

Weststruckness: Its Trials, and Its Tribulations

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Abstract: From the late nineteenth century onwards, ‘Weststruckness,’ under some moniker or another, has remained prevalent in Iranian sociocultural discourse. Its message, however, has largely been distorted and misunderstood by way of its weaponisation as a political, indeed, revolutionary tool. In this paper, we trace the history of the concept from the late nineteenth century through to the Constitutional Revolution and the Pahlavi period, up to the Iranian Revolution of 1979. We describe the evolution of the concept by analysing the sociopolitical ideas of Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri, Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh, Ahmad Kasravi, Fakhreddin Shadman, Ahmad Fardid, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, and Ali Shariati. We will then demonstrate how the concept of ‘Weststruckness,’ originally expressing distress over the intrusion of Western culture into Iran, was stripped of its inherent cultural content and fashioned only into a pejorative slogan.

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Historical Background

‘Weststruckness’ (and its kindred terms such as ‘Westoxication,’ and ‘Occidentiotis’) is an English rendering of Jalal Al-e Ahmad’s *Gharbzadegi* (1962). The subject, however, is much wider as well as older than that. The fear of the intrusion of European culture goes back to the second half of the nineteenth century, when the culture of modernisation was beginning to take form inside Iran.

In the nineteenth century, such fears not only contributed to Naser al-Din Shah’s decision to disband the upper-class intellectuals’ pseudo-Freemason club called *Faramushkhaneh*, but they also influenced the cancellation of Reuter’s Concession in 1872, intended as a wide programme of mainly economic modernisation of the country, including the construction of railways. Naturally, the concession would have also meant the employment and influx of large numbers of European personnel, from managers downwards, who would bring their Christian and European lifestyles with them. This, of course, was believed to impact the Muslim fabric of society.

When, after the shah’s death in 1896, constitutionalism began to gather momentum, two central notions came to the fore with respect to what a constitutional government must entail. First and foremost was the abolition of arbitrary rule; and second was the modernisation of state and society that the younger and secularist intellectuals had long advocated. Some naively believed that the two projects necessarily overlapped.

In particular, the prospect of secular modernisation frightened Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri and his disciples into effectively opposing constitutionalism by advocating *mashru’eh* (as opposed to *mashruteh*) which at best meant that the government should apply religious law. Among their concerns was their opposition to the equality before the law of religious minorities, participation of ‘Frankish Madames’ (*madam-ha-ye farangi*) in mixed meetings; newspapers; and even whistling and clapping. For example, Nuri’s party wrote in one of their major statements that, at first constitutionalism was about the abolition

of arbitrary rule, but now other non-Islamic ideas have been put forward, such as:

... the education of women and the founding of schools for girls, and the usage of funds hitherto used for religious congregations and the pilgrimage of sacred shrines for investment in factories and the paving of roads and streets, and in the construction of railways and acquiring European industries.¹

Nuri and his disciples, however, lost their cause completely when they sided with arbitrary rule in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution, paying a mortal price for it.

But certainly, uneasiness over the dislocation of Iranian traditions in favour of modernism were far from past. Indeed, a prime illustration of this discomfort can be found in Mohammad Ali Jamlazadeh's short story, "Persian is Sweet," published in 1921, about an Iranian peasant finding himself trapped in a prison with two Iranians whose language he cannot understand. One of them is a well-dressed, novel-flicking, and mustachioed "farangi-mo'ab" (Europeanist) amusingly addressed as "Mr. Monsieur," who speaks only in a Franco-Persian hybrid.² Another piece of literature written in the same period, which also ridicules the farangi-mo'ab type, is Hasan Moqaddam's (pen-name, Ali Nowruz) play, *Ja'far Khan has Returned from Europe*.³

Pseudo-Modernism

While the triumph of constitutionalism had not immediately led to secularism and modernism around this time, it had indeed planted the seeds for it. These seeds continued to grow steadily until Reza Khan and his supporters won their power struggle and launched their pseudo-modernist programme in the 1920s. The term 'pseudo-modernist' is explained by the fact that there was a rush to

¹See Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Mashruteh-ye Iran* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1994), 415-17.

²Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh, "Fārsi shekar ast," in *Yeki bud va yeki nabud* (Tehran: Bongah-e Parvin), 1922.

³Hassan Moqaddam, *Ja'far khān az farang āmadeh* (Tehran, 1922).

emulate some of the most superficial aspects of life in Europe, not only widening the streets by demolishing whole buildings, including monuments, but even ordering the people to wear European-style hats, the resistance to which ended in bloodshed.⁴

Regarding this subject Mokhber al-Saltaneh (Mehdiqoli Hedayat, who had been Reza Shah's prime minister for almost six years) wrote in his memoirs:

In an audience the shah took my [chapeau] hat off my head and said, 'Now what do you think of this?' I said it certainly protects one from the sun and the rain, but the hat, which we had before had a better name [meaning 'the Pahlavi hat', which also had been forced on men a few years before]. Agitated, his majesty paced up and down and said, 'All I am trying to do is for us to look like [the Europeans] so they would not ridicule us.'⁵

Perhaps no better critic of pseudo-modernism than Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh could show the extent of the sentiments against it. In January 1920, in the first issue of the new series of *Kaveh* which he and Jamalzadeh published in Berlin, Taqizadeh wrote that "Iran must both in appearance and in reality, both physically and spiritually become Europeanised and nothing else."⁶ Taken out of context, these words do suggest pseudo-modernist thinking, although a study of other articles written mainly by Taqizadeh on the subject in *Kaveh* reflect a higher level of sophistication than shown by the above sentence. At any rate, this was taken and repeated as a gospel of the young pseudo-modernist elite at the time and later. By the same token, when in the 1960s and 70s, as a result of a backlash against pseudo-modernism there was an emotional and unrealistic rejection of the West and everything Western, Taqizadeh was singled out as the demonic harbinger of 'Weststruckness.'

⁴See Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979*, 1st ed. (London and New York: Macmillan and New York University Press, 1981).

⁵Mehdi Qoli Hedayat, *Mokhber al-Saltaneh: Khaterat va Khatarat* (Tehran: Zavvar, 1982), 407.

⁶Iraj Afshar, ed. *Kaveh*, 22 January 1920 (Tehran: Entesharat-e Asatir, 2005), 2.

Long before the outburst against ‘Weststruckness,’ however, Taqizadeh had argued that his view had been misunderstood and misinterpreted; although this involves some exaggeration. He himself did acknowledge once that, earlier, he might have gone a little too far in his zeal for promoting progress and development along European lines. The occasion on which he extensively and most emphatically disowned and denounced pseudo-modernism was in his correspondence with Abolhasan Ebtehaj, the able and honest chair of Bank Melli Iran (then a commercial bank as well as the central bank). Taqizadeh had criticised the Bank’s extravagance in building a lavishly modern new branch in the Tehran bazar on the ruins of the perfectly sound Tekye-ye Dowlat, the public hall built by Naser al-Din Shah for social occasions, pick-axed for the purpose. In response, Ebtehaj wrote and reminded him of the famous sentence in the article in *Kaveh* twenty-seven years before. In his reply of January 1948 to Ebtehaj’s letter, Taqizadeh wrote that his point had been misunderstood, and that in a country which suffers from so much “misery, homelessness, hunger, nakedness, disease, illiteracy and filth,” to construct “pharaonic and Parisian buildings” in emulation of rich western countries is “the deadliest sin and tantamount to religious infidelity”:

And if, as you have pointed out, twenty-seven years ago I encouraged the people to adopt ‘the European civilisation both in appearance and in reality, both physically and spiritually,’ my intention was never such mad and idiotic imitations of luxury. By *apparent civilisation* I meant such things as clean clothes, adequate housing and public health...and good manners....and... valuing time. And regarding *spiritual civilisation*, I meant science, scholarship, foundation of universities, publication of books, improvement of the situation of women...and removal of corruption and bribery and still thousands of other spiritual, legal, moral and behavioral matters which would take another ten pages to enumerate... Unfortunately, we acquired neither the apparent civilisation of Europe, nor its spiritual one. Of the apparent civilisation, we did not learn anything except prostitution, gambling,

sartorial aping and making ourselves up with imported material, and of the real civilisation, none other than rejecting the religions without having faith in any other moral code or principle...⁷

Ahmad Kasravi

Under the rapid pace of pseudo-modernisation during this era, nostalgia was slowly beginning to break out. In turn, Ahmad Kasravi's 1932 book, *Ayin*, emerged both as a prime illustration of this mode of thinking, and more deeply, the cultural unease that these modernist programs had prompted.

A former religious scholar and preacher who had left that profession to become a modern lawyer and later, a vociferous campaigner against Shiism and Shia clerics, his argument in *Ayin* was simple and clear: Modern technology and secularism had led to irreligion and immorality everywhere, and while Iran should acquire from modern European products what was necessary for its survival, it should reject 'Europeanism' (*orupa 'i-gari*). His argument resembled Jean-Jacques Rousseau's who, put in a few simple words, believed that the march of material and scientific progress had not led to the greater happiness and fulfilment of the human race, but the reverse.

Written as early as 1932, Kasravi's discourse was global: there was no basic moral difference between East and West, except that the European machine age had led to moral decline and unhappy living in Europe as well as any society that had been copying it. However, he makes it clear in a footnote that, throughout the book, by Europe he means the whole of the West.

"Have modern European inventions added to human happiness?" asked Kasravi rhetorically. "Sadly not! Alas, not!" he replied. "In fact, such inventions and the inevitable changes which they have brought with them have caused increasing trouble to human beings... We ourselves remember well what a peaceful life we used to enjoy until twenty years

⁷Iraj Afshar, *Zendegi-Ye Tufani: Khaterat-e Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh* (Tehran: Mohammad Ali Elmi, 1368/1948), 672-73.

ago when we still had our own Eastern mode of living and know what difficulties we face now that we have been polluted by Western style of living.”⁸

Expanding on the previously popular *farangi-mo'ab*, the term *orupa'i-gari* was plainly concerned with the same decades-old fear: that the influx of European inventions and ways of life could lead the country towards a divergent and unfortunate path. Since Kasravi had, by then, already observed first-hand the transformations that the sudden and rapid employment of European inventions had brought about, this was far from a matter of mere nativism. Nativism, after all, “operates not as a reminder of one’s cultural history, but as a stark and closed interpretation of who belongs and who does not.”⁹ Though written as a polemic, *Ayin’s* differentiation between east and west served more as a cultural critique and warning. After all, the author was not denying the useful features of these innovations; rather, he was concerned that the Iranian Europhiles’ hastily implementing them lacked the “intellectual independence... [to pursue] an alternative path of progress and development that could detour the social and economic problems of Europe.”¹⁰ Instead, they naively believed that European means and methods were superior, and therefore deserved emulation.

Kasravi, however, reminded readers that Europe was not necessarily superior to the rest of the world. Its innovations, despite their advantages, had caused great harm as well:

Europe claims that the machine reduces human suffering... This use of the machine cannot be denied. But the damages which these instruments have caused to the world are also numerous. One must say that if the machine has relieved hands a hundred times, it has added to the suffering of hearts a thousand times.¹¹

⁸Ahamad Kasravi, *Ayin*, 1932, Part 1, reprint (Tehran: Nashr o Paksh-e Ketab, 1975), 6.

⁹Shirin S. Deylami, “In the Face of the Machine: Westoxification, Cultural Globalization, and the Making of an Alternative Global Modernity,” *Polity* 43, 2 (2011), 259.

¹⁰Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “Ahmad Kasravi’s Critiques of Europism and Orientalism,” in *Persian Language, Literature and Culture: New Leaves, Fresh Looks*, ed. Kamran Talattof (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 230.

¹¹Kasravi, *Ayin*, Part 2, 13.

He went on to argue that ever since Europe had begun to invent machines, it had risen against religion: “lack of faith is now one of the gifts that people of the East bring for their fellow citizens from Europe”.¹² They will ask, ‘What should be done?’ We say, ‘we must turn our eyes off Europe and return to our old Eastern living. Governments would have to watch Europe and be aware of the intentions of the Europeans about the East so that they could protect their countries. And they should acquire newly-invented war materials and whatever is useful for government and administration, and enact the laws which are necessary for it. But people must turn their eyes off of Europe.’¹³

It is important to emphasise that Kasravi’s argument here, as in his many other books, comprises both a universal and a local element. Europe itself has declined almost in every sense since the Industrial Revolution, prompting the loss of religious faith and moral virtues. Therefore, the wholesale imitation of European customs and innovations could prompt Iran to go the same way. More importantly, the country could wind up in the same situation unless Iranians take heed and retain their moral and spiritual life.

Similarly, by providing a historical context to European innovations so as to arrive at these conclusions, Kasravi is indicating that Iranian Europhiles might not be as cognizant of these developments in the first place, which has, in turn, led to the animated emulation of all things European without any thought given to its repercussions. For Kasravi, it is not just Iran’s adoption of Western ways that is problematic; even the West needs to rescue itself from its moral and religious decline in consequence of the rise of modern industry.

Fakhreddin Shadman

A quarter of a century later, in February 1948, Seyyed Fakheddin Shadman—who, unlike Kasravi, had “stayed in Europe for fifteen years”¹⁴—wrote *Conquering the European Civilisation*, another book

¹²Kasravi, *Ayin*, Part 1, 13.

¹³Kasravi, *Ayin*, Part 1, 47.

¹⁴See Seyyed Fakhreddin Shadman, *Taskhir-e Tamaddon-e Farangi* (Tehran, n.p., 1948); reprinted

thematically concerned with the threat of Europeanism. Like Kasravi's *Ayin*, the book suffers from much repetition and its message is at times contradictory. If Kasravi's preoccupation was with the 'machine' and its harmful consequences for clean and peaceful living by way of its undermining pure faith and the traditional public ethics, Shadman's is the fear of European civilisation 'conquering' Iranian culture.

Europe—by which he also means all Western civilisation—is highly advanced although despite what most educated Iranians believe, it is not perfect. Nevertheless, it has had great achievements, which should be acquired by Iranians such that they could then “conquer Europe” or European civilisation. To put it in a few words, Europe is Iran's enemy out to “conquer Iran,” but Iran can ‘conquer’ Europe instead by cautiously acquiring Europe's achievements. Indeed, the whole issue of ‘conquest’ and ‘counter-conquest’ revolves around these subjects, rather than political and economic domination, although that too has been mentioned in passing in a general critique of the West. And what are the instruments for conquering European civilisation? They are language, literature and culture, which he often summarizes under the category of ‘language.’

Shadman is first and foremost concerned with the risk of the decline of Persian language and literature, but combines this with an attack on ‘*fokoli*,’ or the pseudo-Europeanist dandy who he believed was mindlessly abandoning Persian language and civilisation in preference for imitation of half-baked European forms, norms, languages and ways of life:

In reply to the person who asks why *fokoli* is the greatest enemy of Iran, I would say that during the onslaught of European civilisation this domestic enemy is aide to the foreigner...and in the hope that European civilisation conquers us as soon as possible, he would not shy away from betraying our language and our good cultural traditions. If we do not stop the onslaught of European civilisation, the people of Iran would be destroyed.¹⁵

in Abbas Milani, ed. *Taskhir-e Tamaddon-e Farangi* (Tehran, 2003), 3.

¹⁵Shadman, *Taskhir-e Tamaddon-e Farangi*, 22-23.

Fokoli, based on the French *faux col* for a detachable collar, referred to a European-type Iranian dandy. And so, within the popular idiom of the time, a *fokoli* is a person who, having learned a few words from European languages thinks that he can introduce European civilisation, which he does not know, to Iranians; he is no different from Kasravi's 'Europhile' or the *farangi-mo'ab* of old. What is remarkable about Shadman's view is that, unlike pan-Iranian nationalists, he values both the Islamic and the pre-Islamic period of Iran's history, and believes that missionaries are enemies, not just of Islam but of Iran itself:

The Iranian *fokoli* is an ignoramus who does not understand that the European missionary, due to grudge and prejudice, regards Islam as the source of Iran's misfortune... He is the enemy of our religion [and] not a friend of Iran. And if we were Zoroastrian, he would regard that as the reason for the catastrophes which are faced by today's Iran. And if we worshipped the Trinity while his religion was Islam, he would still not leave us alone and say that the teachings of Christianity have ruined Iran...¹⁶

This seems senseless, because it assumes that under any and all circumstances Europeans are enemies of Iran. Unlike Kasravi, Shadman has no fear of the 'machine,' of European inventions and the real Western achievements, yet he fears European civilisation—a kind of ambiguous, if not senseless, Europhobia—which he sees as an enemy of Iran and bent on the destruction of its culture. He points out that Iran has been defeated several times in history but has managed to survive, but the conquest of European *civilisation* will be a defeat from which Iran would never recover:

Do not look upon European civilisation as a plaything. If European civilisation conquers us, the history of one of the most important and oldest of the world's great nations would come to an end, and the book which has been open for two thousand and five hundred years would be shut forever.¹⁷

¹⁶Shadman, *Taskhir-e Tamaddon-e Farangi*, 14.

¹⁷Shadman, *Taskhir-e Tamaddon-e Farangi*, 24.

What should therefore be done? Should Iranians turn their back to the great achievements of European civilisation, which Shadman enlists with great admiration? His answer is ‘no.’ He distinguishes between “rationally and cautiously” *acquiring* it rather than *being conquered* by it:

Either of two things should be done: either we should rationally and cautiously acquire European civilisation, or we should surrender before it, so it would sweep us away like a flood...*In my view the day that European civilisation conquers us will be the last day of the life of Iran; and the only escape route is for us to conquer it before we become captive to it.*¹⁸

The simpletons who would like to be conquered by European civilisation do not realize that it is not our friend. A comparison of those countries, which surrendered before European civilisation in the last couple of centuries, with those that willingly adapted it clearly shows the advantage of rational and cautious acquisition as opposed to surrender before “this pitiless enemy”: Russia and Japan, acquired it and are now advanced nations; Algeria was conquered by it and is a miserable country.¹⁹

Even though emotionally charged, this is a rational argument. Put in a few words, it says that Iran should rationally adapt Western civilisation, rather than purely imitate it. However, it is not clear in what sense this would result in Iran—by the force of the Persian language and culture—‘conquering’ it. Russia and Japan developed through modernisation, but this does not mean that they ‘conquered’ Western civilisation.

Examining Kasravi’ and Shadman’s arguments it becomes clear that neither of them could be authentically described as ‘nativist.’²⁰ True,

¹⁸Shadman, *Taskhir-e Tamaddon-e Farangi*, 30; emphasis in the original.

¹⁹Shadman, *Taskhir-e Tamaddon-e Farangi*, 30.

²⁰See Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), for an in-depth investigation of what the author considers to be ‘nativist’ tendencies in the works of several notable Iranian intellectuals of the

their account is packed with idealisms of various kinds, but neither of them quite advocates complete insularity or a ‘return to self.’ On the contrary, both merely advocate a better historical understanding of the lifestyles and innovations that, they believe, Iranians have naively taken up. As we saw, Kasravi’s message is both universal and local. Since the industrial revolution, faith, humanity and morality have sharply declined, in the first instance, in the West itself. Therefore, Iran should not follow the West in this, especially without knowing of the consequences that these innovations wrought on European civilisation. This, for Kasravi, does not mean that Iranians should avoid Western physical and social products, since they need them for their use. Only caution is key. While, on the other end of the spectrum, Shadman makes a call to conquer Western civilisation rather than turning back on it, he also concludes that Iran should ‘rationally and cautiously’ adapt Western products but maintain its language and culture, if not promote them.

Even so, the critiques of Kasravi and Shadman hardly had an impact on the intellectuals and the educated, let alone the whole society. Although Ahmad Fardid had first used the term *gharbzadegi* in a different sense, it is Al-e Ahmad’s book that gave it its extensive and intensive currency. Within a few years, and especially after his death in 1969, *gharbzadegi* conquered Iran “as completely as the Holy Inquisition conquered Spain.” This is how John Maynard Keynes described the complete triumph of Ricardo over Malthus so that, as he continues, “argument ceased.” It is indeed an apt description of how the term *gharbzadegi* conquered Iran.

Ahmad Fardid

Before examining Al-e Ahmad’s *gharbzadegi*, however, it is important to look into Ahmad Fardid’s original conception of the term. Due to the sparseness of his writing, Fardid was largely an oral philosopher. His ideas were either transmitted through his lectures at the University of Tehran (where he taught philosophy from the 1960s onwards), or his weekly *dowrehs* (gatherings) dubbed “*Fardidiehs*.” Among his

twentieth century, Shadman among them.

noteworthy followers at the time were philosophers Dariush Shayegan and Dariush Ashuri, both of whom would also contribute to the *gharbzadegi* discourse later in their careers—but only after rejecting some of Fardid’s more extremist views, which came to the fore especially after the 1979 Revolution.²¹

Fardid’s *gharbzadegi* (introduced as a rendition of *Yunānzadegi*, meaning ‘Greekstruckness’) was concerned with the sizable influence of Greek epistemology across the history of European modernity, through to its effects on Eastern modernist thinking. Borrowing from the Nietzschean concepts of active and passive nihilism, Fardid considers *gharbzadegi* to be both a passive and passing era in Western as well as Eastern philosophy. This period, he maintains, will soon give way to a more active, questioning form of *gharbzadegi* that will lead to the renunciation of the Greek epistemological hegemony, and a return to a more spiritual, faith-based philosophical discourse.

Following a loose and mostly personalized historical account, Fardid claims (not quite correctly) that *gharbzadegi* entered into the Muslim world following the Crusades, only to ‘redouble’ as a “progressist, modernism-struck, and modernity-desiring” concept in the eighteenth century. This ‘redoubled’ form of *gharbzadegi* then set the stage for the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of the early twentieth century, fueled by Western philosophy’s “worldly” and “objectivized”²² perspective. This Western epistemological worldview’s central flaw was that it posited “an existential separation between the human mind as the knowing subject and the external world as the object of study,” a concept inherently at odds with spiritual Oriental thought.²³ Moreover, upon closer inspection one can see that the French Revolution, by which Iran’s Constitutional Revolution was inspired, led to only

²¹For an extensive examination of Fardid’s life and thoughts, see Ali Mirsepassi, *Transnationalism in Iranian Political Thought: The Life and Times of Ahmad Fardid* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

²²Seyyed Ahmad Fardid, “Gharbzadegi,” in *Maqalati az Seyyed Ahmad-e Fardid* (Web: Ketabnak, 2012), 82.

²³Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 89.

“sin and heresy,”²⁴ with no trace of God or spirituality left in its wake. And so, in consequence, Iran’s Enlightenment-based Constitutional Revolution seems to have occurred around the time that Western philosophy was breathing its final breaths in the West itself, with the ultimate nail in its coffin being the “Russian Revolution, which occurred against a similar kind of *gharbzadegi*.”

A period of ‘redoubled’ *gharbzadegi*, as experienced in the Constitutional Revolution, is for Fardid marked by “its imitations of the West,”²⁵ and by the elimination of the deep-seated faith-based residue of an eastern culture. It was during such a period, Fardid maintains, that the word *mellat*, which connotes religion, was translated into ‘nation,’ even though ‘nation’ actually connotes a race.²⁶ Indeed, for Fardid, these “constitutional translations” reeked of nothing other than the objectivized, worldly thinking of the West.²⁷

As for the present day, Fardid claims that Westerners have begun to call out that “*Oh sir*, our minds have become warped! And this freedom isn’t really freedom, and this world is really moving towards collapse!”²⁸ Now, “after four hundred years, the history of the West has reached a dead end,” and the only way for Iran to avoid the same predicament is “mysticism”²⁹ (*darvishi*) and “self-awareness” (*khod-agahi*).³⁰ These terms actually echo Martin Heidegger’s complex concept of ‘Being-in-the-world’ (*Dasein*), which also called for a more spiritual, mindful, and thus more authentic engagement with the physical world. For Fardid, this sort of self-cognizant mysticism is the only way to fight ‘spiritual poverty’ and counteract the West’s dead end of epistemic objectivity, and thus, to fight against *gharbzadegi*.

As we can see, even in Fardid’s case, a universal concept is utilized so as to arrive at a more local philosophical conjecture. Though written

²⁴Fardid, “Gharbzadegi,” 82.

²⁵Fardid, “Gharbzadegi,” 82.

²⁶Fardid, “Gharbzadegi,” 82.

²⁷Fardid, “Gharbzadegi,” 82.

²⁸Fardid, “Gharbzadegi,” 83.

²⁹Fardid, “Gharbzadegi,” 84.

³⁰Fardid, “Gharbzadegi,” 84.

under a different—this time, philosophical—discursive umbrella, much of Fardid’s conception of *gharbzadegi* shares similarities with the previous, more cultural iterations of *farangi-mo’abi* as well as *orupa’i-gari*. What is original in Fardid’s conception, however, is his conjecture that *gharbzadegi* is a necessary stage in human history, and one that had to be seen through to its very end. Analogously, this stage of *gharbzadegi* also comprises its own sub-stages, one that travails a passively nihilistic form of *gharbzadegi*, marked by its process of blind imitation, to a more active variation of it, ultimately marked by a newly self-cognizant interrogation of *gharbzadegi* with a more spiritual bent.

While the West has already reached the stage of active *gharbzadegi*, the East continues to be passive. It bears noting that despite Fardid’s largely philosophical examination, echoes of Kasravi’s observation can be detected in his argumentation as well: the West has already discerned its collapse, while the East remains naively enchanted by its innovations. As for what will result from these introspections, Fardid is unclear; for him, *gharbzadegi* is merely a historical stage, bound to wear out and give way to a new history thereafter.

Al-e Ahmad

For Jalal Al-e Ahmad, however, *gharbzadegi* was posited as both a mania and an underlying threat to contemporary Iranian culture. Repurposing Fardid’s philosophical conjecture, Al-e Ahmad focuses on the immediate repercussions of a cultural *gharbzadegi*. Al-e Ahmad does not claim that the threat of *gharbzadegi* lies in its Western-ness per se; rather it lies in the fact that Iranians have wholly given themselves away to Western products and habits of consumption, “copying the West outwardly and superficially,”³¹ while making little effort to generate their own cultural products, to say nothing of their unwillingness to understand the mechanisms behind these new products and ways of life. At the heart of Al-e Ahmad’s critique is not the Western-ness of these products, but the passivity that they have instigated due to their inherent luxury and convenience.

³¹Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*. 1967 (Qom: Nashr-e Khorram, 2007), 20.

By the time Al-e Ahmad wrote *Gharbzadegi* at the age of thirty-nine, he was already an accomplished author, critic, and translator. Written in 1962, a year before the Shah's White Revolution and the revolt of June 1963; and four years before Manuchehr Hezarkhani (and not, as it is commonly believed, Ali Shariati) translated Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* into Persian in Paris, *Gharbzadegi* was not an anti-West manifesto; rather, Weststruckness, under Al-e Ahmad's definition was:

... a characteristic of the period of our history that we have not yet acquired the machine and do not know the codes of its organization and construction. Weststruckness is a characteristic of the period of our history that we have not yet learned the premises of the machine, i.e. modern science and technology.³²

Likewise, for Al-e Ahmad, the *gharbzadeh* is a character who has severed his ties with Iranian culture and tradition. This is an individual "with no connection to the past, and no idea about the future,"³³ who also attends only to the most superficial aspects of day-to-day life. This person only cares for ease and uses much of his time "to groom himself... giving importance only to his shoes, his clothes, and the furnishings inside his home."³⁴ Everything for the *gharbzadeh* is about looking like a European. Sometimes, he appears as though he has been "unrolled from some golden piece of foil or has just returned from some European *maison*."³⁵

It must be said that Al-e Ahmad was not opposed to western culture either. Strictly speaking, he was concerned about ways that Iranians had taken up and employed these 'machines' without quite understanding their implications. Western modernism, he believed, was being applied at a time when Iranians did not yet "comprehend the actual nature, foundation, and philosophy of Western civilisation."³⁶

³²Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 26.

³³Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 117.

³⁴Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 123.

³⁵Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 123.

³⁶Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 20.

In fact, as the founding editor of the intellectual journal *Elm-o Zendegi*, Al-e Ahmad had actively tried to better familiarize readers with that civilisation through his translations of André Gide's *Return from the Soviet Union*, Albert Camus's *The Outsider*, Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Dirty Hands*, Dostoevsky's *The Gambler*, and (with Ali Asghar Khobrezadeh) Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. Indeed, towards the end of *Gharbzadegi*, he even goes so far as to refer to Nabokov's *Lolita*, and Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*—which were among the most recent intellectually fashionable works to be published and screened in the West—so as to point to the cultural problems faced by the West itself.³⁷

However, we should distinguish between the book's principal point and how it is presented. Indeed, much of the criticism should be levelled at the style of presentation, not least its polemical tone and its extensive use of the familiar Iranian conspiracy theory. A distinction must also be made between the first edition (1962) and the second edition (1967) of the book. The first edition speaks of the harmful influence of "the machine." Indeed, having read the first edition in 1962, the present author pointed out to Al-e Ahmad that it smacked of Luddism, of the early nineteenth-century resistance against modern machinery, to which the latter responded by saying that he was in love with his own Hillman Minx motorcar.³⁸ However, he wrote in the second edition:

The point is that as long as we have not understood the nature, essence and philosophy of the West, and only superficially copy-cat it by consuming its machines, we are like the donkey who went into the lion's skin...At any rate, it is two hundred years on that, as a crow, we pretend on being a partridge...And from all that we said something commonplace emerges, namely that as long as we are only consumers and not builders of the machine, we are Weststruck.³⁹

³⁷Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 187-88.

³⁸Homa Katouzian, conversation with Al-e Ahmad in London, 1962. Katouzian's copy, which was given to him by Al-e Ahmad himself, was lost in the 1996 fire in his library. And efforts to find a copy of the first edition for use in this chapter proved unsuccessful. Hence, the general references to its substance here are from memory.

³⁹Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 20.

The concept he introduced, indeed, was neither political nor anti-West; nor did he advocate any form of “return to self.” It merely served as a call to go beyond imitation, and to create as well as to appropriate imported cultures in line with Iranian customs. Contrary to common belief, Al-e Ahmad was not railing against the West in favour of Iran. Instead, his cause for concern was simply the prospect of superficial imitation—of “being a crow and pretending to be a partridge”⁴⁰—something that years before *Gharbzadegi*, he had also warned against when critiquing the contemporary press in Iran.⁴¹

As with the large body of Weststruckness discourse, commonalities exist in Al-e Ahmad’s argumentation when compared to his predecessors: a call to caution with respect to modernism; insistence on a peculiar mimetic compulsion appearing among modernists, as well as a historically-framed attempt to wipe away the romanticism often accorded to the Euro-American modernist way of life. However, each of these thinkers offer a different angle with respect to this discourse. In Al-e Ahmad’s case, his discourse—unlike those of Kasravi, Shadman, Fardid, and Shariati—was neither religious nor moral, nor even philosophical. And unlike Bazargan, Shariati and Khomeini, he was not advocating one or the other form of Islamic or Islamically-inspired government.

Later misidentified as the father of a more politicized notion of *gharbzadegi*, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, though a dissident intellectual, never actually affixed himself to a political vision, much less an ideology, following his 1953 falling out from politics. Al-e Ahmad’s preoccupations were largely social and cultural, and his aspirations to social change vis-à-vis political oppression were never spelled out under any specific political or ideological umbrella.⁴² And no way does

⁴⁰Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 20.

⁴¹See Jalal Al-e Ahmad, “Varshkastegi-ye Matbu’at,” in *Seh Maqaleh-ye Digar*, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1342), 8–39.

⁴²For a biographic analysis of Al-e Ahmad as well as the ideological dilemmas he was often faced with, see Michael Hillmann, “Introduction: Cultural Dilemmas of an Iranian Intellectual,” in Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Lost in the Crowd*, trans. John Green, Ahmed Alizadeh, and Farzin Yazdanfar (Washington, D.C: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc, 1985).

it justify the retrospective and anachronistic accounts that pit him and his cultural output as harbingers of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

By the 1970s, however, Al-e Ahmad's iteration of *gharbzadegi* had become a slapdash idiom in the service of many. Adults, children, old and young people, men and women, the poor, the well-off, and even the rich all had begun to use the pejorative as a means to discredit their interlocuters' point of view or cultural identity. Indeed, any object of disagreement, dissent and disapproval, especially in the social and political spheres was attributed to *gharbzadegi*. For example, when a British-educated Iranian economist was trying to explain to a British-educated Iranian physicist, who was engaged in higher studies in Paris, that the first country to become capitalist could not now be "sous développ  ," as she maintained Britain had become, she shouted 'stop being Weststruck' (*gharbzadeh nasho*)! Just the same, this pejorative's admission into the contemporary idiom was less a direct result of the underlying message in *Gharbzadegi* itself than it was a consequence of the ideological weaponization of the term at the hands of ideologues inspired by Al-e Ahmad's book but not necessarily informed by it. As Liora Hendelman-Baavur remarks:

The significance of Al-Ahmad's treatise evolved over time, far beyond the reach of its author. In the prerevolutionary decades, *Gharbzadegi* was renowned for its criticism against the modernisation enterprise enforced by the Shah and the West's imperialist exploitation. Following 1979, it was associated with the hegemonic discourse of clerical revolutionaries and, shortly afterward, with the anti-Western terminology of Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as guidelines for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic.⁴³

Ali Shariati

A name routinely put forward in connection to the more ideological flank of the *gharbzadegi* discourse is Ali Shariati. Much unlike Al-e

⁴³Liora Hendelman-Baavur, "The Odyssey of Jalal Al-Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi*—Five Decades After," in *Persian Language, Literature and Culture: New Leaves, Fresh Looks*, ed. Kamran Talattof (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 276.

Ahmad's example, although Shariati's influence was substantial—to the point that, not quite accurately, he is sometimes described as the ideologue of the Iranian revolution—it appealed much less to the secular than to the traditional individual.⁴⁴

Shariati's works, mainly transcripts of recordings of his talks and lectures, run in tens of volumes. He was a prolific and eclectic thinker in the style of religious reformers and prophets. Even still, it should be said it was not so much Shariati's ideological analysis and evaluations that was most effective in attracting young men and women to his cause; rather, it was his simple discourse on Islam, society, and social change.

Most of Shariati's followers were born in traditional religious families. They had been affected by the modern secular environment in Iran and elsewhere; and they were also trying to hold on to their religious sentiments while at the same time pursuing a modern, revolutionary line of thought and action. A French-educated scholar himself, Shariati made use of the *gharbzadegi* discourse to paint a picture of exactly such a predicament. However, he did so with a counter-ideology already in mind—something that cannot quite be said of his predecessors within the discourse. Shariati's counter-ideology, infusing Marxism with his own configuration of Islamic philosophy, can be examined in 1971's *Bazgasht beh khishtan* (Return to the Self). At the onset, Shariati reminds his interlocutors of the West's history of imperialism:

The West, from the eighteenth century onwards... is trying to provide the world with the thesis that 'there is only one kind of civilisation, which is Western civilisation, and if any other individual wants to become civilised, they must consume the civilisation we

⁴⁴For a side-by-side examination of Al-e Ahmad and Shariati's outlooks on westernisation (with an additional analysis of writer Samad Behrangi's similar concept of 'Amrikazadegi'), see Brad Hanson, "The 'Westoxication' of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, Al-e Ahmad, and Shariati," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15, 1 (1983): 1–23; see also, Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization, Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), which investigates both the politics and epistemology behind Shariati and Al-e Ahmad's stances.

have constructed, and if they wish to rebuff our civilisation, they will remain savages.⁴⁵

Shariati then goes on to offer a personal anecdote so as to shed light on the sheer effectiveness of this mode of cultural imperialism. He recalls sitting next to an individual on an Iranian aeroplane, whose Persian accent was indeed so westernised (*'farangi'*) that the author could not even understand what he was saying. Afterwards, he hears the individual speaking in a European language, only to find out that the boy cannot even speak that other language properly. “Just look at the pretension,” he laments, before pondering its cause out loud: “It is because such an individual cannot even stand himself, cannot stand where he belongs to, cannot stand anything that reminds him of himself.”⁴⁶

These statements echo Al-e Ahmad’s classifications of the *gharbzadeh* as well; an individual that had no relations to the past, and a person who no longer belonged anywhere at all. Shariati believed that this individuality had been sparked by the imperialistic tendencies of the West, which has made anyone Other feel themselves ‘condemned,’ and at the same time, ‘compelled to pretend, to gesture, to use make-up, and to live’ like the westerner.⁴⁷

Unlike his predecessors, however, Shariati actually outlines an ideological path through which to fight back against this cultural inferiority complex. Before doing so, however, he makes sure to remark that he is not advocating mere nativism. “If I were to say that we must return to a racial self, we would become prone to racism and fascism and tribal ignorance, and as such, it would all just amount to a reactionary mode of return,” he admits.⁴⁸ Neither does he approve of a historical or nationalist return, since, as he maintains, “such selves can only be discovered by historians, sociologists, scientists, and archeologists.”⁴⁹ Instead, Shariati advocates for a self that is more accessible, “a self

⁴⁵ Ali Shariati, *Bazgasht beh khishtan* (1350/1971), 7.

⁴⁶ Shariati, *Bazgasht beh khishtan*, 14.

⁴⁷ Shariati, *Bazgasht beh khishtan*, 12.

⁴⁸ Shariati, *Bazgasht beh khishtan*, 17.

⁴⁹ Shariati, *Bazgasht beh khishtan*, 18.

based on deep-seated sentiments and spiritual and humane values that exists within us... that is still alive inside us.”⁵⁰ This self, he finally attests, is “a religious self, an Islamic self.”⁵¹

With Marxism being highly popular both in Iran and elsewhere, Shariati also felt impelled to employ its concepts and categories, and to address the political sentiments arising from them. Still, he did so in his own fashion. He went as far as saying that “the socio-economic order of Islam is scientific socialism, based on the worship of God.”⁵² Likewise, he used dialectical analysis to explain the course of human history within a moral and spiritual framework. The anti-Marxist material, which appeared under his name in the Tehran press shortly before he left for England, may have been an expedient move, as some critics have tended to believe. However, there is little in their substance that is contradictory both with his ideas and his politics.⁵³ In his view, “Islam, especially Shi’i Islam, was a radical ideology that could outdo Marxism in championing revolution and the class struggle, as well as in opposing feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism.”⁵⁴

In line with this, Shariati argued that Islam could and should be turned into an ideological weapon capable of successfully competing with both imperialism and Marxism, in order to bring about radical change in Islamic societies. At the same time, Shariati did not have faith in the religious leadership; indeed, he almost believed in an Islam and a Shiism without the clerics. Shariati, in his turn, castigated conservative religious leaders, and spoke of “two different Islams,” distinguishing between Alid Shiism (*Tashayyo ’-e Alavi*) and Safavid Shiism (*Tashayyo ’-e Safavi*), the latter of which he identified with the

⁵⁰Shariati, *Bazgasht beh khishtan*, 18.

⁵¹Shariati, *Bazgasht beh khishtan*, 18.

⁵²See Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari’ati* (London: I.B Tauris, 1998), 24

⁵³See his *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies: An Islamic Critique*, trans. R. Campbell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1980); Rahmena, *An Islamic Utopian*, chapter 22.

⁵⁴Ervand Abrahamian, “The Working Class and the Islamic State,” in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 269.

established Shiism of his time, holding it to be false and reactionary.⁵⁵ That is how he contrasted his version of revolutionary Islam to the Islam of Shia clerics.

As we have also seen, contrary to the prevailing official nationalism which emphasised Iran's pre-Islamic past, for Shariati, a 'return to self' meant returning to pure Shia and Islamic roots:

When we say 'return to one's roots', we are really saying return to one's cultural roots which in the case of Iran is not a return to pre-Islamic Iran, by which the masses of Iranians are not moved. Consequently, for us to return to our roots means not a rediscovery of pre-Islamic Iran but to a return to our Islamic roots'⁵⁶

In sum, Shariati advocated a revolutionary Islam with a modern face, which involved a return to an idealized early Shia culture and tradition—a Shiism virtually without the ulama—, but one which was influenced by European intellectual and political developments of his time. As such, even if this concept can be described as a kind of 'nativism,' Alid Shiism is the past Shariati aspires to, which has its origins in Arabia, not Iran.

Conclusion

What, then, is the upshot of the above discussion on *gharbzadegi* or Weststruckness? First, it was shown that concern about the modern European impact on traditional Iranian society goes back as long ago as the mid-nineteenth century. This became an issue during the Constitutional Revolution, but it was one that did not impress the majority even of clerical constitutionalists. The issue began to be taken seriously in the post-constitutionalist era, and especially in consequence of uncritical emulations of Europe under Reza Shah and his wholesale attack on all things traditional.

There were (sometimes significantly) different responses and reactions such as Taqizadeh's social critique of pseudo-modernism and Kasravi's

⁵⁵See Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, reprint edition (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 119, quoted from Entezar (1980), 21.

⁵⁶Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, 116, quoted from Shariati, *Bazgasht beh khishtan*, 11, 30.

moral and religious discourse on the decline of the industrialized West. To some extent, each comprised a similar plea: a call to stop imitating Western society, except for what was necessary for the safeguarding and independence of the country. Then came Shadman's peculiar and somewhat self-contradictory argument about the need to 'conquer' Western civilisation before it conquered Iran. In the end, however, even Shadman came to the conclusion that Iranians should cautiously adopt Western products and at the same time develop the Persian language and Iranian culture. Yet, none of these ideas and arguments made a noticeable intellectual, let alone popular, impact on Iranian society, not even Fardid's philosophical discourse, despite the fact the he was the inventor of the term *gharbzadegi*.

Shariati's modern Islamic ideology had an appreciably greater impact than theirs, and it came closest to what might be described as a 'nativist' advocacy for 'return to self,' although it must be observed that not only is 'the self' here not Iranian but Arabian, but also that Shariati was quite aware of the nationalistic dangers of nativism, and accordingly endeavored to skirt its implications within his rhetoric. The fact that he also framed his Islamic ideology within Marxism, which was a chiefly European school of thought, also points to the flaws of a nativist argument made with respect to Shariati.

All the same, it was Al-e Ahmad who gave the term *gharbzadegi* its quintessential currency with his cultural critiques. And it was subsequent to that when it became all things to all men and women, its inherent cultural critiques spurned in favour of its use as a foolhardy pejorative. The anti-West and Europhobic meaning that was attached to it was indeed far from the author's original conception, which had only appealed for more specialization and a better contextual understanding of modernist innovations. Despite this, *gharbzadegi* became an ideological weapon in the hands of almost all the revolutionaries, but especially Islamists and Marxist-Leninists, who, in turn, rewrote both the history and connotations of the term so that it could serve their versions of the greater good.