegetical since the primary texts themselves do not give the impression that Foucault held this kind of Nietzschean perspective on Khomeini: as the only brief and unfruitful meeting between Foucault and Khomeini indicates (Beukes 2008:24, see Eribon 1991:286), there is in my view nothing Nietzschean to be read in Foucault's perspective on Khomeini, neither as a person, nor as the 'leader of the revolt'. In my opinion, Foucault's perspectives on Khomeini, however uncritical, and his support for the revolution should be kept apart as far as possible.

In summary: Afary and Anderson, in their magnificent contribution to Foucault research, conclude that Foucault, with his comments and writings on Iran, 'had isolated a unique and problematic position for himself' (Afary & Anderson 2005:105). Although they accept Foucault's observations as penetrating and unique from a modern-critical perspective and concur with his notion of 'political spirituality' – which indicated that the movement against the Shah included many diverse elements, not only social or political in orientation, but 'spiritual' and religious as well, even dominantly so – they maintain that Foucault was annexed by the persona of Khomeini, that he found Khomeini's ability to maintain the anti-Shah focus intriguing, to the point of uncritical adoration. They acknowledge Foucault's insight into the dissemination of knowledge in Iran, that he anticipated the revolution to have a global reach through its use of modern means of communication. They acknowledge that Foucault's philosophical position was modern-critical, that he rejoiced in the revolution because he interpreted it as a rejection of the spirit of Enlightenment, a European form of modernity; that he hoped that the 'madness' of the revolt would break new boundaries for understanding subjectivity, transgressing the fixed cultural and political positions of 'rational modernity'. This focus led him to an unconcerned position regarding the way Islamic radicalism displaced liberal ideas on the state and the individual.

Ian Almond and Foucault's Occident/Orient

Ian Almond's⁷ fascinating contribution to Foucault research on the Iran issue, *The new Orientalists – Postmodern representations of Islam from Foucault to Baudrillard* (2007),⁸ investigates the West's Orientalism – its construction of an Arab or Islamic Other – as manifested in the works some of the most profound thinkers of the past century: Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, Borges, Kristeva and others. Almond shows how post-modern thinkers over the past decades employed motifs and symbols of the Islamic Orient, its alterity and anachronisms, within their attempted critique and relocation of modernity (Almond 2007:2). However – and this is where Almond radically dissects the post-modern discourse – these thinkers present to him a new and more insidious Orientalist strain – an argumentative notion which resonates with what I, alongside Afary and Anderson, have already referred to as Foucault's 'peculiar Orientalism'. I find Almond's analysis important because it sheds light on my often-repeated depiction of Foucault in Iran as 'a self-conscious Greek in Persia'. It is furthermore of paramount importance to my own perspective on the relation between Foucault's critique of modernity and Islam, which I will present in the last section of this article as a Nietzschean 'ethics of Self-discomfort', that Almond embeds Foucault's Orientalism in a Nietzschean context.

Crucial then for us is Almond's reading of Nietzsche and the Orient: He indicates that although a wealth of studies exist on Nietzsche and the 'high Orient' (to use Edward Said's famous distinction between the 'high and low Orient', the 'high Orient' indicating the established and well-published documentation of Nietzsche's relation to themes in Buddhism, Hinduism, Japanese and Chinese philosophy), not a single monography exists on the subject of Nietzsche and the 'low Orient' (Islamic cultures), although more than a hundred references to Hafiz, Arabs and Turks are to be found in the many volumes of Colli and Montinari's *Nietzsche Studien* (Almond 2007:7–8), for scholars

7. Ian Almond was until recently Associate Professor of English Literature at Bosphorus University, Istanbul, Turkey and currently teaches English and American Literature at the Europa-Universität-Viadrina (Frankfurt Oder) and the Freie Universität (Berlin). He is also the author of *Sufism and Deconstruction: a comparative study of Derrida and Ibn'Arabia* (2004) and *History of Islam in German thought: from Leibniz to Nietzsche* (forthcoming 2009).

8. See the sections on Nietzsche (Almond 2007:7–21, 'Nietzsche's peace with Islam') and Foucault 'Foucault's Iran and the madness of Islam' (Almond 2007:22–41, 'Foucault's Iran and the madness of Islam'), which is a reworked version of an earlier article, 'The madness of Islam: Foucault's Occident and the revolution in Iran' (Almond 2004).

the standardised collection of Nietzsche's writings. Almond (2007:8) argues that Islam, for Nietzsche an 'affirmative Semitic religion', forever hovers in the back of Nietzsche's writings. And it was progressive: Nietzsche's *Der Antichrist*, his last finished work, devotes more attention to 'these enemies of the Crusades' (Almond 2007:8) than any of his other works.

According to Almond (2007:8), there are at least two reasons for Nietzsche's 'inordinate' and generally sympathetic interest in Islam: Firstly, Islam provided for Nietzsche a criterion for establishing difference, a system of alternative customs and beliefs well-equipped to undermine the universalist claims of both European Christianity and modernity, fulfilling the desire for the acquisition of a 'trans-European eye' which would relieve Europeans from their short-sightedness or *greisenhaften Kurzsichtigkeit* (Almond 2007:8); secondly, it departs from Nietzsche's infamous *Selbsthass*, his contempt for German culture, his discomfort with the Self, the limitedness of the Self and the own position, identity, perspective, inclination and so on (Almond 2007:9). This notion of self-interruption and self-critique, as we have seen, played a vital role in Foucault's radiation of uncertainty about the philosophical nature of his Iran endeavour, and I hope to represent it in a fruitful way in the last section of this article.

Almond cuts deeply into Nietzsche's texts, showing that Nietzsche's favourable disposition towards Islam stems from the fact that it is 'less modern' – less emancipated, less Enlightened, less democratic – leading Almond to isolate four categories of Nietzsche's appropriation of Islam for his critique of modernity: 1) Islam's 'un-Enlightened condition', with all its social consequences for issues of equality; 2) its perceived masculinity, or to use a more manly word, its 'manliness'; 3) its perceived non-judgementalism; 4) and its affirmative character, leading Nietzsche to consider Islamic cultures, alongside the Roman, Japanese, Homeric and Scandinavian cultures, as 'more honest' cultures, purer – not weakened by the *ressentiment* of Christianity and its influence on the West's self-understanding, in other words, not weakened by the life-denying values of chastity, meekness and equality, which he considered to be typical of the Occident (Almond 2007:9–10). Intriguingly, Almond disseminates every one of these four categories of Nietzsche's appropriation of Islam as 'more honest and pure', showing that Nietzsche followed exactly the same logic as those of generations of European Orientalists before him, who again and again fixated on medieval Islam in their interpretations, characterising Islam as incapable of democracy, as fanatical, as socially unjust, as combative and antagonistic. The only difference between Nietzsche and the Orientalists who preceded him is that he affirms these prejudices instead of lamenting them (Almond 2007:10–21). His Orientalism just features on a meta-level.

But Almond shows that Nietzsche did differ from his Orientalist predecessors in one important sense, namely that he sympathetically viewed Islam as a 'pool of signs' to employ in his critique of modernity, using Islamic imagery in uniquely self-serving, modern-critical terms (Almond 2007:21). According to Almond, in an eloquent and analytical affirmation of my suggestion (P1), which was based solely on Foucault's Iran writings, it is precisely this self-serving attitude which characterised Foucault's perspective on the events in Iran in 1978–1979 as events that should be understood according to modern-critical considerations: the uniqueness of Nietzsche's Orientalism is thereby repeated, if not broadened. The complexity of Foucault's approach to the Islamic Other lies, for Almond, in a consecutive analysis and appropriation of Islam's alterity: a critique of what makes Islam *Other*, yet at the same time keeping Islam docile, in its place (Almond 2007:22–23).

Almond (2007:27–32) considers Nietzsche's influence on Foucault in his evaluation of non-European cultures as profound, which, combined with Foucault's unique and subtle 'essentialisation of

the West', should be integral in our understanding of Foucault's perspectives on Iran. To understand Foucault's views on the events of 1978–1979 in Iran, according to Almond, one should actually not start with the Orient, but the Occident in Foucault's thought. Again, in an extremely sophisticated analysis, Almond shows how the Occident, and the repetition of the word itself, plays a central role in all Foucault's projects – Foucault is forever reminding us of the Western specificity of his subject, 'always careful not to stray too far outside the limits of his tribe' (Almond 2007:23). The repetition of the word 'Occident' is Foucault's way of emphasising the 'geo-cultural locatedness' of the language-game he is scrutinising, his technique of avoiding any lapse into an unthinking universalism. Foucauldian phrases such as 'we Western Others' or 'the limit-experience of the Western world' indicate for Almond (2007:24) the sensitive awareness of the limitations of Foucault's own vocabulary.

A paradox now arises: It is exactly Foucault's desire to delineate the finite, limited, Occidental boundaries of the collection of ideas and practices he is studying that leads to a subtle 'essentialisation of the West' (and implicitly, the East). Almond does not forward this paradox as a critique or judgement against something banal or obvious in Foucault's work: he is simply stating that wherever the West appears in Foucault's work, which is practically everywhere, there are notions that silently assume the absent Orient to be its inverse (Almond 2007:24). Foucault's Occident takes on a number of sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant characteristics that vary according to the Orient it is being juxtaposed with, whether it is Japan, Tunisia or Iran. One of these characteristics is that of Western superficiality and self-denial, *vis-à-vis* Eastern honesty, as Nietzsche would have it. Almond (2007:25) shows how often Foucault followed Nietzsche, representing the East as the lost domain where Europeans used to think, that place where the Orient masculine and the open affirmation of sexuality and hierarchy remain intact. This Eastern consideration is in Almond's reading integral to Foucault's description of power as 'everywhere', as technical and positive, rather than judicial and negative, as unashamed of hierarchy, as a 'healthy attitude toward power' (Almond 2007:25).

But Foucault's Occident, apart from being less honest or more dishonest than its Orient counterpart, is also more complex, because of its deceit, its dishonesty. The reason-unreason opposition in Western thought is a typical example of the kind of complexity that follows from the not-direct, not-honest, binary thinking of the West, leading to Foucault's repeated juxtaposition of individualist Western subjectivity and the more homogenous Eastern collectivities ('... there has never been in the West [at least not for a very long time] a philosophy that was capable of bringing together the practical politics and the practical morality of a whole society' [Foucault, quoted from a famous interview,⁹ by Almond 2007:26]). This notion affirms Foucault's appreciation of the masses in Iran's spontaneous, coherent resistance to power 'as one', as a collectivity (P5). But Almond indicates that this notion is deeply entrenched in Foucault's thinking, visible throughout his oeuvre: Foucault's Orientals lend themselves to collectivities with far greater ease than Occidentals, giving rise to the notion of Oriental holistic collectivity versus Occidental fragmented individuality, a clash between a harmonious, unchanging Orient and a volatile, mutating Occident (Almond 2007:26). Almond (2007:26) boldly asserts that Foucault's Orient carries a social ethos of unity that cannot any longer be found in his Occident (which has long moved on, which could after modernity never again be viewed in utopian terms), becoming a paradise-state of Nietzschean innocence where power is exercised freely, a place where it is still possible for the state to intervene in its subjects' lives without it being viewed or experienced as problematic. Analysing Foucault's *Order of Things* and the unfinished trilogy *History of Sexuality*, Almond elaborates on Foucault's volatile Occident versus this unspoken, 'unthought' Orient, which lies as a sort of palimpsest in Foucault's texts – in between Foucauldian

9. Foucault (1988:215).

phrases such as 'the fate of the West', 'our modernity' and the 'old rational goal of the West' lies a silent Orient, with all the inverse qualities assigned to it: serenity, freedom from the death of their God and all the tragedy that death invokes (Almond 2007:28). In the Orient, god(s) are still alive.

Almond's analysis therefore does not only confirm the suggestion (P1) that Foucault's enterprise in Iran was modern-critical in nature and orientation; he even provides us with a description of the Nietzschean development in Foucault's thought in this regard, with the interplay between the fragmented Occident and the intact Orient, an interplay that formed that first Foucauldian inclination, that basic contra-modern instinct in Iran. The staunch, silent demeanour of the masses in Iran in 1978 was an expression of the strong, masculine yet static energy of the Orient, unlike any the Occident could ever again generate.

After providing an overview of Foucault's first real contact with Islam and his only residence in a Muslim country, in Tunisia, working at the University of Tunis from 1966 to 1968, where Foucault found 'something refreshingly active' about the political struggles in Tunisia at the time (the students' lack of theoretical knowledge about Marx and Sartre being more than compensated for by 'their violence', their 'radical intensity', their 'impressive momentum' [2007:31], clearly a prologue to his experience in Tehran in 1978), Almond (2007:33–41) proceeds to interpret Foucault's Iran writings. The static yet violent energy Foucault witnessed on the streets of Tehran in the last months of 1978 was the expression of a force Foucault deemed not possible within European boundaries – again, almost immediately, contrasting East and West in his experiences. Almond (2007:35–36) is struck by how closely Foucault's preferred terminology in his Iran writings resemble Nietzschean terminology. Examples of terms and phrases used in Foucault's Iran writings which Almond connects with the Nietzschean influence are 'life-affirmation', 'the militaristic', 'the medieval', 'a regime of truth close to that of the Greeks ... and the Arabs of Maghreb', 'vitality' and 'consciousness'. Almond describes the first step in Foucault's modern-critical endeavour in Iran as an opportunity to remind Marxists of their own epistemological finitude, having Iran as a reminder how culturally finite the West's idea of revolution really was (Almond 2007:35). Once again, for Foucault (as for Nietzsche), Islam becomes a nostalgic glimpse on what Europe lost, how Europe used to think: for Almond, by travelling to Iran Foucault was actually travelling back in time, to a time where there was still a possibility of a transcendental faith which could 'move things in this world', to a set of practices 'we Europeans', as Nietzsche would say, no longer believed in. Iran constituted for Foucault a positive space, a space where his notion of a 'political spirituality', with all its potential for the reconfiguration of traditional (modern) subject-object schemes, could flourish:

[... a space where] the possibility of a spiritual dimension to the political quotidian has remained intact ... the East becomes the retainer of a forgotten vitality, the preserver of a wisdom which has long since trickled through European fingers ... what Foucault is seeing, in effect, is a reversal of the French revolution.

(Almond 2007:36, P7)

The energy of the Islamic revolution becomes for Almond 'a disruptive energy,¹⁰ a positive moment of discontinuity ... [Foucault's Iran writings therefore] serve a purpose in the wider context of his writings: a collider of Occidental teleologies, a provincialiser of Western historiography' (Almond 2007:37).

10. The notion of the Iran revolution as a dislocative, subversive force brings to the fore Foucault's fascination (P5) with the spontaneous, almost 'insane' nature of the Iranians' revolt, with the uncontrollable energy of a people breaking free from Western hegemony: while his fascination was mostly implicit, I have indicated how explicit that fascination often became, describing in almost lyrical terms the revolt as one executed with 'with bare hands' against one of the biggest military forces in the world at the time. This mad energy of the demonstrators, as they resisted the control and containment of the West, offered a threat to modern Europe in particular, the same kind of threat the 'free reign of medieval madness' held for the asylums and clinics of the 18th century. Therefore, this energy had to be ridiculed by Western commentators.

Yet Foucault in Iran, with all his subtlety and ironic quirks which Almond (2007:38) recognises, remains a Western thinker about the East, or, to again use my depiction, a 'self-conscious Greek in Persia'. This statement is in terms of Almond's analysis especially valid in two regards: Firstly, Foucault is impressed by Iran's Islamic-Oriental 'wholeness', its unity and the absence of a brusque individuality, and secondly, he is convinced of the permanence and non-volatility of its institutions, especially its religion. As we have seen, the solidarity and unity of the Iran revolution are aspects often accentuated in Foucault's Iran writings, even to the extent that he overlooked the sense of individuality that at least Afary and Anderson's natural dissidents of the revolution – women, homosexuals and many secularists – still embraced. There were indeed internal struggles in the revolution. Almond's analysis is absolutely correct in this regard.

Yet Almond goes further and poses that, uncharacteristic for a thinker as self-critical as Foucault, there appears to be for Foucault no doubt about the correctness of his analysis of the revolution itself.

[A]t no point in any of his Iran writings did Foucault seem to wonder whether his conviction of the oneness of the Iranians, their unity, their madness and everything else he witnessed in the streets of Tehran, may have been facilitated by his utter unfamiliarity with the culture he was observing.

(Almond 2007:39)

When Foucault (1988:215–216) states in an interview that what struck him in Iran 'is that there is not a struggle between different elements' and 'we met in Iran the collective will of a people', it seems as if his self-awareness as essentially a tourist in Iran is largely absent; it seems this Greek in Persia was, for Almond, not self-conscious enough.

At this point I would have to differ from Almond's otherwise solid and spellbinding analysis. There are, according to my reading of the primary texts, many examples which would show how much uncertainty Foucault radiated, not only during the time of the writing of his Iran essays and clearly in the texts themselves, but even in his preparation for his expeditions and his vagueness about his philosophical disposition toward what he was possibly going to find in Iran. To quote a few of those remarks again: 'Intellectuals will (merely) work together with journalists at the point where ideas and events intersect ...' (Foucault in Eribon 1992:282); 'I go to see what is happening, rather than referring to what is taking place ...' (Foucault in Miller 1993:308[82]); 'let us admit that we Westerners would be in a poor position to give advice to the Iranians on this matter' (Foucault 1978e:213; cf. Foucault 1978h:220).

In terms of the Occident/Orient in Foucault's thought, as meticulously researched and isolated by Almond, it is therefore only to an extent true that he 'already knew what he was going to experience in Iran' (Almond 2007:41). Almond's conclusion is too bold: that Foucault's perception of the 'insane energy' of the Iranians, of what he observed to be the affirmative nature of their religion, of what he understood to be the millennia-old permanence of their institutions, of what he considered to be the absolute homogeneity of their collectivity, are not what he actually found in the streets of Tehran; that he already found the epistemological conditions for those perceptions in Nietzsche and his brief encounter with Islam during his two-year lecture tour in Tunisia. Whether it was unconscious or not, states Almond (2007:41), the Islamic Orient that Foucault found in Iran reflected the same peculiar Orientalism we find in Nietzsche's *Der Antichrist* and *Genealogie der Moral*, the same positive rejection of modernity, 'the same association with Greeks and Romans'. Almond in the process does not acknowledge Foucault's 'self-consciousness', his uncertainty and vagueness, which I consider to be crucial. Almond's analysis of Foucault's Occident is formidable;¹¹ however, I think this commentator again goes too far, taking Foucault where he does not want to be. I have

to disagree with the notion that Foucault was not self-conscious and therefore not self-critical enough, that he was unaware of his silent Orient, of his own prejudices, of his indebtedness to Nietzsche with regards to the Islamic Other. The tense, uncertain tone of his Iran writings and interviews, substantiate this claim. That is why I maintain the notion of Foucault in Iran being a *self-conscious* Greek in Persia.¹²

Danny Postel and Foucault in 21st-century Iran

Danny Postel's little 'pamphlet' (2006:1), *Reading legitimization crisis in Tehran*,¹³ is a jewel in Foucault scholarship: only 120 pages long, it conceals a hyper-condensed intellectual landscape of contemporary political and intellectual activity in Iran, which is interpreted with remarkable insight and erudition. The book covers four overlapping themes: 1) the confusion in the Western liberal tradition about Iran, which Postel considers to be 'widespread' (2006:1); 2) the reasons why dissident intellectuals in Iran today are nevertheless liberalist, rather than reactionary or Marxist; 3) the tremendous energy of the political and intellectual landscape in contemporary Iran, and 4) how Foucault's complex engagement with the Iranian revolution as well as the hostile reaction toward that engagement both somehow encapsulate the confusion and the energy of the liberal project as manifested in contemporary Iran.

Postel (2006:4–58) argues that, for the Western Left, the modern-critical acknowledgement of failures in the damaging modern project of colonialisation of the East and the recognition of the misleading perspectives of modern Western Orientalism generated in the Western world an often uncritical adoration of aspects of the non-Western Other. For the non-Western world on the other hand, the modern-critical enterprise implied the rejection of all which bore the signature of their oppressive Other, which led to a search for some pre-colonial truth, untainted by Western influence. In the ideological confusion that followed, religious fundamentalism seized the opportunity to establish itself as an authentic reaction to both the modern-critical claims of the Western liberal tradition and the seemingly resonating pre-modern reactions of its Orient counterpart. Against this backdrop, religious fundamentalism produced a political discourse that, today more than ever, thrives on the coarse

principle that ideas have merely singular geographical sources that dictate the status of their authenticity and relevance. In countries such as Iran, anti-imperialist arguments have therefore been appropriated by theocratical structures, and religious faith has been cunningly manipulated as a means to delegitimise any and every form of dissent (see Zakaria 2007).

Postel (2006:31–57) argues that observing liberalism through an Iranian spectre reveals the failure of the Western liberal tradition to emerge from a remarkable narrow-mindedness that prevents it from accepting the reality that the Other can engage with and have internal connections with ideas that may be highlighted by similarity rather than difference. Close to the proximity of Almond's central argument therefore, Postel elaborates on how the same limitations that bound the old modern Orientalists, in the 21st century have created a new breed of Western liberal, which is not all that different from and not less damaging and dangerous than its outspoken modern-Orientalist predecessor. Now focusing solemnly on difference, these new Orientalists, to explicitly use Almond's term, are virtually indoctrinated to expect only difference from the Other, whilst completely disregarding similarity. Fighting the injustices against the Other in this sense has become in Postel's mind as problematic as the modern fetishisation of the Other.

Postel (2006:11–13) utilises Iran's contemporary intellectual environment to illustrate how current liberal movements within Iran, led by dissident intellectuals such as Akbar Ganji and Ramin Jahanbegloo, have begun the laborious political project of re-reading and re-implementing the thought of some of the most prominent Western intellectuals of the past decades, notably Habermas, Foucault, Rorty and Taylor, to engage the theme of 'modernity in Iran' – the *tajaddod*, in Persian, which looms large in public life in Iran and is far from being a mere theoretical issue: 'In the Iranian context, liberalism is a matter of life and death ... a fighting faith' (Postel 2006:37). For these Iranian intellectuals, their lives literally depend on what they can distil from the liberal Western tradition. Yet the liberal tradition fails them, as Postel (2006:44–57) intensely and repeatedly accentuates, because of the liberal's modern-critical fixation on difference rather than similarity, because of its unwillingness to respect the actual and frequent similarities of the Other.

The dialogue between civilisations is not construed by Postel as a reductionist exchange of two alienated Others defined solely by their differences. Instead it emerges as an interchange in which 'landscapes and localities undergo symbolic metamorphoses, and that experiences once localised at a given place increasingly find echoes or resonance chambers among distant societies and peoples' (Postel 2006:57). The modern-critical gaze on difference, combined with an opposition to the neo-conservative agenda in the US, silenced the liberal tradition in Iran.

Indebted to the basic tenets of Afary and Anderson's analyses and their basic conclusions (Postel 2006:59–64), Postel affirms the importance of the notion of a 'political spirituality' in Foucault's perspectives on the revolution, exactly because it places the current reluctance of the Western left to get involved with Iran in the context of modern-critical thought (P1). Postel's reading of Foucault's Iran writings is in fact interwoven with Afary and Anderson's perspectives to such an extent that his own position is initially almost indistinguishable from theirs. Postel (2006:64–71) concurs that Foucault's stance on Iran was marked by a rejection of the scepticism that was characterised by Foucault's cynical perspectives on Western institutions of power, that Foucault in Iran seemed to treat power in Iran 'differently'. On the one hand, he agrees with Afary and Anderson, and Almond, that Foucault adopted and embraced the singular kind of theocracy he was witnessing in Iran because of its sheer 'difference' rather than its ability to govern equitably and respect human rights; he agrees by implication with Almond's central objection to Foucault, namely that Foucault's Iran writings present how philosophical estimations of the Other have evolved out of what is judged by

11. One would be able to isolate some thematic parallels between Almond's somewhat polemic analysis and Eric Paras' equally intriguing 'Foucault 2.0' contra-standardised reception, with specific regards to the later Foucault's notion of subjectivity, which undoubtedly – consciously – rehabilitated pertinent Oriental sentiments, especially in the first two volumes of *History of Sexuality*: see 'Planetary forces: Foucault, Iran and the Nouveaux Philosophes', in Paras (2006:57–97). Paras approaches Foucault not from his standardised texts and famous publications, but from his less well-known published lectures at Collège de France during the last decade of his life, setting a mature Foucault within the larger context of French and Western intellectual history.

12. Almond does not investigate Foucault's expeditions as such: he fixates on the Occidental and Orient in Foucault's thought and the way it predisposed him to view the events in Iran from a modern-critical angle. Yet it is clear that at least premises 1, 3, 5 and 6 would be explicitly underwritten by Almond. Where my conclusion on P2 (regarding Foucault's relationship with Khomeini) differed from Afary and Anderson's conclusions, we are in agreement on the remaining conclusions from my reading of the primary texts, differences in accent granted. It seems it is on the issue of P4 that Almond and I would have to differ: Depicting Foucault as a 'self-conscious Greek in Persia', I have indicated that he was critically aware of the fact that he had no clear philosophical objective, in the conventional sense, for his Iran undertaking, that he was vague with purpose, that he radiated uncertainty, that he was aware of his own limitedness, whilst Almond would maintain that he knew exactly what he was doing and simply was not self-critical enough.

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Westerners to be most authentic about the Other – in this case as in most other cases, the most exotic and most different aspects of Islam (see Zakaria 2007).

On the other hand, Postel stands on the brink of a breakthrough in his reading of Foucault and yet he does not take the step forward and claim it. If it is true, as he argues, that the liberal tradition fails Iran in its unwillingness to compromise its own gaze of differentiation, to cross over into the strained domain of the Other as an 'Other Self' – in other words, if the liberal tradition is failing Iran because of its unwillingness to interrupt the safe theoretical haven of the modern-critical respect for the Other's Otherness, whilst the Other's Sameness is being sacrificed in the process – Foucault, actually, is exactly that kind of liberal intellectual Postel is looking for. Yet Postel does not take his reasoning that far.

While Postel does recognise and even appreciate Foucault's ironical quirks, that Foucault should be read cautiously in terms of his vagueness, his understatement, the strained quality of his efforts, 'however quietly, to come to grips with ... Iran' (Postel 2006:71), Postel in a cruel rebound of irony himself does not recognise the fact that Foucault was exactly that different kind of liberal he seeks for – one who indeed chose to be quiet, if not silent; who was willing to recognise Sameness in the Self-posed Other; who not only saw difference but sameness; who was consciously willing to cross over into the strained domain of the Other by severely compromising his acute sense of Self, or West-essentialisation, as Almond called it; who was willing to interrupt the predictable yet unproductive reception of the Iranian revolution in the minds of Western (liberal) observers. What initially brings Postel to isolate Foucault's 'necropolitical imagination' in his Iranian 'Odyssey' as of fundamental importance in his reconsideration of the relation of Self to Other, and the liberal tradition's role in keeping both the tensions and similarities in this regard alive, is an avenue not explored by Postel. Instead of using Foucault merely as a token for post-modernity's fixation on difference, he could have read Foucault as the one who broke the gaze and disturbed the fixation. Actually, Postel did the reading, but he does not follow Foucault into that strained domain between Self and Other.

Whereas Afary and Anderson and Almond went too far in their analyses, Postel does not go far enough. He misses out on Foucault's sense of Self-interruption; again, as Almond, not isolating the fact that Foucault was a self-conscious Greek in Persia. Postel eventually concludes by noting an irony: Foucault's ideas have, since his death, been deployed by liberals in Iran to unmask the clerical system and its operations of power: that is, as a tool of analysis against the same revolutionary forces about which Foucault enthused in their inception. 'To his credit, I think this irony would have pleased Foucault a great deal had he lived to witness it' (Postel 2006:71). It is a pity that Postel did not recognise the preceding irony, which would have given this one irony Postel eventually does mark a far more crucial impetus. His reception hangs in the balance because of this crucial oversight.

Radiating uncertainty: the *hamartia* of a self-conscious Greek in Persia

I have learned to keep silent sometimes, and also that one has to learn talking, in order to be silent in the proper way: that a human with backgrounds has to have foregrounds, be it for others, be it for him or herself. For the foregrounds are necessary, in order to recover from oneself, and to make it possible for others to live with us.

(Nietzsche 1886:232, translated by author)

I have now systematically narrowed the secondary texts down for argumentative purposes, moving from the natural dissidents of the revolution in Afary and Anderson, to Almond's depiction of Foucault's silent (yet in my opinion self-conscious) Orient, to Postel almost recognising Foucault's Self-interruption in his relation to the Other, reading these texts with virtually no hindrance against the backdrop of the ten suggestions I have

made in conclusion to the first article, which was based on my reading of Foucault's Iran writings. Since I found no strict objections to any of those suggestions, apart from the issue on the relation between Foucault and Khomeini in Afary and Anderson (and Postel, by implication) and the issue regarding Foucault not being aware or being unconscious of his silent Orient-Other in Almond's text, I now propose that those ten suggestions should be accepted as preliminary conclusions for our understanding of Foucault in Iran.

The notion of self-interruption and self-critique, as we have seen, played a vital role in Foucault's radiation of uncertainty about the philosophical nature of his Iran endeavour. It is exactly the notion of Foucault's relation to the Self as 'disturbed', as 'displaced', as one of 'discomfort', which I consider to be important for our ongoing discussion and which I now present in conclusion by embedding it in Foucault's history of sexuality and posing it against his presumed *hamartia* regarding the events in Iran in 1978–1979.

The distinctive hallmark of modernity is its division of reality into two branches, two absolute and incommensurable universes, each with their own laws, conceived as totally discrete realities, forever divorced, alienated and estranged from one another: mind and matter, self and world, the private and the public, the individual and the masses, the thinker and the thought, dream and reality, soul things and worldly things, imagination and reason, West and East, the subject and the object, Self and Other. This binary fiction of modern convenience has been broken down over the past decades, even if the de(con)structionists of modernity are themselves ambivalent about the direction it is taking. Post-modernity, at the very least, has recognised over the past decades the damage caused to the Other by modern polarisations. Yet this post-modern recognition has gone, in my opinion, no further than either merely emphasising the difference, or lingering on the difference, still keeping Self and Other apart, or completely demolishing Otherness by forcing the Self to relinquish itself into an integration with the Other. Now, in terms of the relation Self and Other, there is in the wake of the critique of modernity one of three possible directions to be taken: 1) Either the Other's otherness can be acknowledged according to modernity's strict polarising terms, whereby its otherness would be honoured whilst the Self's sense of sameness would not be disturbed; or 2) the Other's otherness can either be exalted or downplayed to such an extent that it is no longer possible to distinguish between Self and Other (which in the end ironically boils down to the extermination of the Other); or 3) – and here, in what possibly could be described as the move after post-modernity, or 'post-post-modernity' Foucault can be found – there can be a conscious move to interrupt both the sense of Self and Other, by the Self hesitantly moving toward the Other, with all the uncertainty it entails, not knowing what it will bring about, keeping the tension alive, keeping both Self and Other in a strained, painful negative-dialectical position, producing, even if only momentarily, flashes of insight about the Other as 'an Other Self'.

I have read Foucault alongside Adorno as a 'post-post-modern' thinker who indeed was willing to recognise Sameness in the Self-posed Other, who, when gazing 'East', saw not only difference but sameness, who was consciously willing to dwell over into the strained domain of the Other by severely compromising his acute sense of Self (Beukes 1995:210–222). Along the very same lines I would argue that Foucault's critique of the modern events in Iran was by no means triumphant or sure of itself. It comprises a strong awareness of loss, of a decadence which must be fought, of a world in a state of collapse and a still undefined future. Foucault trod the streets of Tehran as a self-conscious Greek in Persia, upholding a sense of the necessity of the downfall of modern-Western *telos*, which 'seemed to him almost like fate' (Rée 2005:46). Nietzsche's scorn for modern ideas made a profound impression on him: What Nietzsche said about his own critique of modernity in *Beyond Good and Evil*, still rings true

for Foucault's project in Iran:

[M]y book is a criticism of modernity, yet painfully it embraces the modern sciences, arts, even politics, together with possible indications that we are to reverse the fate of modern man ...
(Nietzsche 1968:225)

Foucault, during the last decade of his life, became progressively hesitant about clear and certain philosophical inquiry into the strained dynamics of the relation between Self and Other. The main argument of Foucault's last work, his unfinished trilogy on the history of sexuality, was that the main exponents of 'sexual liberation' in the West could be as grandiose, oppressive and self-deceiving as the repressive Medieval and Victorian puritans they took pride in defying. The ideas of these self-appointed liberators could, as Foucault noted, be traced to the Freudian Marxism of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, but he regarded them as part of a far larger problem. Jonathan Rée (2005:46) explains with a quote:

Speaking in the 'high Orient' of Tokyo in April 1978, just before he went to the 'low Orient' of Iran in September 1978, he went so far as to suggest that the pretentious, false incantations of sexual liberation could be heard throughout the entire history of the West: 'We Europeans', Foucault said, then hastily correcting himself, 'We Others' – 'have been engaged for millennia in a quixotic adventure unparalleled in the rest of the world: an earnest quest for the truth about ourselves in the form of the truth about our sexuality. Throughout the twentieth century, moreover, we European Others have been regaling ourselves with a tale about how Freud eventually exploded the age-old hypocrisies, allowing sexuality to be released from its fetters at last: First, there was Greek and Roman antiquity, where sexuality was free, and capable of expressing itself without hindrance; Next, there was Christianity, which – for the first time in the history of the West – imposed a great prohibition on sexuality, saying no to pleasure and to sex; But then, beginning in the sixteenth century, the bourgeoisie found itself in a situation ... of economic domination and cultural hegemony; it took over the Christian rejection of sexuality and made it its own, enforcing it with unprecedented rigor and severity, and perpetuating it into the nineteenth century, until at last the veil began to be lifted by Freud'. In order to avoid misunderstandings with his Japanese audience, Foucault meticulously articulated his opinion that the Freudian-Marxist epic of sexual liberation was 'misleading and untenable, for hundreds of reasons'.

(Rée 2005:46)

But in his *History of sexuality* itself, Foucault presented his readers with a compilation of somewhat awkward case studies, ranging from the *ars erotica* practices of ancient cultures to long elaborations on his views on perversity, leaving his readers to draw their own conclusions. His aim, and on that he was very clear and explicit (Foucault 1990:1–14), was not to replace old certainties with new ones, but merely to assist his readers to formulate some uncertainties of their own, and then as radiantly tentative as possible: 'When Foucault's Japanese hosts thanked him for the clarity of his exposition, he turned the compliment gracefully: "Obscurity is unforgivable, indeed it is a form of despotism" ' (Rée 2005:46). Yet, he immediately stated, he had to admit that his own elucidations sometimes had the effect of *cafouillage* (Rée 2005:46), of messing things up and leaving them more confused than ever. But at least he could never be accused of false or factitious clarity.

Michel Foucault never emulated the kind of modernist Freudianism that confidently discovers vast unconscious realities behind the smokescreen of false consciousness in which the rest of Westerners live their lives – Nor did he long for the Marxist self-assurance that ridicules a problematic political present in the light of a glorious future that has not yet dawned on anybody else outside the scope of a little circle in Europe.

(Rée 2005:46)

As Rée argues, Foucault's mind was too expansive for that: he was never going to commit to an a priori separation between those who 'know' and those who do 'not know'. The mature

Foucault of Eric Paras' *Collège de France* reception (Paras 2006:57–58) has moved beyond that simplistic division and simply wanted to manifest uncertainty.

Foucault's hesitance about critical matters in Iran in 1978–1979 was therefore not a careless negation of intellectual responsibility, but rather a principled avoidance of the arrogance of those who claim to speak with authority on matters we 'Western Others' should rather be silent about. Like Nietzsche before him, Foucault towards the end of his life learned to keep silent sometimes, so that he could learn to talk, in order to be silent in the right way, in order to recover from ourselves, and to make it possible for others to live with us. That was Foucault's sin in Iran; that was his *hamartia*: He dared to cross over, he dared to speak when others were silent, he dared to be silent when others were speaking, he dared to be hesitant and unclear when Western-liberal commentators thought they could clearly and fluently articulate the problematic events in Iran. Foucault dared not speak – neither the trusted old binary language of modernity, nor the pretentious, all-abiding, all-inclusive tongue of its post-modernist counterpart.

Perhaps then, the humbling lesson to be learned from Foucault's problematic expedition to Iran in 1978–1979 could be that intellectuals have to be silent sometimes, in order to learn to speak. And when they speak, they should do so cautiously, consistently interrupting themselves. The West has to learn anew to embrace understatement when faced with its Other. Our world would be a singularly different place if there was more hesitation in the Self's relation to the Other, more uncertainty in the West's dealing or rather reckoning with 'the East', if there was a greater sense of Self-interruption of its Occident certainties, if Self-discomfort could become the trait of its panoptic gaze on its Orient Other, on that unstable place since the dawn of time – Persia.

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