ISSLP
Interdisciplinary Studies in Society, Law and Politics

Original Research

The Shiite Utopia and Its Influence on Shiite Political Action from the Perspective of Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytic Theory

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Received: 2025-03-21 **Revised:** 2025-05-24 **Accepted:** 2025-06-03 **Published:** 2025-07-01

Attaining the utopia of Mahdism is an ideal that, through the reproduction of a powerful discourse, has historically exerted decisive impacts on the socio-political life of the Shiite community and the Islamic world. Essentially, utopian thought seeks to reclaim the totality of goodness and happiness—in other words, humanity's lost paradise. However, based on Lacanian psychology, the human being is trapped in the symbolic order and within a structure produced by language, a realm inherently characterized by lack and rupture. According to this theory, utopian thought, as an ideological-social fantasy, conceals the inherent antagonism of human societies and sustains the desire for movement among its followers by promising wholeness. It motivates them toward action in pursuit of their goals and to combat those elements introduced as obstacles to the restoration of totality. This article aims to examine the influence of Shiite utopian thought on Shiite political action from the perspective of this theory and by employing the method of critical discourse analysis. Accordingly, it first identifies several of the most significant characteristics of utopianism and arrives at a specific definition of the concept. Then, it analyzes the discourse of Shiite utopianism and concludes that what Shiites pursue in their envisioned ideal society is the totality of justice, which can only be realized under the divine leadership of the infallible Imam. In the final analysis, the article concludes that this thought, by presenting the idea of "struggle against the oppressor and establishment of justice" as its central signifier, constructs a powerful discourse that mobilizes its followers to engage in a sacred struggle on a global scale against oppression, and to wage jihad for the establishment of a global utopia under the leadership of the most knowledgeable and pious human being, divinely appointed by God.

Keywords: *Shiism, Mahdism, Utopia, Justice, Infallible Imam.*

How to cite this article:

Taghizadeh, R., & Moeinabadi, H.. (2025). The Shiite Utopia and Its Influence on Shiite Political Action from the Perspective of Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytic Theory. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Society, Law, and Politics, 4*(4), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.isslp.4.4.2

1. Introduction

The term *utopia* was first coined by the Englishman Thomas More in the 16th century CE to describe an imaginary city where human beings live in complete comfort and well-being. However, many scholars argue that the first systematic articulation of utopian thought should be attributed to Plato, although the concept itself predates Plato's era and can arguably be traced back to the very origins of human civilization. The concept of the Shiite utopia is a distinct form of utopianism that, while introduced in early Islamic history, entered a new phase of vitality in the contemporary period following the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

The hypothesis of this study posits that Shiite utopianism has been one of the most significant mobilizing elements in the Shiite discourse during and after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, as well as throughout the Shiite geopolitical sphere. The objective of this article is to examine the impact of this ideology on the hopeful and mass participation of Shiites in arenas designated by Shiite leadership. This topic is of critical importance today, as a substantial proportion of the populations in member countries of the Resistance Front are Shiites who believe in *Mahdism*, and whose mass mobilization in the field can have historic and transformative effects on regional and even global political dynamics.

Therefore, this article seeks—within the framework of socio-political psychology and by utilizing Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory alongside the method of critical discourse analysis—to answer the central research question: "What is the influence of the Shiite utopia on Shiite political action?" According to the authors, this interdisciplinary approach has not yet been undertaken in existing scholarship.

2. Literature Review

Due to the centrality of *Mahdism* in Shiite belief and its extensive influence across all dimensions of Shiite social life, numerous works have explored its various aspects. In Iran, scholarly efforts—primarily by Iranian thinkers and scholars—have focused on explaining and promoting *Mahdism* based on Qur'anic verses and Islamic traditions. International scholarship, however, has often addressed the political ramifications of this ideology from specific analytical angles.

For instance, in 2015, Rachel Boulle of the Australian National University analyzed the influence of Islamic utopianism in what she terms "terrorism influenced by Islamic radicalism." In another example, Alex Vatanka, writing in 2018 for the Middle East Institute in Washington, examined how *Mahdist* ideology enhances the mobilization power of Iran's proxy militias in the so-called "Shiite Crescent" countries. Likewise, Sohrab Behdad, in a 2006 article published in the journal *Middle East Studies*, studied and analyzed utopian thinking within the Fadā'iyān-e Islam (Devotees of Islam) party during the pre-revolutionary period in Iran.

3. Theoretical Framework

Lacan analyzes behavior through three primary orders: the Imaginary (or mirror stage), the Symbolic, and the Real (Moshirzadeh & Minadi, 2019). These three registers form the Lacanian theoretical matrix for conceptualizing the human subject (Gregory, 2006). The mirror stage is a developmental pattern observed in infants between 6 and 18 months of age. For Lacan, this stage marks the birth of the ego/self and, simultaneously, the emergence of the Other (Godin, 2013). This phase should be understood as the subject's pre-linguistic identity formation through the mirror image, although the image itself is imaginary (Sheikh, 2017).

The next stage—the Symbolic order—is not something that begins merely after the end of the Imaginary stage. Rather, from the very beginning, the child is born into a symbolic structure, and it is precisely this symbolic structure that constitutes the subject. According to Lacan, although the subject is brought into being by the Symbolic order, it ultimately becomes alienated within it (Hendrix, 2019). Thus, the subject experiences alienation in two dimensions: first, in the mirror stage, when the infant misrecognizes itself through the mirror image; and second, upon entering the Symbolic system of language. Alienation is the inevitable result of ego formation and the first essential step toward subjectivity (Homer, 2005).

The Real (the third register) is the domain of the inherent failure of the other two registers—the domain of impossibility or lack (Skode, 2007). It is essentially that which resists symbolization (Fink, 2018). Unlike the Symbolic, the Real contains no absence. While the Symbolic consists of distinct and differentiated elements—namely, signifiers—the Real lacks any internal differentiation; it is a realm without fissure or division (Evans, 2006). However, the issue is that the subject can never attain the Real and always remains trapped in the Symbolic order.

In Lacanian literature, the Symbolic order that constitutes the subject is referred to as the "Big Other." Lacan emphasizes that language is the Big Other, and the subject is a subject of language. According to Lacan, after the subject fails to retrieve its desired wholeness through the *petit autre* (the mirror images seen by the child from 6 to 18 months), and fails to become the object of the mother's desire, it then attempts to fulfill this fantasy in the Symbolic order—seeking to become the

object of desire of the Big Other, unaware that it is forever barred from attaining such wholeness.

Thus, the Big Other becomes the locus that shapes the subject's desire, and the subject always derives its desire from it. As Lacan states: desire must necessarily be formed at the level of the "A" inscription (the Big Other); in other words, desire is always a consequence of linguistic emergence and is inscribed at the level of the Big Other (Lacan, 2018). Human desire, in fact, is the desire of the Big Other (Lacan, 2018). What Lacan refers to as "desire" points to something beyond basic human needs—something that cannot be fulfilled (Homer, 2005). Desire is, by its very nature, the continuous pursuit of something else. There is no specific object that can satisfy or extinguish it. Desire always represents something perpetually lacking in both the subject and the Big Other—that is, the Symbolic system (Fink, 2018). This absence is essentially the absence of *jouissance*—the lost enjoyment. *Jouissance* is the response to the subject's infinite desire, yet it remains inexpressible and unrepresentable (Heidari & Fard, 2014). *Jouissance* always emerges from a pleasure that eludes capture, a joy that has been lost and is continually sought. This absence authorizes the emergence of a concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis known as *fantasy*. Fantasy promises to fill the void of *jouissance*. It is a structure that conceals the subject's lack by presenting an image of wholeness, while fundamentally resisting opposition and antagonism (Muller, 2012).

Thus, if desire persists as a result of an irreparable lack stemming from the desire of the Big Other, fantasy emerges as a solution to this lack. The function of fantasy for the Big Other is to cover its own lack. Žižek writes: "Fantasy offers a ready-made answer to the question 'What do you want?'—to the unbearable enigma of the Big Other's desire and its lack; yet at the same time, it is fantasy itself that defines the contours of our desire and constructs a framework through which we are enabled to desire" (Macdonell, 2007). Fantasy serves only as a representational mechanism attempting to mask the fissure within the Big Other, covering its absence, and thereby sustaining the subject's desire for wholeness.

Fantasy is a domain that, above all, strives to veil the lack in the Big Other. Therefore, it primarily belongs to the social world (Stavrakakis, 2002). Slavoj Žižek explicitly defines fantasy as a political concept (Glynos & Stavrakakis, 2008). Emphasizing the significant role of fantasy in ideology and coining the term "ideological-social fantasy," he describes it as follows: the aim of ideological-social fantasy is to design an image of society that is supposedly real—a society not torn by antagonistic division, where relations among its parts are organic and harmonious (Žižek, 2005).

Such a unified and organic society is the very utopia that utopian thinkers throughout history—both in the East and West—have striven to conceptualize and depict. A society devoid of suffering, sorrow, and pain—filled with joy, health, and peace. The inhabitants of this city eternally enjoy the finest blessings and live outside history at the zenith of human felicity, under the leadership of wise philosopher(s). Unaware of the past and detached from the future, they thrive in the light of rational productivity and scientific prosperity, leading lives of minimal sufficiency, peace, and contentment (Davari Ardakani, 1977, 2000).

Hence, utopia is a kind of *fantasy*. Freud once said that while a child, in response to deprivation by reality, creates a protective space for itself through "play," the adult retreats into their fantasies to compensate for losses caused by deprivation. He regarded utopia as a sign of decline and an attempt to escape from disappointment (Davari Ardakani, 1977, 2000).

As noted, Lacan, in equating the Big Other with language, uses linguistic structures to define his concepts, including fantasy. In Lacanian linguistics, there exists a concept called the *point de capiton* (quilting point), which plays a crucial role in maintaining societal cohesion and preserving the framework of political fantasies. The *point de capiton* is a master signifier that, like a stitching point, gathers floating signifiers around itself and renders them meaningful. It articulates a set of signifiers and thereby stabilizes a discursive structure. The importance of *points de capiton* lies in their role as nodal points that contribute to the construction and cohesion of collectivity, political-social objectivity, and the generation of a sense of unity (through the articulation of ideological elements) (Ashraf Nazari, 2018). For this reason, identifying the *quilting point* of a discourse is vital and central in discourse analysis.

4. Method

The method employed in this study is *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*, which is a qualitative and interpretive mode of inquiry. The concept of discourse, which has

expanded significantly in analytical scholarship in recent years, refers to a form of analysis that does not merely focus on factual matters but also addresses the conditions of possibility. Discourse analysis is an investigative approach that seeks to uncover how visible effects of discourse are shaped by the production structure and the context of text or speech—that is, extratextual factors such as situational, cultural, and social contexts. It aims to analyze the relationship between the formation of ideology and the formation of discourse and its influence on both structure and agency, based on the assumption of an interactive relationship between text and context, and a dialectical interplay among discourse, power, knowledge, and truth (Azak & Bahrami, 2021).

Critical Discourse Analysis originates as a developmental trajectory from traditional discourse analysis in linguistic studies, and it elevates the theoretical and methodological level of discourse analysis from mere textual description to explanatory depth. Moreover, it expands the scope of research from the micro-level of individual situational context to the macro-level of society, history, and ideology (Agha Golzadeh & Ghiathian, 2007). In this approach, the research question focuses on how social realities are constructed through discourse in relation to specific processes or issues. Empirical data in this domain can include materials ranging from scholarly articles to media interviews (Kalantari, 2009).

The central concern of CDA is the changes occurring in political and socio-intellectual life (Khoshkjan, 2017; Khoshkjan & Rezaei Panah, 2017), with a primary emphasis on identifying and denaturalizing ideological propositions (Fazeli, 2004, p. 17). This is due to the possibility that a particular semiotic structure of difference may become hegemonic and gain legitimacy as part of common sense, thereby reinforcing relations of domination (Mohseni & Parvin, 2015). Under such circumstances, the prevailing ideology, through persistent use in language, is assumed to be natural and acceptable. Hence, critical discourse analysts aim to denaturalize such ideologies by exposing the hidden power relations and ideological processes embedded in linguistic texts (Agha Golzadeh & Ghiathian, 2007).

Accordingly, CDA is a form of discourse analysis that focuses on how social power abuse, inequality, and injustice are enacted, reproduced, and resisted in social and political contexts. Scholars working within CDA adopt a clear and committed stance, seeking to understand, expose, and ultimately challenge social inequalities.

One of the leading theorists in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis is Norman Fairclough (Qasemzadeh & Gorji, 2011). He criticizes non-critical linguistic theories and studies of language phenomena for their lack of attention to the ways discursive acts are shaped. Instead, such theories often focus solely on analyzing the structure and function of discourse acts. In contrast, CDA highlights ideological processes in discourse, the interplay between language and power, ideology, domination, inequality, and the ideological presuppositions embedded in discourse. It examines both linguistic and extralinguistic elements, along with the contextual knowledge of agents, as central to its analysis (Haghighat, 2008).

Fairclough outlines three analytical levels of discourse based on the social conditions of text production:

1. **Text Description**: This stage pertains to the content and surface features of the text.
2. **Text Interpretation**: This stage focuses on the relationship between the text and interaction, viewing the text as both a product of the production process and a resource for the interpretive process. It also considers situational context and intertextuality.
3. **Text Explanation**: This stage analyzes the relationship between interaction and the broader social context. It involves the social explanation of the processes of production, interpretation, and their societal effects. This stage also interrogates the social factors and ideologies employed in the discourse (Mohseni & Parvin, 2015).

5. Text Description:

5.1. Definition of Utopia

Conceptually, *utopia* (or *eutopia*) represents an ideal city, a vision of a perfect society that has been among humanity's most ancient aspirations—a wholly natural desire with a history as long as that of humankind itself. Realization of this desire would mean the establishment of a place where all virtues and goods are gathered and where evil and the devil are absent (Motalebi & Naderi,

2009). According to some sociologists, utopia is merely an imaginary city with literary value (Davari Ardakani, 1977, 2000). However, it must be noted that in addition to its literary style and fictional nature, utopia also envisions social arrangements that have, at times, been realized in history (Godin, 2013).

Freud viewed utopia as a sign of decline and an attempt to escape disappointment. In other words, both Freud and some sociologists regard utopia as a manifestation of decadence, or at best, as a historical accident. They argue that whenever social pressure and deprivation intensify, the oppressed class utilizes utopia as a tool for resistance against its enemies and rivals (Davari Ardakani, 2000). This creates a discourse that gains high acceptability by promising the desires of the marginalized class—promises such as absolute justice and a paradise-like life. This broad appeal enables the discourse to become hegemonic within society.

Karl Mannheim, in his book *Ideology and Utopia*, offers a theory in which he defines utopia as a conflict that arises from a fundamental disharmony with the "actual state of affairs"—that is, with the very conditions within which it emerges. More clearly, Mannheim describes utopia as any mental image opposed to the "existing and practical social order" and which seeks to undermine it wholly or partially (Rouvillon, 2007). In this sense, utopia, unlike ideology—which reflects a conservative acceptance of dominant values—is one of history's driving forces, a kind of "explosive substance" in the hands of specific social classes fighting for dominance (Rouvillon, 2007).

Mannheim positions rebellious utopia in contrast to conservative ideology, which is solely concerned with legitimizing the status quo (Godin, 2013). However, equating utopia with insurrection implies neglecting more pragmatic forms of utopia, in which protest is replaced with reform and the desire to improve current conditions. This view would exclude exceptional texts such as *New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon (Rouvillon, 2007), which aims not to reject the existing order but to reform it (Mohammadi Monfared, 2008).

Of course, what truly matters is the content—the vision of perfection sought by utopians—rather than the specific method employed. This content is centered on the idea of perfection, whose primary objective is the *polis*, or political system, and whose realization depends on an institution built upon human will, resolve, and action. It must be emphasized that what matters is the totality of this content: both the result (political perfection) and the means (human effort, as the sole agent of his own development) (Rouvillon, 2007).

Utopia, in reality, is a lens through which we critically reexamine foundational social concepts—such as family, consumption, government, and religion. The fantasy of an alternative society and its spatial configuration as a kind of "no-place" represents the most powerful challenge to the existing order (Ricoeur, 2016). It is a reassuring and promising dream that arises from the anxiety and perceived oppression by the ruling class (Godin, 2013). Ultimately, the main and enduring theme of utopia is the comprehensive organization of human society (Godin, 2013).

Based on the above, the following definition of utopia and utopian thought may be offered:

A. Utopia is a society governed by a system aimed at achieving the totality of happiness and prosperity, attainable through meticulous planning by thinkers and rulers and the committed efforts of its citizens.

B. Utopian thought is a conceptual framework that emerges in opposition to prevailing conditions deemed unjust and detrimental to public welfare by the utopian thinker. It seeks to transform these conditions to establish the foundations of collective happiness and well-being.

This definition appears to be more comprehensive than Mannheim's and encompasses various types of utopias:

- *Utopias* (with undefined time and place);
- *Uchronias* (with a real, defined place but a vague, future time);
- *Kallipolises* (Plato's beautiful city, presented as a normative ideal);
- Eastern utopias such as *al-Madina al-Fadila* (al-Farabi's ideal city attainable through human reason supported by divine guidance and spiritual enlightenment).

This understanding of utopianism also includes *religious utopias*, where, although the final victory and dominion of the faithful are seen as divinely guaranteed, religious leaders and thinkers maintain that such promises are not fulfilled through mere idealism or passive hope but through pragmatic and action-oriented conduct by the believers.

For example, one serious approach to messianism in Jewish thought, as expressed by 19th-century thinker Kalischer, is the belief that the coming of the *promised*

Messiah will occur through a natural process involving human action (Khoshkjan, 2017; Khoshkjan & Rezaei Panah, 2017). The belief holds that Jewish salvation cannot be realized without the help and efforts of the Jews themselves, as liberation is the final stage of a physical and material process achievable through collective solidarity and agency (Khoshkjan, 2017; Khoshkjan & Rezaei Panah, 2017).

Similarly, in Shiite thought—according to the majority of Shiite scholars—the establishment of a just global government led by the awaited Imam (*Mahdi*) will not occur without the will and active struggle of the Shiites. The Qur'an suggests that the appearance of the promised Mahdi is part of an ongoing battle between the people of truth and the people of falsehood—a struggle that will ultimately end in the triumph of the former (Motalebi & Naderi, 2009).

5.2. *Characteristics of Utopia*

5.2.1. *Pursuit of Justice*

Utopia, even in its most rational form—and especially in its most rational form—is founded upon a love for equality. It may even go so far as to sacrifice liberty in the name of equality (Godin, 2013). Justice is the central theme of Plato's *Republic*, as reflected in its historical subtitle, *On Justice* (Popper, 2001). As Plato states, "The principle we laid down at the foundation of the city and gave it the form of law, I believe, is none other than justice" (Plato, 1974).

5.2.2. *Common Ownership of Property*

The sharing of property and the devaluation of gold and precious metals in Plato's *Republic*, and in all utopias, are considered safeguards against greed, envy, and other irrational psychological impulses (Davari Ardakani, 1977, 2000).

5.2.3. *Attention to the Qualities of the Ruler*

Most utopias emphasize the character of the ruler. Thinkers such as al-Farabi, Plato, and Francis Bacon believed the ruler must be a philosopher or sage-king (Motalebi & Naderi, 2009). Plato argued: "Unless philosophers become kings in our cities, or those now called kings and rulers truly and adequately pursue philosophy, and political power and philosophy converge, and the many natures that now pursue one or the other exclusively are eliminated, there will be no end to the troubles of states and of humanity" (Plato, 1974).

5.2.4. *Concern for the Welfare of Society and Citizens*

In *Laws*, Plato goes so far as to declare that the principal goal of legislation is to provide "the greatest happiness and the highest degree of mutual friendship possible for citizens" (Tabatabai, 2017). Aristotle, too, believed that discussion of human happiness is more political than ethical (Tabatabai, 2017), and considered the primary responsibility of the ideal state to be the guardianship of virtue: "A state that truly deserves the name exists for the sake of the good life; its job is to care for virtue" (Popper, 2001).

5.2.5. *Influence of Social Conditions*

Utopias reflect the objective conditions of society. A utopian writer or designer, dissatisfied with the political, social, or economic conditions of their society or the wider world, and perceiving a dissonance between these realities and their idealistic visions, attempts to negate the present order and deny its values through a utopian projection (Asil, 2014). Utopian thinkers each design their visions from unique perspectives shaped by the specific social disorders of their time and their interpretation of the root of societal problems (Ramin, 2010, p. 5).

5.3. *Shiite Utopia*

The definition of utopia presented above can aptly be applied to the Shiite utopia, since Shiite utopian thought also reflects deep dissatisfaction with the status quo and aims to establish an ideal state of complete goodness through the struggle of its followers. As Ayatollah Khamenei states: "The current course of history is one of oppression; a path of domination and submission—some in the world are oppressors, and others are the oppressed" (Khamenei, speech, January 8, 2013). He continues: "With effort, perseverance, and struggle, we hope that this world—now filled by enemies of God and devils with the darkness of tyranny, rebellion, the trampling of the weak, and the affliction of the rule of oppressors—will, through our continuous effort, one day be transformed into a world where humanity and human

values are honored, and tyrants and aggressors find no space to act on their desires" (Khomeini, 2010).
The previously stated characteristics of utopia can also be applied to the Shiite Promised City:

5.3.1. Pursuit of Justice

The most prominent slogan of Mahdism is justice: "Justice is the foremost demand of those awaiting the Promised Mahdi... Thus, the primary expectation of the Awaiters is the establishment of justice" (Khomeini, 2010).

5.3.2. Common Ownership of Property

It has been narrated from the Prophet of Islam that the Mahdi will distribute wealth equally among the people. Morteza Motahhari also considers one of the features of the era of the Mahdi to be "the establishment of full equality among human beings regarding wealth".

5.3.3. Attention to the Qualities of the Ruler

The eighth Shiite Imam described the Mahdi as the most knowledgeable, wise, pious, patient, generous, and devout among the people. Shiite leaders have even emphasized the physical characteristics of the savior. The first Imam describes him as "a handsome, robust young man with a luminous face, beautiful hair resting upon his shoulders, whose radiant countenance is surrounded by the blackness of his beard and hair".

5.3.4. Influence of Social Conditions

Whenever the Shi'a recall the descendants of Ali (a), they remember a people who suffered great injustice at the hands of ruling powers—those who were martyred, imprisoned, hanged, burned, and had their ashes scattered. They also remember the freed slaves (*mawālī*) who, like the descendants of Ali, endured severe forms of torture and oppression (Jurdaq, 2000). It is under such conditions that the struggle against oppression and the pursuit of justice becomes the supreme ideal of Shiism.

5.3.5. Peace and Tranquility

The Prophet of Islam foretells the Islamic Promised Utopia with these words: "All classes of my community will live in such prosperity during his (Mahdi's) time that no righteous or wicked person before them would have experienced such blessings. The sky will shower its mercy and the earth will yield all its produce" (Majlesi & Ali, 1998; Majlesi, 2005). It will be a world free from discrimination, class conflict, and divisive alignments—free from separation, fragmentation, war, bloodshed, and aggression (Makarem Shirazi, 2009).

6. Text Interpretation

The term *Shiʿa* in its lexical sense means "companions" or "followers," and in the technical language of theologians and jurists—both classical and contemporary—it refers to the followers of ʿAlī and his sons (may God be pleased with them). According to Shiʿi doctrine, all sects agree that *Imamate* is not a public utility to be decided by the community nor a position confirmed by their endorsement. Rather, it is a pillar of religion and the foundation of Islam. The Prophet could not neglect it, nor could he delegate it to the ummah; instead, it was obligatory upon him to appoint an Imam for the people—an infallible leader, free from major and minor sins. That person, Shiʿis believe, is none other than ʿAlī (may God be pleased with him), whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) appointed to this station.
Historically, Shiʿism emerged as a social phenomenon (Jurdaq, 2000) and from its inception has been a political movement. In fact, it could be argued that its political dimensions were more prominent than its purely religious aspects, stemming from dissatisfaction and protest against the prevailing sociopolitical conditions (Khoshkjan, 2017). Shiʿis initially appeared as a political party seeking power, and they have never relinquished this original political character (Halm, 2006).
This political activism, often expressed as resistance against oppressive regimes, is viewed by the highest contemporary Shiʿi authorities as intrinsic to Shiʿism. As Imam Khomeini stated, "One of the inherent characteristics of Shiʿism from the beginning to the present has been resistance and uprising against dictatorship and oppression, as evidenced throughout Shiʿi history" (*Sahīfeh-ye Imām*, vol. 4, p. 188). Therefore, Shiʿism is the religion of revolution, and no other sect or denomination in history has witnessed as many uprisings and rebellions (Niyazmand, 2004). Even during periods of extreme weakness, Shiʿis never lost sight of their latent potential to seize power (Halm, 2006).

The followers of this socio-political movement emerged around the events of *Saqīfa* and the exclusion of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib from what Shiʿis believe was his God-given right to lead the Muslim community after the Prophet. Throughout Islamic history, they have endured the harshest and most brutal forms of persecution. During the Umayyad era, the Alids were subjected to such dire poverty that many died of starvation (Mashkoor, 1976). Muʿāwiya filled his prisons with Shiʿis—men and women—executing, mutilating, crucifying, and burying them alive (Sadr, 1982; Sadr, 1997).

Under the Abbasids, this pattern of persecution continued. Ibn Esfandiyār writes about the oppression of Shiʿis under al-Mutawakkil: "Just as some are drawn to hunting or entertainment, al-Mutawakkil had an obsession with exterminating the descendants of the Prophet". "In his time, the Alids were scattered and hiding in valleys, ruins, and remote places". In Shiʿi memory, recalling the children of ʿAlī (peace be upon him) evokes images of innocent people whose hands and feet were cut off and left to die in the desert; of lands ravaged by tyrannical governments; of people who were killed for the whims of rulers, officials, and palace elites (Jurdaq, 2000).

Shiʿis believe that the institution of *Imamate* is not within the purview of public opinion—i.e., the public has no authority to appoint an Imam or successor. Like *nubuwwa* (prophethood), it is a divinely ordained role, a cornerstone of religion and the foundation of Islam. Consequently, all other governments are viewed as illegitimate and oppressive. The Shiʿi belief in the rightful succession of the Prophet has never been forgotten; the hearts of the people have always held an affinity for the Ahl al-Bayt and a conviction that their rights were usurped (Safi Golpayegani, 1998).

Both the usurpation of power by the unworthy and the oppression of Shiʿis are clearly evident in the discourse of the highest Shiʿi leaders. Ayatollah Khamenei notes, "For centuries, Shiʿis have seen themselves living in a society ruled by usurpers, whose governance brought nothing but tyranny and darkness" (Khamenei, speech, May 10, 2017). However, the Shiʿi discourse understands this oppression as affecting not only themselves but all of humanity, believing that the rule of the unfit has brought human society to a standstill. "The Imam of the Age (peace be upon him) will reappear to bring relief to all humanity—to save mankind from stagnation, to rescue human society and even the future of human history... Awaiting his reappearance means rejecting and refusing to accept the condition imposed upon humanity by ignorance and human desires" (Khamenei, speech, August 18, 2008).

Thus, the uprising of the Mahdī is not a limited social movement aimed at reforming part of the world; rather, it is a global revolution and a divine mission to deliver humanity from the darkness of tyranny into the light of justice (Sadr, 1982). It is clear that throughout the history of this movement, the Shiʿa have always longed for a government led by a divine and infallible leader who:

A. Establishes justice and eradicates the roots of oppression and discrimination: "The heart of humanity beats for that savior to come and uproot oppression; to destroy the edifice of injustice that has existed throughout history and persists today in extreme forms; to put tyrants in their place. This is the first and foremost expectation of those who await the Promised Mahdī" (Khamenei, speech, October 22, 2002).

B. Avenges the wrongs committed against the Shiʿa. According to narrations cited by Faḍl ibn Shādhān (d. 873 CE / 290 AH) and Kulaynī, the *Qāʾim* (i.e., the Mahdī) will rise as a divine avenger against those responsible for the suffering of ʿAlī and Fāṭima (peace be upon them). He will also avenge those who persecuted the Imams and their followers, especially the killers of Imam Ḥusayn (peace be upon him) (Jassim & Seyyed Mahd, 1998).

7. Text Explanation

According to Lacan's theory, an ideological discourse must be conceptualized as an articulation or chain of ideological elements centered around a nodal point (*point de capiton*) or a set of nodal points. The *point de capiton* is a master signifier that stabilizes meaning and anchors otherwise floating signifiers within the ideological discourse (Stavrakakis, 2002). Based on this framework, it can be inferred that the notion of "establishing justice under divine governance"—which includes resisting oppression and defending the oppressed—has become the *point de capiton* of Shiʿi utopian thought. This signifier blankets and gives meaning to the floating signifiers within the discourse. Thus, a discourse is created, articulated around the central signifier of "restoring lost justice," which seeks to reassert ideological hegemony among the oppressed

class by promising a universal utopia led by the infallible Imam and realized through the struggle of the world's downtrodden:

"We are Muslims; East and West mean nothing to us. We defend the oppressed and challenge the oppressors. This is an Islamic duty. O nations of the world who are oppressed! Rise and claim your rights, and do not fear the clamor of the powerful, for God is with you, and the earth is your inheritance" (Khomeini, 2010).

From the earliest moments following the Prophet's death, Shiʿism has endured the most brutal forms of oppression at the hands of rulers deemed illegitimate and unjust. Exhausted by injustice and enraged by the historical tyranny of ruling structures, the Shiʿa yearns for full justice in a utopia governed by the most just and knowledgeable individual. Firm in the certainty of this utopia's eventual realization, Shiʿism continually revives hope for the establishment of a justice-centered, anti-oppression society in the hearts and minds of its followers:

"The name and memory of Imam Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance) constantly remind us that the sunrise of truth and justice is guaranteed at the end of this dark night" (Khamenei, speech, May 10, 2017).

Hence, Shiʿism, by promoting the idea of *Intizār* (anticipation) and the preparation for the coming of a savior who will establish humanity's ultimate utopia at the end of time, regards the most important step in realizing this promise as relentless struggle against oppressors—who are seen as the primary obstacles to achieving universal goodness and salvation:

"With God's help, we shall break the hands of all oppressors in Islamic lands... and pave the way for the reappearance of the global reformer and divinely ordained leader, Imam Mahdi—may our souls be sacrificed for him" (Khomeini, 2010).

A Shiʿi Muslim who deeply believes in a coming ideal day—one filled with happiness and the fulfillment of innate human desires—never loses the will to struggle or falls into despair. This is because the Mahdist discourse, as a central part of Shiʿi political culture, teaches that the victory of justice over oppression is inevitable. This certainty removes any despair or weariness from the Shiʿi community:

"When human beings witness the accumulation of darkness and oppression, they may despair. The memory of Imam Mahdi reminds us that the sun will rise, the day will come. Yes, darkness exists, oppressors exist and have existed for centuries—but the end of this dark night is surely the sunrise. That is what belief in Imam Mahdi teaches us. This is God's guaranteed promise" (Khamenei, speech, May 10, 2017).

Thus, Shiʿi utopianism is future-oriented, rooted in an eschatological tradition in which the Hidden Imam reappears to restore justice and lead Muslims in a global jihad that culminates in a spiritual and moral resolution for all of humanity (Bloul, 2015). This future-oriented, hopeful anticipation shapes the socio-political structure of Shiʿi society and guides the movement of its subjects—who, according to Lacan, desire what the Big Other (i.e., the hegemonic discourse) desires.

As Lacan asserts: in the scene of fantasy, desire is not fulfilled or realized; rather, it is constructed. Through fantasy, we learn how to desire. Fantasy constitutes the very framework that structures and defines the coordinates of desire (Žižek, 2005). Similarly, Shiʿi utopian thought defines the nature of Shiʿi desire and, by extension, the anticipatory behavior of the faithful:

Intizār (expectation) is an Islamic concept and cultural value from which a distinct cultural behavior emerges (Asafi & Taghi, 2004).

This cultural behavior cultivates agents who are to be both the facilitators of the savior's reappearance and his supporters thereafter—subjects whose desire, shaped by the lack generated through the Big Other's desire, compels them to strive to become its perfect object. The goal of the Mahdist discourse is the training of such individuals:

"Though their hearts are soft by nature, when confronting tyrants and oppressors, they become like pieces of iron, immune to gentleness or tenderness... Their duty is to fight the global system and rebel against it" (Asafi & Taghi, 2004).

"They are not shaken by storms, not disheartened or weary in battle, and they rely solely on God" (Asafi & Taghi, 2004).

The sixth Shiʿi Imam describes the Awaiters as:

"Men whose hearts are like pieces of iron—no doubt enters their faith. In belief, they are stronger than stone. If commanded to move mountains, they would uproot them. Their armies do not enter a city without destroying it. By night, they are like monks; by day, they are like lions. They yearn for martyrdom and long to be killed in God's path" (Majlesi & Ali, 1998).

Accordingly, Awaiters are trained to be ever-ready—driven by unyielding resolve and equipped to confront enemies of the Shiʿi utopia, where one side represents absolute good and the other, absolute evil. They believe, based on divine promise and tradition, that they will ultimately emerge victorious:

"Our war was a war of faith and depravity—and such a war has existed since Adam and will continue until the end of life" (Khomeini, 2010).

To construct this intense desire to fight oppressive structures and reproduce hope in eventual victory, the Shiʿi utopian discourse incorporates numerous signifiers articulated through the central signifier. Concepts like *martyrdom* and *return (rajʿa)* are examples. *Martyrdom* means conscious death in the struggle against oppression, promising absolute good in the afterlife; *rajʿa* refers to the return of certain deceased Shiʿis during the Mahdi's reappearance, allowing them to assist him and witness his state:

"God will bring back to life a group of deceased Shiʿis at the time of Imam Mahdi's appearance so that they may earn the reward of supporting him and witnessing his rule" (Majlesi & Ali, 1998).

In a narration, the sixth Imam says of the faithful departed:

"The believer meets the Ahl al-Bayt in paradise, dines and converses with them until our Qāʾim rises. Then God resurrects them, and they hasten to him in groups" (Majlesi & Ali, 1998).

The power of this idea is evident in the daily supplications of those who believe in the Mahdist utopia:

"O Lord! If death, which You have made inevitable for Your servants, comes between me and him (the Imam), then raise me from my grave wrapped in my shroud, unsheathing my sword, and holding my spear, to answer his call whether I am among the dwellers of cities or deserts" (*Duʿa al-ʿAhd*).

Thus, jihad in the cause of the Shiʿi global state, even when ending in sacred death, is not only a path to eternal salvation but even offers the hope of returning to this world to taste victory and the fulfillment of happiness under the rule of the infallible Imam. This compelling drive may explain why Sheikh Ṭūsī, quoting the sixth Imam, described the *expectation of relief* itself as a form of relief.

8. Conclusion

Shiʿism is a religion with deeply political inclinations, founded upon the belief in the divine succession of the Prophet Muhammad. Yet, throughout history, its followers have endured severe oppression and marginalization, and its leaders have been denied their divinely appointed right to rule. In response, Shiʿi leaders have consistently promised their followers a future age in which the most knowledgeable and virtuous individual, by divine command, will establish a global government grounded in justice and the eradication of oppression. For Shiʿis, whose historical memory is steeped in recollections of tyranny and injustice by rulers viewed as illegitimate usurpers, the vision of the Shiʿi utopia is immensely compelling and emotionally stirring. It is difficult to find a committed Shiʿi who does not yearn for its realization.

However, Shiʿi teachings emphasize that the establishment of the Mahdist city of justice will not be accomplished through miracles but through the agency of Shiʿis themselves. Thus, by promising a world of universal peace and justice under the leadership of the Shiʿi Imam, Shiʿism keeps the desire for political engagement alive in its adherents. These followers, as subjects of the discourse, become dedicated agents who continue the struggle against the enemies of Shiʿism—seen as the perennial destroyers of human happiness—under any circumstances, even to the point of accepting a sacred death in defense of their ideal. They believe such death is not the end, but the beginning of eternal bliss and possibly even the opportunity to return and witness the final victory of good over evil in the Mahdist utopia. In this way, Shiʿi religious leaders—possessing unique access to and control over the discourse—shape the social order and guide the political structure of the Shiʿi community through discursive means.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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