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Reclaiming the Faravahar

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Background, Questions, and Theory

Stain your prayer rug with wine if the
Zoroastrian Elder [magus or priest]
tells you to.¹ Hāfez (1315–1390)

Zoroastrian traditions shaped the main type of Iranian religiosity from about 600 BCE to 1000 CE. Albeit transformed in the face of more than a millennium of persecutions, migrations, and conversions, these have survived as distinct pre-Islamic priestly and sociocultural traditions. This book examines the reasons for such resilience by addressing Zoroastrian categories of identity and identification in contemporary Tehran. Thus, this is an ethnographic account of the economy of Zoroastrian religious knowledge, that is, complex configurations of sociocultural categories through which believers understand and present themselves while producing and disseminating them under the regnant Shi'i order.

During two years of research in Iran,² I attended Zoroastrian rituals, ceremonies, and exhibitions in Tehran, and interviewed members of the hierarchy, including the *mobeds* or priests, acolytes or learned individuals, and laities. Contemporary Zoroastrian socio-discursive practices evidence a historically conscious community that is deeply cognizant of its status under the long Islamic rule. Juxtaposing ethnographic findings to archival research,³ and informed by the anthropology of knowledge and of history and also by performance, performativity,⁴ and discourse analyses,⁵ I approach Zoroastrian modes of historical evocation in terms of cultures of Zoroastrian history. That is, ways in which social actors remember, reconfigure, and exhibit, hence as discussed below “perform,”⁶ their past and establish the product as social reality in the present in order to negotiate and sustain a distinct and modern identity and culture. As Michael Lambek argues:

Historical consciousness entails the continuous, creative bringing into being and crafting of the past in the present and of the present in respect

to the past (poiesis), and judicious interventions in the present that are thickly informed by dispositions cultivated in, and with respect to, the past, including understandings of temporal passage and human agency (phronesis). (2002:17)

The economy of this knowledge tradition of the past holds the key to Zoroastrians' resilience, providing them with a means of defining and defending Zoroastrian identity and values.

Modern Iranian identity is closely bound to the rupture that resulted from the Arab invasion of seventh-century Iran. This "critical event," to use Veena Das' phrase (1995), has continued to be an active part of Iranian consciousness.⁷ The dynamic scope of this historical moment proves to be even more critical when one explores the complexity of religious minorities' identity construction in Iran, particularly that of the Zoroastrians. In fact, in addition to the Arab invasion, Iranian history chronicles invasions of the Greeks, Turks, and Mongols, each of which devastated the country. For Zoroastrian historical awareness, the main index of Iranian devastation is nevertheless marked by the Arab invasion and the subsequent Islamization of Iran, a historical consciousness largely rooted in the more recent Pahlavi nationalistic project discussed further below. Whereas the former tribes have come and gone and treated all Iranians equally as enemies, the Arabs succeeded in deracinating the Iranian-Zoroastrian Kingdom, converted most of the country to Islam, and even treated the new converts as unequal.⁸ Subsequently, many Zoroastrians left Iran.

Zoroastrians' awareness of this historical episode and its modes of articulation in the present reveal how a religious configuration of historical knowledge hones the *social* and *cultural imaginaries* of a community. Philosopher Candace Vogler defines "imaginaries" in terms of "complex systems of presumptions—patterns of forgetfulness and attentiveness—that enter subjective experience as the expectation that things will make sense generally" (2002:625). The "social imaginary," then, as Charles Taylor defines it, "is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society," collective self-understanding that is constitutive of a society (2002:91).⁹ Discussing how Zoroastrians imagine their social surroundings, I address "the deeper normative notions and images"¹⁰ that underlie ways in which they fit together, in particular, with the expectations of the dominant Shi'a. Another theme that I explore, which culminates in the final chapter, is the constellation of Zoroastrian and Iranian historical consciousnesses in Iranian nationalism, understood in terms of Iranian "cultural imaginaries."¹¹

My guiding questions include: how do Iranian Zoroastrians create, recognize, and identify with their historical past and “perform” it in the present? How do their deep textual histories interact with their daily life to shape the values of their modern identities? How do they maintain consistency with the past in the context of modernity? What are the local and global contexts in which their past becomes especially salient, constituting not only their own social imaginaries but also infiltrating Iranian national/cultural imaginaries? That is, how do Zoroastrians imagine their historical insertion into Iranian society in order to adapt to the expectations of the dominant Shi’a? Also, how do Iranians perceive Zoroastrians in relation to the ideals and symbolism of Iranian nationalism?

Preoccupied with their historical past as a legitimizing link in the present to imagine religious self, a kerygmatic mode of religious experience,¹² Zoroastrians that I worked with formulate and perform both an ancient and a modern genealogy of their identity. Drawing on Zoroastrian tenor of historical consciousness, this genealogy vaunts the status of the followers as the original Iranians, emphasizes historical and spiritual connections with distant Iranian history, and hearkens back to the glorious past of the Iranian-Zoroastrian state. Ensnared in this “imagined continuity,”¹³ Zoroastrian utterances presented here, on the one hand, portray the Arab invasion of Iran and the Islamization process thereafter in terms of shared Iranian heritage and stand against the invaders. In this regard, they understand Shi’i tradition as a form of resistance against the Sunni Arabs, hence emphasizing their own similarity with Shi’a as an “Iranicized” religion. On the other, they emphasize the Arab roots of Shi’i tradition and denounce some of its religious and cultural practices as opposing the “authentic” Iranian culture, thus stressing difference, authentic origin, and the maintenance of distinctiveness. The product is a constantly performed discursive oscillation between Zoroastrians’ relatedness to and difference from the Shi’a.

As an ethnographic study it is not the aim of this book to evaluate the validity of the historical accounts and communal myths presented. Rather I draw on John Austin’s analyses of speech acts to present such subjective presentations as performative utterances to establish links with the past. As Austin puts it, they are acts *in* saying, rather than acts *of* saying that are truth-evaluable and constative (1962). They are performative since they entail, to use Judith Butler’s definition, “that reiterative power of discourse [that] produce[s] the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (1993b:2). The discourses outlined here are therefore considered as part of the performative architecture of Zoroastrian distinct universe. The goal

is to explicate how these “invented traditions,” to use Eric Hobsbawm’s phrase (1993), albeit closely linked to the emergence of Iranian modern nationalism, are presented and inculcated as time immemorial in order to produce the contemporary community.

1.1 – The Zoroastrians of Iran

The estimated worldwide Zoroastrian population according to the latest report in 2012 is about 111,201 depicting a decline of about 13,752 since the previous survey in 2004.¹⁴ About 61,000 live in the Indian subcontinent; they are known as Parsis and Iranis and are the descendants of two major waves of emigrants from Iran, corresponding to the escalated persecutions in the eighth/ninth and late eighteenth/and nineteenth centuries.¹⁵ As a result of the latest and ongoing phase of migration, mostly under the Islamic Republic, a North American Zoroastrian community was also established. According to the same report some 14,000 Zoroastrians live in the U.S. and an additional 6,421 live in Canada, 5,000 in England, 2,577 in Australia, and 2,030 in the Persian Gulf states.¹⁶

In Iran they number about 14,000¹⁷ to 25,271¹⁸ mostly concentrated in Tehran and villages around the cities of Yazd and Kerman,¹⁹ “on the edge of marginal salt deserts” (Bekhradnia 1991:118). The latter were two “thinly populated regions” to which Zoroastrians moved after the Arab invasion and “withdrew from all major forms of interaction with Muslims” (Choksy 1987:30). Yazd and the surrounding villages—where, as Michael Fischer points out, a strong sense of religious commitment seems to be a general characteristic, which is shared by Zoroastrians (1973)—are considered to be the stronghold city of Iranian Zoroastrians (Boyce 1977). Nevertheless, due to the increased rate of internal migration to Tehran,²⁰ which is noticeable among all minorities, Tehran is said to have the largest Zoroastrian population, consisting nonetheless mostly of Yazdi and Kermani descendants.

The Islamic Republic’s Constitution permits Zoroastrians to follow their religious Personal Status, Family Law, and education.²¹ The community sends an internally elected representative to the Islamic Parliament,²² and each local Zoroastrian community is organized around an elected administrative Council or Association (*Anjoman*), a system introduced to the community by the emissary of the Parsis of India, Maneckji Limji Hatavia, who, with the aim of improving the conditions for less fortunate co-religionists, visited the Iranian community in 1854. The Tehran Association has twenty-

one members who are vetted by the Islamic Republic's State Ministry (*Veẓārat-e Keshvar*). There is also a Mobeds' Council; comprised of all mobeds, it is charged with administering religious laws and is headed by the high mobed. Tehran has one functioning fire-temple, wherein some of the religious ceremonies are held. There are several other centres in Tehran, those of central Tehran's *Narges* building for the migrants from city of Taft and its surrounding villages, and *Tehrānpārs Marker*²³ Centre and *Rostam Bāq* in east Tehran. Zoroastrians also have primary and secondary schools (Firuz-Bahram boys' high school was established in 1923), and several other minor establishments.²⁴

Repressive policies of the Islamic Republic have presented political, cultural, and demographic challenges for the community. For example, in 2005 the Guardian Council that oversees elections disqualified the Zoroastrian Member of Parliament from running for reelection. It happened again during my fieldwork. The government also imposes tight controls on their religious ceremonies and celebrations. As a result of these and other policies more Zoroastrians have left their villages to migrate to Tehran, many of whom eventually migrate to the West. A Zoroastrian authority told me, "The Islamic Republic gives us so much trouble that most of the Zoroastrian villages of Yazd are uninhabited now." Emigration, therefore, remains a concern and a total absence of Zoroastrians in the land they are indigenous to and that is sacred to them is not beyond imagination.

In the face of all these continuous difficulties, the surviving, albeit irreplaceably diminishing, Iranian Zoroastrian community shows remarkable resilience. Even though as a result of emigration to Tehran, for instance, "most traditions that were markedly Zoroastrian stopped being practiced," as Shahin Bekhradnia points out, "a distinct social identity did not necessarily diminish" (1991:124). In chapter 6, I discuss that cognizant of the renewed physical and cultural threats, and subject to the changing political circumstances, the community has taken some preventative measures.

1.2 – "De-Zoroastrianization" and Shi'a Domination

Following successive bloody wars, the Arab victory of 651CE devastated Zoroastrians and marked the end of the Sasanian Empire in the Persianate world—a vast territory stretching from Western China and Central Asia to Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, Anatolia, and beyond.²⁵ At the time of the invasion, Sasanians were facing a welter of internal challenges, at their core

the succession to the throne. They had also suffered from the exhaustive wars with Byzantium and, as a result of the concentration of Iranian military forces on the frontiers, the Arabs did not find massive fortifications in the central part of the Empire. Moreover, the defeat of the Persian Empire is understood by historians to be a result of the overly confident Iranian Army and its disparaging image of the once-scattered Bedouin Arab tribes who were now unified under prophet Mohammad's message of a Muslim brotherhood, which transcended tribal boundaries.

Another reason for such defeat was the disenchantment of the dominant Iranains who practised varieties of religions and sects with the minority Zoroastrian orthodoxy that had close ties with the Sasanian monarchs and pursued harsh religious policies. Since the third century this minority had persecuted Manichaeans, Christians, the Zurvanite and Mazdakite sects.²⁶ Hence, even before the Arab invasion the Church was suffering due to the conversion of its members, especially to Christianity and Manichaeism. This religious disenchantment continued into the post-Arab conquest and was particularly reinforced under a new economic condition that included the non-Muslim poll-tax as well as the Islamic inheritance laws.²⁷

Jamsheed Choksy argues that during the post-conquest period both Muslim and Zoroastrian communities' contact with the other "aimed at strictly maintaining rigid religious codes of conduct while trying to accommodate socio-economic realities" (1987:29). Zoroastrian laws of purity and pollution prohibited interactions with Muslims, and tax collection was at the heart of their relations. Conversions to Islam had been both forcible, in particular for women who were forced to marry Muslims, and voluntary, partially to protect assets and belongings. Coupled with the Abbasid policy that converts achieved equal status, as described below, the incentive for conversion was (and still is) great, as a convert to Islam becomes the sole heir to the non-Muslim family. Yet, the initial harsh treatment of converts by Muslim officials hindered the process.

Jonathan Berkey points out that the uneven and nuanced Islamization process "bound both Zoroastrianism and Islam in a complicated dialectic of interlocking identities" (2003:171). The relationship evolved into "one of interdependent acculturation into Islam and Islamic society through political conquest, cohabitation, gradual cooperation, production of myths, religious conversion, and institutional modification" (Choksy 1997:142). Iranian society nonetheless was not "subsumed into an Arabian-style society. Rather, as Iranian social mores ceased to be valid in Zoroastrian settings, many were reconciled with Islamic values and, in some cases, even prevailed over

previously established Muslim practices” (Ibid:141). The emergence of Shi’i tradition as the dominant cultural and religious force in Iran is indebted to this dialectic, as well as to the incessant Iranian/Zoroastrian struggle against the Islamization process outlined in the following cursory historical sketch.

1.2.1 – *A Historical Sketch*

An important step in the “de-Zoroastrianization”²⁸ of Iran was taken by the Arab Umayyad dynasty in 698 CE when the caliph changed the language of the defeated administration from Persian to Arabic and dismissed the Zoroastrian official remnant of the Sasanians.²⁹ During the next two centuries, Iranians attempted several socio-religious uprisings against the Arabs,³⁰ employing an apocalyptic eschatology based on a Zoroastrian “sense of cyclical renewal in time [...] and the moral struggle that it arrogates to humankind” (Amanat 2002:xiii). Some of the uprisings were headed by Zoroastrians, and some by descendants of Abu Muslim, an Iranian Muslim from Khurasan³¹ who led a rebellion against the Umayyad in 758 CE and was perceived by some of his followers as a restorer of Mazdean [Zoroastrian] rule. He brought two groups together: the Iranian Khurasan army that was dissatisfied with the Umayyad, and those Muslims whose impression of the movement was that the house of Ali, Prophet Mohammad’s son-in-law, would eventually reclaim its long-ignored divine right to authority. It was the Zoroastrian “messianic promise enunciated by Abu Muslim and embodied in the Abbasid Caliph” (Lindholm 2002:103) that mobilized the masses. Two centuries later, his revolt and appearance with the famous black banners entered into “Zoroastrian eschatological texts as an apocalyptic sign of the coming of *Saoshyant* [the Zoroastrian savior]” (Babayan 2002:82). This movement reflects the bitter feelings that had survived in Iran against the Arab invaders and their continuous rule. Thereafter, Patricia Crone writes,

[A] new sequence of revolts started when Sunbadh rebelled at Rayy in response to Abu Muslim’s death, repudiating Islam. In the west we soon hear of Khurrami risings in the Jibal, upper Mesopotamia, and Armenia, culminating in the revolt of Babak in Azerbaijan. In the east we hear of Khurrami risings in Jurjan and obscure activities by a certain Ishaq in Transoxania, culminating in the revolt of al-Muqanna’ in Sogdia.

(2012:27)

Almost all of these uprisings attempted to address cultural concerns by synthesizing Islamic and Zoroastrian beliefs and local customs. Thus, there remained a sharp distinction between them, on the one hand, and Zoroastrian and Islamic orthodoxy, on the other. Aptin Khanbaghi argues, “the uprisings played a major role in transforming the Iranians’ religious identity” (2009:202). Although both the Muslim and Zoroastrian orthodox core harshly suppressed syncretism as heretical, these movements further weakened the Zoroastrian Church, which provided the incentive to join forces against the heterodox beliefs and movements. This helped an Islamization process that ultimately led to the emergence of Shi’i tradition.³² The last major movement of Khurrami in the early ninth century was both anti-Islamic and detached from Zoroastrian religion. Its leader *Bābak*, executed in 838 CE, is still celebrated in his hometown in west Iran, an anniversary cracked down upon by the Islamic Republic.³³

While Abu Muslim’s movement failed to dismantle the Arab Caliphate’s rule in Iran, the Abbasids’ ensuing victory ushered in a marked decline in the influence of the Arab tribes in Khurasan.³⁴ For instance, under the Abbasids, there were officially only two classes of people: Muslims and non-Muslims. As the old invidious distinction between Arab Muslims and non-Arab Muslims became blurred, Iranian converts achieved (at least in theory) the same status as Arab Muslims; in contrast, all non-Muslims had to pay the religious poll-tax of *jaziyeh*. It is in this period that Zoroastrians converted to Islam in huge numbers, and by the end of the Abbasids in 1258 CE, many cities such as Merv and Nishapur had become overwhelmingly Muslim, while others not on the strategic road to the east, such as Isfahan and Kerman, although governed by Muslims, still contained large numbers of Zoroastrians, Jews, and others.³⁵

In the early sixteenth century, an Iranian tribe mobilized the masses and founded the first entirely Iranian-Islamic dynasty of the Safavids (1502–1722). It secured its legitimacy to rule both on an Islamic basis and on the “traditional motifs of Iranian monarchical grandeur” (Lapidus 1988:240). Its founder, Shah Ismail, declared himself the savior, as articulated within the Shi’i tradition,³⁶ and *Shah*, the pre-Islamic Persian term for king. Reminiscent of the Sasanian grandeur, the manifestation of this blend is seen in the Safavids’ 1666 CE capital city Isfahan with its 162 mosques, 48 colleges, 182 caravansaries, and 273 public baths.³⁷

While in the Abbasid era Arab authority was fundamentally articulated through a genealogical link with the Prophet, Safavids claimed a direct link to the Shi’i Imams. This distinction, nonetheless, did not eliminate the Arabs

from the government, since the lack of Shi'i believers in Iran resulted in the importing of Shi'a scholars from Syria, Bahrain, Northeastern Arabia, and Iraq³⁸ who were gradually brought into the government as judges, administrators, and even as military commanders.³⁹ Henceforth these scholars were organized into a state-controlled bureaucracy and their power in the court intensified—the Sufi movement of the Safavids thus gradually moved towards the Shi'atization of Iran that was completed in the seventeenth century. This period witnessed “a wave of persecutions leading to forced conversion directed first against Armenian Christians, and then against Jews and Zoroastrians” (Moreen 1986:217). As Choksy observes, “[I]n 1658, mass expulsion of Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians from Esfahan's city center took place—on account of their presence being deemed detrimental to the orthodox beliefs, ritual purity, and day-to-day safety of Muslims” (2006a:138). Thus, “[a] highly pluralistic society was forcefully moved toward creation of a coherent Shi'a Twelver,” even “Sufis were massacred, their sacred tombs as those of Sunnis were desecrated, other minorities also were forced to conversion to Shi'a Islam” (Lapidus 1988:243).⁴⁰

It is as a result of such continuous harassments that “[r]eligion in the minds of minorities (and others) [in Iran] is intimately connected with past persecution” (Fischer 1973:ix). Ways in which Zoroastrians remember this period are versions of what Dr. Jahanian said at the 7th World Zoroastrian Congress in Houston, Texas in December 2000:

Despite all the adversities, the population of the Zoroastrians at the turn of the 18th century was nearly one million. But the worst blow was delivered by the last Safavid king, Shah Sultan Hosein (1694–1722), a fanatic and superstitious man profoundly influenced by the clergy. Soon after his accession to the throne to popularize himself, he issued a decree that all the Zoroastrians should convert to Islam or face the consequences. Nearly all were slaughtered or coercively converted, few fled the blood bath and took refuge in Yazd and Kerman. By the French estimate a total of 80,000 Zoroastrians lost their lives, and the entire population of Isfahan's Gabrabad [Zoroastrian neighborhood] was massacred. The Zoroastrian sources estimate the number of victims at hundreds of thousands.⁴¹

He added that “[t]oday the people of Nain and Anar near Isfahan speak *Dari* but they are Moslems.”⁴² *Dari*, called *Gabri* by the Muslims, is a local dialect spoken, but almost never written, by Zoroastrians among themselves.⁴³ It

is “the most common language still spoken among Zoroastrians in Yazd [...] a language unintelligible to Muslim Yazdis and thought to be closer to Middle Persian” (Bekhradnia 1991:123–124). Since it is “incomprehensible to speakers of standard Persian,” Mary Boyce argues that it was a “linguistic barrier that Zoroastrians had raised in self-protection” (1979:178). The Safavids’ increasing intolerance and forceful conversion of non-Shi’a communities to Islam, however, made this language an ineffective barrier. It is nonetheless a testimonial to a pervasive tradition of resistance in Zoroastrian history.

Choksy writes, “[I]t is unclear how significant the population decline actually was for Zoroastrians especially as their numbers were at least around 100,000 in the middle of the eighteenth century” (2006a:138). Later, during the Shi’i Qajar dynasty (1794–1925) when at “a nadir” (Ibid:141), they were considered unclean (*najes*), forced to build houses with lower walls, were not allowed to four-legged animals in the presence of a Muslim, yet they still had to pay poll-tax (*jaziyeh*), and sumptuary laws forced them to wear special insignia in public. In Kerman a location was designated for the “infidels” (*gabr-mahaleh*) wherein Zoroastrians lived outside the protective walls of the city. During the Afghan invasion of 1719–1724 CE Mahmud Khan Ghilzai massacred them and those living in villages for being non-Muslims.⁴⁴ Pogroms against Zoroastrians were rampant and “in response to persecution and segregation policies, the Zoroastrian community became closed, introverted and static” (Price 2005:111). Those who left Iran for the Indian subcontinent, mostly Bombay and Karachi, formed the second group of Zoroastrian migrants known as Iranis, as distinct from Parsis.

During this period the aforementioned Maneckji Limji Hataria, emissary of the Indian Parsis, appointed by the Persian Zoroastrian Amelioration Fund in Bombay, visited the Iranian community whose members were being persecuted by the Qajars—Parsi agents were subjects of the British Raj and hence were not governed by the Qajar regulations but by Iran’s treaties with Britain.⁴⁵ Hataria reported his findings to the Parsi Panchayet as follows:

Dear Sir: This noble group has suffered in the hands of cruel and evil people, so much that they are alien to knowledge and science. For them even black and white, and good and evil are equal. Their men have been forcefully doing menial works in the construction and as slaves received no payments. As some evil and immoral men have been looking after their women and daughters, this sector of the community stays in

door during the daytime. Despite all the poverty, heavy taxes under the pretext of land, space, pastureland, inheritance and religious tax (Jizya) are imposed on them. The local rulers have been cruel to them and have plundered their possessions. They have forced the men to do the menial construction work for them. Vagrants have kidnapped their women and daughters, worse than all the community is disunited. (Hataria 1865)⁴⁶

He continued, “Their only hope is for the future savior (Shah Bahram Varjavand) to come. Because of extreme misery, belief in the savior⁴⁷ is so strong that 35 years earlier when an astrologer forecasted the birth of the savior, many men left the town to search for him and were lost in the desert and never returned” (Ibid.). For Zoroastrians who were deep in the state of disarray, Hataria’s visit was the cusp of an era. As a result of his assiduous work and correspondence with the Qajar King, and also due to pressure from the British Raj on behalf of prominent Parsis,⁴⁸ the religious poll-tax was eventually lifted in 1882 and Zoroastrian schools were built. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, his work resulted in the formation of the elected administrative Association and the Council of the mobeds.

Zoroastrian mobeds are traced through the male line within priestly families who have religious knowledge and the authority to officiate at religious ceremonies. After the Arab conquest, they suffered enormously, in particular in the 9th century following the mass conversion of their base to Islam. Mobeds turned to farming or trade, and were unable to discharge their religious roles. Bekhradnia (1992) writes that in 1891, 63 mobed families lived in Yazd but only 35 individuals served as officiants for the total population of 6,908 that lived in Yazd and its 23 outlying villages. Due to economic hardship the community was unable to pay for its officiations and mobeds were the poorest members of it. They found better opportunities among the Parsis of Bombay, where Iranian mobeds were considered more authentic; hence many migrated. Beset by years of hardship, they were also among the most illiterate—only 65% of adult mobeds in Yazd were literate. Due to the importance of education as a way out of poverty, this condition however changed among their sons—58% compared to 23% of laymen.⁴⁹

The Mobeds’ Council, *Kankosh-e Mobedān*, was originally established in 1916 in Yazd. However, the emigration to Tehran of most of the 83 mobed families in search of better education and careers forced the Council to dissolve in 1944 and to reconvene in 1952 in Tehran. From the mid-1950s, the decline in number of practising mobeds changed the agnatic rule of male

descent and opened the Council up to all *dasturzādeh*, men or women who could claim paternal or even maternal descent from the families of mobeds. In addition, *mobedyars* are trained to discharge *all* the responsibilities of a mobed. During his fieldwork in 1971, Fischer counted about fifteen active priests in Iran (1973:66). In 1978, only five practising mobeds resided in Yazd and eight in Tehran, paid by the Anjuman. In 1991, there were three in Yazd, one in Isfahan and five in Tehran (Bekhradnia 1992:40). Table 1 contains the breakdown by city and gender of the number of mobeds and mobedyars as of 2013:

TABLE 1 Number of Mobeds and Mobedyars Breakdown by City and Gender⁵⁰

Year 2013	Mobeds	Mobedyar Male	Mobedyar Female
Tehran	8 (1 full time)	11	4
Karaj	-	1	2
Yazd	2	21	1
Kerman	1	4	1
Shiraz	1	1	-
Isfahan	-	1	-
Ahvaz	1 uninitiated mobedborn	-	-

The decline in numbers of mobed families has not necessarily hampered the transmission of religious knowledge. The most important contributing factor to this continuity is the traditional role of the parents in religious education, a strategy adopted by minorities to keep religious tradition alive in the privacy of homes in which the role of mothers by far supersedes that of the fathers. Moreover, this recent priestly decline has been accompanied by the twentieth century opening of Zoroastrian schools that shared the burden of knowledge transmission with the parents and continued to be significant institutional additions in the maintenance of the community, yet another contribution of the Parsis of India—by the 1920s each of the 26 villages around Yazd had schools for Zoroastrian girls and boys paid for by the Parsis.⁵¹

In the last two decades of the Qajars, during the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911, some Iranian intellectuals such as Hasan Taqizadeh, promoted a national discourse that was based on Iran’s pre-Islamic era,

within which standards of progress and modernity were to be understood. There was a nascent movement to purge Arabic words from the Persian vocabulary, further entrenching the pre- and post-Islamic gap.⁵² Thus, in the wake of the surge of national sentiment, Iranian nationalism became progressively interwoven with the ancient religion of Iran, such that during the secularist Pahlavi rule Zoroastrians were recognized as the last vestiges of the pre-Islamic Iranian religion and were officially elevated to become symbols of a new Iranian nationalism. Despite the positive changes, the Shi'i monopolizing ambition continued to grow and shape the condition of religious minorities. Even though after the Constitutionalism Zoroastrians, along with the Christian and Jewish communities, earned representation in the Parliament, this constitution "institutionalized the second-class status of non-Jafari Shi'ites [who believe in twelve Imams, hence called Twelver] by prohibiting them from holding positions as judges or cabinet ministers" (Writer 1994:86).

It was only during the short-lived secular nationalism of the Pahlavi dynasty that Zoroastrians eventually gained a respite from a prolonged turbulent past. From 1925 to 1979, "the long-lived history of the Persian monarchy" was portrayed as "both more glorious and noble than the recent [Islamic] past" (Bekhradnia 1991:124). For instance, in order to buttress his rule and to undermine the authority of the Shi'a clergy Reza Shah (1925–1941) regularly blamed Muslim religious institutions for the backwardness of a once-great civilization and stressed the superiority, ethnic and cultural inclusiveness, and continuity of Iran's pre-Islamic history and culture. He revived historical links to pre-Islamic Iran, "imagining" an authentic continuity with the past, thus creating an "official national" memory.⁵³ One way to establish this was to promote archaeological excavations to recapture the "splendour" of the Iranian past to advocate a nationalist agenda.⁵⁴ Reza Shah ordered the (re)construction of the memorials of many celebrated poets, including Hāfez, Khayyām (1048–1131), Sa'di and Ferdowsi, transforming individual mortality into historical continuity. This provided spiritual competition for Islamic pilgrimage sites, similar phenomena according to Benedict Anderson would signal "not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought" (1983:11).

Critical to our discussin is that this secular national emphasis was accompanied by the elevation of Zoroastrian tradition to become the Iranian religious national symbol further to belittle the Islamic religious establishment as a relic of the Arab invasion.⁵⁵ As Fischer points out, part of this project that continued into the reign of Reza Shah's son Mohammad Reza

was the attempt to “elevate Zoroastrianism into a symbol of the Iranian genius which was able to withstand and absorb the Greek, Arab, Turk, and European incursions” (1973:xv).

Glorification of Iran’s pre-Islamic past for sociopolitical reasons by the state—including introduction into the official calendar, in 1925, of Zoroastrian names for the months—also raised the status of Zoroastrians in the eyes of many other Iranians by seeking to establish a bond between all confessional groups based on nationalism and history. As a consequence, Zoroastrians were promoted and elected to positions of authority within the state. (Choksy 2006a:155)

Thus, the ways in which the Zoroastrian religion is equated in the discourse of the community leaders with Iranian culture is the result of Zoroastrian historical consciousness having been filtered through the Pahlavis’ nationalist project. So the Pahlavi period is integral to the formation of contemporary Zoroastrian identity in Iran. Fariborz Shazadi recounts that “[i]n a short span of sixty years, the Zarthushtis began to excel in all walks of life spanning government, business, industry, including the arts and the sciences” (Choksy 2006a:132). Nonetheless, Shi’i Islam remained the state’s official religion.

With the Islamic Republic, Shi’i ideology became the foundation of the state with a new political force, and the religious institution of *Velayat-e Faqih*—a concept inherited from Sheykh Fazl Allah Nuri, who was hanged during the Constitutional Revolution⁵⁶—presided over the state. Even though the religious minorities whose names were mentioned in the Quran continued to be recognized in the Constitution, their treatment suffered significant changes. The founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989), was worried about the revival of pre-Islamic values, a revival he had observed during the Pahlavi era; he therefore prevented Zoroastrians from reaching high status. Regardless, Zoroastrians’ *public* narration of their hardships as part of their discursive negotiations with the state always concluded by vindicating the Islamic Republic through statements such as “[n]ow we are free, and it would be unkind of us not to fulfill our religious duties to keep our tradition alive.”

On another but related note, in post-conquest Iran pejorative and condescending terms such as *Ātash-parast* or fire-worshiper, *Majus*, and *Gabr* were popularly adopted in referring to Zoroastrians. *Majus* is a term originally used for priests of pre-Zoroastrian Persia (Eng., magi, magus). Et-

ymologically, Gabr is the Persian form of the Arabic *Kāfar*⁵⁷ or infidel. In the calling of a Zoroastrian *Gabrak* and his religion *Gabraki*, the addition of the humiliating suffix *-ak* increased the disdain of the term.⁵⁸ It is more significant that these derogatory terms entered the Persian literature of the Islamic period, almost entirely replacing any other names. For instance, in his celebrated *Vis and Râmin*, Fakhr al-Din Asad Gorgâni of the 11th century writes, “If a Gabr lights fire for hundred years [referring to the Zoroastrian ritual practice of lighting and revering fire in fire-temples], eventually the same fire [of Hell] burns him.”⁵⁹ I address the Zoroastrian response to the fire-worship accusation in chapter 6. Nonetheless, one of the harshest references to Zoroastrians, along with Christians, is when they are characterized as “enemies of God” by Sa’di (1183–1284/1291), one of the major Persian classical writers, particularly known for his social thought, whose poem on the oneness of Mankind is even inscribed in the entrance to the *Hall of Nations* of the United Nations’ New York building.⁶⁰ Sa’di’s celebrated *The Rose Garden* (1258) begins with the following invocation, “O bountiful One, who from thy invisible treasury, Suppliest the Guebre and the Christian with food, How couldst thou disappoint thy friends, Whilst having regard for thy enemies?” (1258:2).⁶¹ Even though more of a complaint against God, it is formulated at the expense of non-Muslims.

1.3 – A Continuous Struggle

Zoroastrians’ suffering is part of a protracted history in the annals of the Iranian past, a history lost due to the devastating effects of repeated invasions of Persia and the destruction of Persian libraries. Even the recovered and recorded remains, in particular the religious texts and scripts, were destroyed during the Islamic periods. Ibn Battuta relays the story of a Sa’d ibn Abi Vaqqâs’ inquiry into Caliph Omar ibn Khattâb regarding Iranians’ books as booty, to which he replied, “Throw them all in water. If they are books of truth we have been blessed with a greater one [the Quran] and if they are of infidels God has made us needless of them—Ibn Battuta identified this event as the root cause for the loss of Iranian’s science” (Cf. Rajabi 2001:383–384). Similar events occurred whenever orthodoxy reigned. For instance, in his *Tazkarat al-sho’arâ*, Dowlatshâh Samarqandi writes that Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi (reigned 998–1030) burned all the 114,000 scientific, philosophical, and astronomical books of the Rey library (Cf. Rajabi 2001:384). Regarding the loss of Iranian written histories, the following ob-

servation by Persian scholar Birouni, “one of the very greatest scientists of Islam, and, all considered, one of the greatest of all times” (Sarton 1948:707), is more directly related to my discussion:

The reason we [Iranians] do not know our history is that Qatiba ibn Moslem Baheli killed writers and Zoroastrian religious teachers (*Hirbodān*) of Kharaz and burned all their books and writings (90 Hejri). Since that time Kharazmis remained illiterate and the only unifying elements in matters of history among them was memory. Through the passage of time discrepancies were forgotten and only what all were agreed upon survived. (Cf. Rajabi 2001:384)

In spite of a dearth of recorded historical accounts, two images continue to be critically significant to Iranians and, even more so, to Zoroastrians’ living memory of the past: a romanticized pre-Islamic period and a dramatized post-Arab era. These images are most effectively mediated and expressed through the medium of poetry, as other artistic forms were not sanctioned under Islamic rule. Moreover, due to the relative ease of memorization and speed of dissemination, poems were generally better preserved than other texts. The most important and earliest of these literary works is the Persian classical Book of Kings, *Shāhnāme* of Ferdowsi. This national epic of Persian-speaking peoples, composed during the Ghaznavid dynasty in 1010 CE, is still performed in the oral traditions called *naqqāli*, and recited aloud from memory in Iranian coffee houses also among Zoroastrians.

Ferdowsi hoped, Kathryn Babayan reminds us, that the *Shāhnāme* would recall the particularities of Iranian past throughout time:

In the *Shāhnāme*, the late tenth-century poet Ferdowsi crystallized an image of an Iranian past that lived on in the imaginations of those who came to embrace Persianate culture, from the rulers and courtiers of Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal courts, to the Turk or Iranian (Tajik) perfume seller who participated in the culture of storytelling in the coffee houses of larger cities and towns in central and eastern Islamdom. The *Shāhnāme* narrates Iranian myth history as a cosmic battle between the forces of good, embodied in Iran, and those of evil, personified by their Turanain (non-Iranian) enemies. (2002:xxix)

Shāhnāme’s very last verse reads, “Henceforth, I cannot die for I live having broadcast the seeds of my verse” (Ibid:22). What is more closely related

to our discussion is that, regardless of the contradictory reports about Ferdowsi's religion, "the *Shāhnāme* continued to be associated in the Muslim era with Zoroastrians (Gabr) because it embodied Mazdean [Zoroastrian] ethics and cosmology" (Ibid). It is noteworthy that while, during the early years of the Islamic Revolution, copies of *Shāhnāme* were removed from bookshops and omitted from university curricula, Zoroastrians have annually celebrated a Ferdowsi day.

Themes of the Arab invasions have also regularly been expressed by contemporary poets. For instance, in an autobiographical ode, one of the greatest contemporary Persian poets Ahmad Shamlou (1925–2000) writes, "My first name [Ahmad] is Arabic, my tribal name [Shamlou] is Turkish, and my nickname [Bāmdād] is Persian. My tribal name is ashamed of history, and I do not like my first name." (2002:827–876). In another insightful poetic rendering of Iranians' shared struggle against the Arabs, Shamlou inveighs that "I was not born today from my mother. No, I have been through the ages of time. My closest memory is the memory of centuries. They slew us many times" (Ibid.:882–884). Recounting that this memory started when "the Arabs swindled me," he laments the brutality with which the Iranicization of Islam was stifled and the polarization of Iranians spiritualized:

I prayed and I was massacred: They found me a *Rāfezi* [an unorthodox Islamic sect]. I prayed and I was massacred: They found me a *Qarmati* [another unorthodox Islamic sect]. Then they decided that we and our brothers should kill each other; and this was the shortest way to Heaven. Remember, and all that the massacre gave us was the worthless cover of our genitals. (Ibid)

In the end he concludes, "Remember the strange migration, from one alienation to another, so that the search for Faith would be our sole virtue. Remember, *our history was of restlessness. Not of belief. Not of hometown.*"⁶²

The following account further illustrates the anti-Arab sentiment and its lingering effects on the consciousness of Iranian posterity. In the 2009 contested Iranian presidential election, many bloggers, also on Twitter, speculated that the establishment's plainclothes vigilantes of Basij and revolutionary forces that mercilessly attacked supporters of the reformist candidates were Arabs, brought from Lebanon. Later, the victims of torture and sexual abuse claimed that they had heard some of the torturers converse in Arabic.

Moreover, support that the Islamic Republic offers the Shi'a of Lebanon has bolstered accusations such as that the regime loves the Arabs, and abhors pre-Islamic Persian culture.

Thus, the pathological historical legacy of Iranian struggle, framed by Shamlou in terms of “a history of restlessness,” is crystallized in moments of the Arab invasion—a pathology percolated and sustained in the Iranian consciousness through various sociocultural means. Within this general context, I am concerned with the lingering effects of the Arab invasion as manifested through Zoroastrian socio-discursive practices that inhabit their affects and sensibilities and form their imaginaries. Not to violate this “historical interdict,” for instance, accepting new members into the Zoroastrian fold, if possible at all,⁶³ would be through an exclusion process that meant “non-conversion of Arabs” (Writer 1994:217).⁶⁴ This stance is at the extreme end of an exclusion/inclusion spectrum along which the rigid exclusion of the Arabs takes an amorphous and situational position toward the Iranian Shi'a.

1.4 – Theoretical Framework

Before discussing my theoretical approach, let me address Janet Amighi's invaluable study of the Zoroastrian communities in Yazd and Kerman during 1972–1973. As my study does, she engages traditions developed in the face of perceived threats of either persecution or assimilation; she frames the formation of these traditions in terms of “developing symbols of resistance” (1990:334). Her model correlates the persistence measure of Zoroastrian membership with the integration level within the community, or the lack thereof. Accordingly, she finds an uneven and segmented persistence, linked to “long term patterns of selective social interaction and cultural syncretism with Moslems, high levels of internal stratification and segmentation, and a predominance of centrifugal forces within Zoroastrian communities” (1990:359). She argues that Zoroastrian resilience in the face of historical problems, particularly in the past one hundred years, has been achieved through interplay between centrifugal and centripetal forces. While the centrifugal forces of a poorly integrated socioreligious system “often drove Zoroastrians to the boundaries of the community” and thus “some Zoroastrians abandoned their ethnic affiliation [...] centripetal forces such as kinship, occupational or institutional networks based on generalized reciprocity and trust relationships” helped those who were repelled by incom-

patibilities with Moslem society to re-engage with Zoroastrian affiliation (1990:359).

My study situates Zoroastrian aubaltern experience, which is produced outside the dominant power structure, within the larger social and longer historical abovementioned struggle of Iranians—problematics of Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāme* due to its Zoroastrian links and glorification of pre-Islamic Iran, the dislike of Shamlou due to his anti-Arab and anti-Islam sentiments, the alleged Arab involvements in the suppression of dissidents, and the Zoroastrian interdict against Arab conversion to Zoroastrian religion—all of these exhibit the continuity of a struggle with the legacy of the Arab invasion of seventh-century Iran. Thus, after fourteen hundred years the Arab 'other' has remained not just relevant, but central to the discursive dynamics of Iranian identity negotiations. Engaging these negotiations, I focus on Zoroastrian-specific semiotics of resistance, the socio-discursive conventions, tenors, forms, practices, and artifacts against the legacy of the Arab invasion that Zoroastrians perceive has been survived in Shi'ī-saturated Iranian-ness. Through shifting messages of similarity with and distinction from the dominant Shi'a the discursive regularity of Zoroastrians' historical and cultural genealogy that I collected seeks to position them both as religious and cultural fathers of present Shi'ī tradition and as its rival as well, fashioning a habitable niche in the hostile religious and cultural order of the Iranian public. As such, although Zoroastrians understand the development of Shi'ī tradition in terms of Iranians' battle against the Arabs, they nonetheless adamantly maintain distinctiveness. The articulation of such complicated relationship vis-à-vis Shi'a through performatives that reconstruct and circulate historical narratives of entanglement and distinctiveness, embed the explicit, implicit, and abstract imaginaries of Zoroastrian identity.⁶⁵

Anthropologists have long found ways in which history could be approached and understood in conjunction with ethnographic research (Ohnuki-Tierney 1990; Biersack 1991; Sahlins 1981, 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Dirks 1996). Neil Whitehead articulates an ethnographic approach to history that affords room for performance analyses, a model in which textual sources could be used in conjunction with ethnographic study of historical consciousness. He defines histories as those "culturally constructed texts, visual and aural representations, verbal representations, verbal narratives, and oral and somatic performances that are the discrete tales that make specific histories," and historicities as "the cultural proclivities that lead to certain kinds of historical consciousness within which

such histories are meaningful” (2003:xi). For example, each period in which Zoroastrian prophet, priests, and kings have served is narrated within the sacred and non-sacred texts, but social roles and cultural meanings of that narration are not uniform—they reflect both the historical experience of Zoroastrians and the cultural significance of recalling the past.

Zoroastrian performatives that I recorded, by which priests, acolytes, and laities, recollected and recalled discrete tales of histories and awareness of the past, manifested a superior and transcendent Zoroastrian identity. Through myths, narratives, and images, in addition to finding a niche in Shi’i Iran they sought to find a respected place among the world’s monotheistic and intellectual traditions as well. They integrated scholarly materials when these complemented their discourses of originality and relevance. For instance, a textual ambiguity surrounds the time and place of residence of Zoroaster, the eponymous founder of the religion. Exploiting this ambiguity, Zoroastrians validated their claim to a world religion by citing scholarship that suggests Zoroaster’s period to be prior to Moses, and by scholarly literature by Mary Boyce who states that Parthian Jews adopted and developed their eschatology and theodicy while under the protection of a Zoroastrian state. For them, belief in the day of resurrection and the tradition that, eight centuries before Christ, Amos predicted the presence of three magi during the birth of the Messiah proved the influence of Zoroastrian religion over Christianity.⁶⁶

Another tenor of Zoroastrian historicities corresponded with the discursive and structural impacts of universal ideas and ideals. They claimed a significant contribution to modern philosophy through *the Gāthās*, the oldest recorded religious text. The *Gāthās*’ influence through diffusion to the West on Phithagoreth, and on mystical and ethical traditions of the West, was evident to believers. They also progressively reevaluated and rearranged present-day religious rituals and beliefs to stress principles of universality, modernity, and equality, especially in terms of the scientific achievements of their religion, their exact calendric calculations, and their egalitarian gender relations, as we will see in Chapter 5.

Analyses of the ways in which the community approached and understood both universal and particular histories in order to construct its own historical knowledge help to explicate how cultural proclivities make histories meaningful. This historical consciousness should not however be understood in monolithic terms, as it would obscure individual variations and the discontinuity that existed between the specialized and popular religious knowledge. My three most important sources include the high mobed, a

mobediyar, and the community poetess, each with modes of address closely linked to their positions within the community and connections to the outside world, as well as to their personal penchants. Additionally, there existed a discontinuity of religious experience in a more institutionalized way. Priests and acolytes respectively possessed the requisite religious and intellectual capital—the former officiated at the rituals where they recited the sacred texts; the latter assisted and some of them were conversant in history and theology. It was the laities' practical knowledge that enabled socialization, produced the social capital, and helped members to realize that the priestly religion was theirs too. This kind of “division of ritual labour,” to draw on Hefner's analysis, “effectively create[d] a parallel segregation of experience” that nonetheless was not absolute (1985:175).

Regardless of such internal diversity and discontinuity, I observed a level of uniformity, and in order to understand such consistency it is important to address how historical consciousness, the equivalent of Fredrik Barth's knowledge concept (2002a), transforms into that of the cultural. With the intention of distinguishing between the two, I refer to an exchange between Fredrik Barth and Clifford Geertz in which Geertz contends that Barth's view of knowledge and its role in human life “did not seem to distinguish it much from what anthropologists have been calling ‘culture’” (2002a:1). In response, Barth clarifies that knowledge *provides* material for reflection and premises for action, but culture *includes* reflections and actions. Moreover, actions become knowledge for others only *after* the fact; thus knowledge's relationship with action, events, and social relations differs from that of culture. Also, knowledge is *distributed* in a population while culture makes us think in terms of *diffuse* sharing.

Influenced by Austin's performative acts (1962), Walter Ong's orality and technologizing words (1967), Jack Goody's dialogical flexibility of oral tradition (1968), Talal Asad's notion of disciplinary practices (1993), and Charles Hirschkind's study of the cultural organization of sensory experience and his discussion of absorptive listening (2001a, 2001b, 2006), I frame Zoroastrian socio-discursive acts, including all types of performance and also commentary by participants within the religious space of rituals, as the technical apparatus of religious conventions by which historical consciousness was mediated, manifested, and passed on to the next generation. Zoroastrian performatives resonated within Zoroastrians' historically disposed affects and sensibilities and those of the sensitive Iranians within reach who harboured nationalist sentiments and, in doing so, to use Hirschkind's model, “[t]hey create[d] the sensory conditions of an emergent ethical and political

lifeworld, with its specific patterns of behavior, sensibility, and practical reasoning” (2006:8). As such, to draw on Michael Warner’s analysis of public discourse, these performatives were poetic. Not just because the religious space is self-organizing, “a kind of entity created by its own discourse, or even that this space of circulation is taken to be a social entity”; rather, that all discourse and performance addressed characterize the world in which they attempt to circulate, “projecting for that world a concrete and livable shape, and attempting to realize that world through address” (Warner 2002:81).

The creation of Zoroastrian world through address was partially sustained by the economy of oral knowledge. Oral transmission was the norm among the proto Indo-Iranian in Bronze Age Central Asia.⁶⁷ Due to the devastation of Zoroastrian libraries after Alexander’s invasion of Iran, oral transmission of religious knowledge assumed a new prominence. Thus, “orality,” to use Ong’s term (1988), had been a part of the cultural practices when the Arabs invaded Iran. As Fischer points out, “orality is said to be more embedded in multiplex social relations, in reason that plays on rich analogies and similitudes, and in parables that weave a subjectivity disciplined by and concerned with the common good” (2004:7). In contrast to fixed written traditions, Jack Goody argues that the dialectical quality of oral traditions makes them more disposed to internal social influences (1968). In addition to the social embeddedness, flexibility, and adaptability as a result of the dialectical quality of oral traditions, “orality” as a variety of “noetic economy” (Ong 1988:70) renders knowledge more sustainable. Noetic economy refers to the variety of technologies, disciplines, and organizations involved in the production and reproduction of knowledge over time. Qualities such as aggressive rather than analytical, additive as opposed to subordinative, situational and not abstract, participatory rather than objectively distanced,⁶⁸ all heighten the salience, and hence memorability, of oral narratives. While these qualities are characteristics of the Zoroastrian performatives presented here, unlike Ong I do not situate orality in opposition to literacy. Rather, I consider it as the linguistic capital of oratory that contains figurative language, proverbs, metaphors, allegory, and allusion, enacted in the Zoroastrian circulative sphere, in particular within the oral narrations of myths, life histories, and tales.

Moreover, these Zoroastrian fragmented tales of histories were religiously configured, and as such brought together via authoritative oral and somatic performances of the sacred texts, visual and aural representations of calendric cycles, cosmological constructs, moral and ethical orientations,

and symbolic and numerical items. Speakers derived further authority from mobeds' traditional agnatic and genealogical ties and/or acolytes' modern education. As opposed to history that speaks from the position of a disembodied and disinterested subject, the linguistic markers (deixis) helped to situate these performatives in the text, to draw on Emile Benveniste's linguistic studies (1971); and the narration of histories through literary images rendered them a "chronotopic" representation of time and space, and thus concretized their representation, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's study of historical poetics (1981:251). The authoritative force of the performatives also stemmed from "the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices," to apply Butler's analysis of performatives (1997:51). The discourses that cited Zoroastrians' ancestors, for instance, claimed the position of the original creator of Iranian culture for the contemporary community by invoking their own genealogical ties.

In addition to the authoritative power anchored in the past that we shall see in chapter 3, Zoroastrian performatives elicit a dialectical force from a continuous and contentious dialogue with the regnant Shi'a in the present. The temporality of Zoroastrian collective religious space operated in a constant contradistinctive positioning to that of the Shi'a, embedded in the calendric life to which the members were routinely exposed. To extend Marshall Sahlins' analyses of the heroic societies to Zoroastrians,⁶⁹ "the coherence of the members or subgroups is not so much due to their similarity (mechanical solidarity) or to their complementarily (organic solidarity) as to their common submission to the ruling power" (1985:45). Zoroastrians' affective dispositions were nonetheless cultivated in and with respect to a shared past—a disposition the contours of which were historically shaped and its edges effectively attenuated in a continuous juxtaposition of Zoroastrians' own religious space and ideology with those of the imposing Shi'a—hence these performatives resonated within their sensorium.

There was yet another homogenizing source from which Zoroastrian performatives derived their authority. Detached from the past and the present, this one was concerned with cosmologies. Zoroastrian teleological theodicy and apocalyptic eschatology as articulated in the sacred histories delineate a principle of historical practice tantamount to Sahlins' "mythopraxis" (1985). These cosmic theologies afford a scheme of life-possibilities that ranges from the mythical creative interventions of the divinities to the glorious religious past and contemporary memory of a subaltern community that expects the saviour to come:

The present years thought to be filled with evil, pollution, and suffering will, in established Zoroastrian belief, be followed by two millennia during which three male saviors will be born, one every thousand years, to purify the world. Finally, in the glorious year 11,973, the last savior, Saoshyant or Soshans, would resurrect the dead. Thereafter, Ahura Mazda will descend to earth with the other divinities, and the last savior will separate the righteousness human souls from the evil ones. Each sinner, having already suffered after death, will be purified of his or her transgressions and impurities by means of an ordeal involving molten metal. Immortality of body and soul supposedly will be granted to all humans. Ahura Mazda, the beneficent immortals, and other divine beings will then annihilate all the demons and demonesses. Angra Mainyu himself will be forced to scuttle back into hell. Finally, hell will be sealed shut with molten metal, safeguarding the spiritual and material worlds from evil forever—or so Zoroastrians believe. Once the separation of evil from good has been accomplished, Ahura Mazda would renovate the universe in the religious year 12,000. Human history will end, eternity would recommence in absolute perfection, and humanity should begin dwelling in happiness upon a refurbished earth according to Zoroastrian eschatological doctrine. (Bundahishn 34:1–32; Zand i Wahman Yasn 9:1–32) (Choksy 2002:21)

In this eschatology, “[i]f in every age each individual fulfilled her or his particular role within a case of human characters, if she or he fought for truth and conquered lies, thought good thoughts, spoke good words, and performed good deeds, the world would gradually regain its original purity” (Babayan 2002:35). Accordingly, Zoroastrian historicities are informed by a sacred history that engages divine action through human agents. Passing through a series of epochs, this history sequentially changes in content from the archangels to the human, from the abstract and universal to the concrete and individual.⁷⁰ The calendric rituals that I address in chapter 3 embody this sacred history, a tradition of knowledge that sustains a vision of Man and Cosmos in Zoroastrian theology.

Thus, Zoroastrian performatives that I encountered derived their force and authority from a variety of sources and through various means: invocation of a glorious past, citation of religious texts, embeddedness in a sacred history, priestly genealogical lineages, academic and devotional standing, opposition to the dominant Shi’a, and adaptation to the performatives of modern rational-critical discourse. Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s *The Sto-*

ryteller (1969) and his notion of a “naïve relationship” between speaker and listener, Hirschkind suggests a necessary “subordination to the authority of the storyteller and thus, in some sense, a heeding to the story itself” (2006:27). I argue that the accumulated authority of the Zoroastrian performatives afforded the requisite condition for what Hirschkind frames as “effective audition, an act that enables the integration of the narrative into the listener’s own experience” (2006:27). These performatives accordingly foregrounded the same affective dynamics that underlay the distinctive Zoroastrian tradition in a hegemonic Shi’i context, thus embodying believers’ prediscursive sensibilities. These prediscursive modes of appraisal entailed deep emotional connections to Zoroaster and his teachings, and also towards Iran and the pre-Islamic grandeur of Iranian/Zoroastrian culture. They involved a sense of precedence, preeminence, and authenticity and a ubiquitous sense of distinction from and priority to Shi’i Islam, accompanied by the resentment of the Arabs.

Through reiteration and the citational power of the past, Zoroastrian performative utterances that resonated with the community’s evaluative dispositions acquired an authoritative agency in the present. The invocation of specific spatiotemporalities transformed the socio-discursive acts from the mundane of the present to evocation of the authoritative statements of the tradition. This summoning of spatial ties and temporal relations afforded Zoroastrian performatives the power to affect and invent realities of the members’ lifeworld to position them as the original and authentic Iranians. This is to say that these performatives, mostly addressed by Zoroastrians to Zoroastrians, specified “in advance, in countless highly condensed ways, the lifeworld of its circulation” (Warner 2002b:81–82).

Zoroastrian poiesis and phronesis—the adaptation of the past to the present and creation of the present with respect to the past—constituted the cultures of histories that objectified Zoroastrians’ past, appropriated and made specific changes meaningful, and constituted their contemporary identity and the identity of other subjects in its reach. Zoroastrian historical consciousness that imagined them as the origin of Iranian culture, and the current substitutes and transmitters of the past via the present to the future of Iran, to extend Lambeck’s study of historicity, suffused and emerged “from production and practice, rather than simply that objectified knowledge of the past” (2002:17). The line of argument in the notion of historicity that I pursue is concerned less with how the past mediated new events, than with the articulating modes of the past with the present that shaped the Zoroastrian imageries and imaginaries. As such, this is an “ethnography of

[Zoroastrian] historical imagination,”⁷¹ an “imagined continuity”⁷² that creates the Zoroastrian “imagined community” (Lambek 2002:13). It explores realities of a world invented through the effects of speech genres, idioms, citational fields, and lexicons that are embodied in historical narrations, literary parables, and edifying addresses, and also in auditions and recitals of the sacred texts, visual spectacles and mise-en-scène of ceremonies, rituals, and exhibitions. These were transformed into cultural consciousness as circulated Zoroastrian religiously-facilitated spaces of collective discipline, inhabited sociocultural imaginaries, and cultivated religious sensibilities.