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General Conclusion

The research question in this dissertation has been how we are to interpret and contextualize Ayatollah Khomeini's poetry. We can conclude that his poetry opens a door to the inner world of one of the most influential revolutionary leaders of the twentieth century. He promoted an Islamic form of governance, political Islam, a theocratic political system that was meant to be exported beyond the borders of Iran, but he was at the same time a convinced mystic, eschewing all forms of material possessions and worldly attachments, enjoying writing mystical poems in his spare time. While most academic works on Ayatollah Khomeini have focused on his political career, the mystical and especially the poetical side to his character are to a large extent unexplored. His mystical poetry enables us to form a more complete picture of his character, helping us to understand the paradox in his personality. In his poetry, one detects a strong mystical aspiration where spiritual growth is preferred over religious and even political duties. At the same time, one can also find traces of his political convictions, such as his condemnation of imperialism, his ideas on pan-Islamism and his rejection of any forms of governance that is not based on Islamic tenets. This study demonstrates how Ayatollah Khomeini places himself in a long literary tradition, but at the same time recycles popular mystical motifs and themes to comment on political events.

Ayatollah Khomeini's *qasides*, the oldest poems that he wrote during the 1920s, clearly illustrate how he used mystical motifs as political instruments. These poems are interesting as they are all written in Ayatollah Khomeini's early career, reflecting his preoccupation with a new Islamic political system, a legitimate form of temporal government that could cope with modernity and withstand European imperialist aspirations. In these panegyrics, one sees the influences of Ibn 'Arabi and Mollâ Sadrâ, where Ayatollah Khomeini projects mystical concepts of perfection onto Hâ'eri, presenting his teacher as a Perfect Man, a precursor of *velâyat-e faqih*. These poems demonstrate how Ayatollah Khomeini tries to model his ideal Islamic form of Governance on the ideas of several nineteenth-century *mojtaheds* such as Sheikh Fazl Allâh Nuri. The poems are illustrative of the ingenious way in which Ayatollah Khomeini has recycled well-known literary and mystical themes to create a new form of governance that could meet with the challenges of modernity. To my knowledge, Ayatollah Khomeini is the only one who elevates Hâ'eri to the status of a perfect man, to be emulated in both religious, social and political matters. Though he never expressed himself on this matter in public, at least not to my knowledge, the poems illustrate how Ayatollah Khomeini recycled mystical themes to serve political needs.

That Ayatollah Khomeini has used poetry to respond to various aspects of his life, both personal, religious and socio-political, and that he has made use of the mystical poetic framework to communicate political issues, can best be seen in his *robâ'is*, the quatrains that he wrote during the 1980s. It was, above all, the celebration of the fifth anniversary of the Islamic Republic of Iran that impelled Ayatollah Khomeini to compose his first *robâ'i*. The war between Iran and Iraq plays an important role in the *robâ'is*. The classical poetical love theme that he uses in these poems to equate the spiritual love death of the mystic to the actual martyr death of the Iranian soldier, is only one example of how Ayatollah Khomeini has used classical mystical metaphors, that have typified Persian poetry for over a thousand years, as political symbols during the 1980s. He often adopted the same love death theme in his public speeches, when he equated the road of the Iranian soldiers to the spiritual journey of the mystic; both aimed at reaching union with God. The theme was also immensely popular amongst Iranian war poets of that period. Also Ayatollah Khomeini's re-interpretation of the event at Karbalâ illustrates his politicization of mystical motifs. In his *robâ'is*, he presents the battle at Karbalâ as a conscious act of active revolt against the troops of Yazid. The same re-interpretation could be noticed amongst Iranian war poets and representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini's *robâ'is* on the mystical figure of Mansur Hallâj, who died for the sake of love, are other examples of the way in which he connected religious and mystical poetic figures to political events, in this case to serve military needs to encourage Iranians to participate in the fight against Iraq. Ayatollah Khomeini was not unique in his use of antinomian figures. They were used on a regular basis by war poets during the 1980s. And as M. Nematollahi rightly states: "Employing mystical and religious motifs was not unique to the war poetry. These motifs were [also] used during both the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), and the Islamic Revolution of 1979."⁷⁴⁹ The rejection of the Ka'ba is another classical metaphor from antinomian poetry that can be found in Ayatollah Khomeini's *robâ'is*. It could be that Ayatollah Khomeini adopted this topos as a political statement, to reflect the restrained socio-political relation that Iran had with Saudi Arabia at that time. Although we will never know the exact intentions behind the Ka'ba motif in his poems and whether they served socio-political purposes, it is clear that, as with the Karbalâ event and the figure of Mansur Hallâj, Ayatollah Khomeini was very familiar with the antinomian poetic tradition. Ayatollah Khomeini's *robâ'is* are also interesting because of the personal note that can be found in these poems. The poems addressed to his daughter-in-law reflect his approach

⁷⁴⁹ See M. Nematollahi, "Do Not Say They Are Dead", p. 241.

to religion, where he prefers intuitive knowledge over rational knowledge, convinced that only the first can give entrance to the divine secrets.

In his *ghazals*, Ayatollah Khomeini uses poetry to express his own spiritual development, rather than to comment on socio-political affairs. His adoption of antinomian topics in these lyrical poems again shows that he had a considerable knowledge of the mystical poetic tradition, in which unorthodox topics have traditionally been used to discuss religious hypocrisy and piety. The fact that Ayatollah Khomeini imitates one of Hafez' *ghazals* illustrates that he purposely places himself in the same poetic tradition; his unorthodox poems should be interpreted in the same way, as tokens of piety. The fact that, in these poems, he prefers spiritual development over observance of the Islamic rules indicates that Ayatollah Khomeini's piety transcended that of the average Muslim (or at least, that he believed it did). His rejection of the Ka'ba in Mecca should be read in the same light. It indicates that he, as a mystic, interpreted piety as a spiritual rather than a physical observance of the Islamic laws.

The attraction of literary, Shiite and mystical motifs, such as those used by Ayatollah Khomeini, for the Iranian population and the intense response to them from Iranians from all strata, can be explained by the essential and interlocking role of poetry, religion and mysticism in the lives of Iranians. From an early age, they are extensively exposed to mystical and other poetry and to Shiite stories commemorating the lives of the Shiite Imams, in particular that of Imam Hoseyn. For centuries, the faith of the Shiite community has been commemorated during special recital meetings (*rowze-khânis*), gatherings that are extremely popular amongst the Iranian population. The recurring images and motifs used during these popular meetings have resulted in strong feelings of a common past and nostalgia. Charismatic as he was, Ayatollah Khomeini was able to address these common emotions and the collective memory of the Iranian population during the revolutionary period, when most Iranians, whether secular, intellectual, reformist, or *bazaaris*, had become estranged from Mohammad Reza Shah. Many Iranians, who were marginalized on a political, social and cultural level by the Pahlavi government, found a safe haven in religious institutions and mosques. In this de-spiritualized era, Ayatollah Khomeini's religiously inspired words found fertile soil, addressing the common spiritual and religious feelings of the Iranians. As M. Mahdavi rightly puts it: "Khomeini emerged armed with Shi'i cultural symbols and clerical institutions in order to lead this mass movement."⁷⁵⁰ As the 1979 poem by Hadi Khorsandi

⁷⁵⁰ M. Mahdavi, "The Rise of Khomeinism," p. 67.

demonstrates, secular Iranians were also attracted by the way Ayatollah Khomeini presented himself, as a mystic and as an inverse image of the Westernized and secularized Mohammad Reza Shah. As I showed earlier, also in the following period, during the war, Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Republic of Iran as a whole used these familiar Shiite metaphors and classical mystical motifs to foster feelings of a common past and to create a sense of shared responsibility.

What can be concluded from the reception of Ayatollah Khomeini's poetry is that the followers of Ayatollah Khomeini made every effort to place his poetry in the vivid and popular Iranian poetical tradition, making him one of 'them.' It is notable that it is the same typically Iranian mystical nature of Ayatollah Khomeini's poetry that is criticized in responses from the Diaspora. Both Hadi Khorsandi and the anonymous poet make every effort in de-mystifying Ayatollah Khomeini and his mystical poetry. It seems that they cannot accept that this leader, who in their eyes is a 'cruel oppressor,' has used 'their' mystical poetic language and tries to place himself in a millennium-old Iranian tradition, with which both poets feel so connected. The contradiction between Hadi Khorsandi's poem from 1979 in support of Ayatollah Khomeini and the *robâ'is* of 1989 in response to Ayatollah Khomeini's *ghazal* indicates this even better. While his 1979 poem 'mystifies' Ayatollah Khomeini, turning him into an almost impeccable *ensân-e kâmel* figure, the same poet ten years later, strips the man of his mystical pretensions and the poem of its 'Iranian' elements, as if he, as an Iranian poet, does not want Ayatollah Khomeini to touch this cultural heritage. It would be interesting to examine whether Iranian poets would respond in the same negative way to Ayatollah Khomeini's mystical poetry, if they did not know who was the author of the poems.