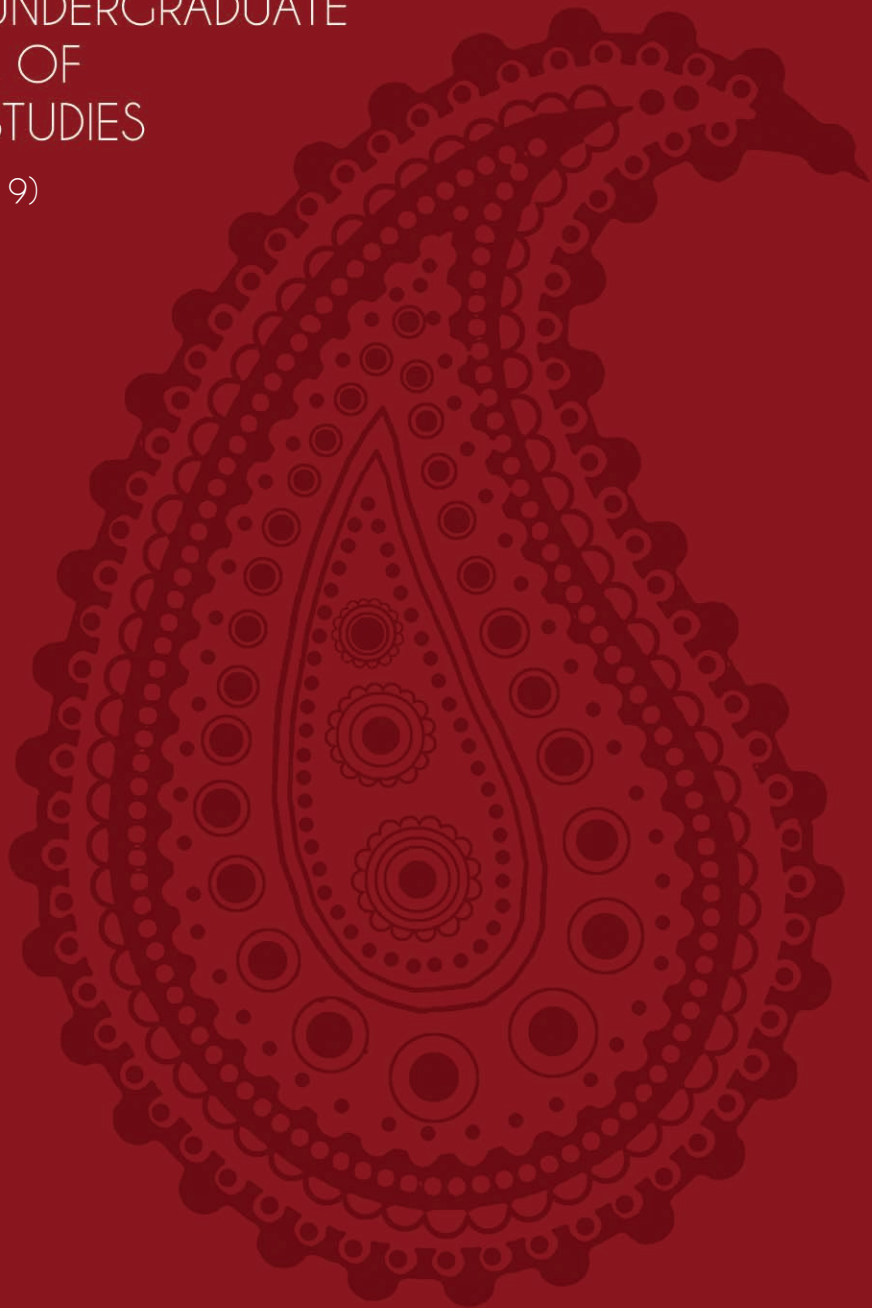


# DĀNESH

THE OU UNDERGRADUATE  
JOURNAL OF  
IRANIAN STUDIES

Volume 4 (2019)



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*The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA*





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## **From the Faculty Advisors**

Since its founding in 2016, *DĀNESH* has sought to provide a forum to showcase the original research produced by undergraduate students at the University of Oklahoma's Iranian Studies program. This fourth volume of the journal was produced through the able editorial leadership of **Corey Standley** (BA, 2019) and **Kayleigh Kuyon** (BA, 2019). As with their work on volume three, Corey and Kayleigh have ensured that *DĀNESH* has continued to thrive as a forum for the study of all aspects of the history, culture, society, and politics of Iran and the Persianate world.

The name of the journal, *DĀNESH*, comes from the Persian word meaning *knowledge, learning, and wisdom*. We believe this is a fitting name for a journal that seeks to foster deep and compassionate understanding of one of the world's most culturally rich and historically complex civilizations. It is with this in mind that we present this volume of *DĀNESH*.

Afshin Marashi

Farzaneh Family Chair in Modern Iranian History

Director, Farzaneh Family Center for Iranian and Persian Gulf Studies

Manata Hashemi

Farzaneh Family Professor in the Sociology of Contemporary Iran

## **From the Editors-in-Chief**

We are proud to present to you the fourth volume of the University of Oklahoma's Undergraduate Journal of Iranian Studies, *DĀNESH*. Through the past three editions of the journal we have seen wonderful presentations on varying regional topics, spanning the breadths of history and social strata. In the tradition of the meaning of *DĀNESH*, or knowledge, we present these articles as an offering to expand the collective dialogue on the understanding of the Iranian and Persian state. We are pleased to have worked on this edition with a group of driven authors to present an edition comprising of submissions focusing on both historical issues and events as well as contemporary issues that Iranians are currently facing.

This work is a collective effort among our undergraduate authors and editors. We would like to extend a humble thanks to our Associate Editors, without whom we would not be able to produce such a successful and professional journal. It would also be remiss of us to not extend a heartfelt thank you to the Farzaneh Family, for without their continued support of the Iranian Studies program none of this would be possible. The University of Oklahoma's Libraries and Printing Services are the unsung heroes of this endeavor, as without their support we would not have the ability to make *DĀNESH* so accessible, both our print and digital versions. Thank you to the tireless, diligent work of our authors, who have crafted these amazing works that we are proudly sharing with you.

And finally, we are wholly indebted to the continued and unwavering support of Dr. Afshin Marashi, whose guidance and advice was invaluable in this journal's creation and continuance. This work, and so much of the growth of the Iranian Studies program as a whole, would not be possible without your faith in us, and our institution. Your academic guidance, advice, and friendship have been invaluable to us.

**Corey Standley** (BA, 2019), Editor-in-Chief

**Kayleigh Kuyon** (BA, 2019), Editor-in-Chief

## Reworking Westoxification: Jalal Al-e Ahmad's Original Conception of Westoxification and its Post-Revolutionary Reinvention

Aubrey Crynes\*

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On October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the Islamic Republic of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, posted an image on Instagram that depicts Uncle Sam standing in front of what appears to be a club-like entrance blocked off by red rope with "globalization" scrawled across a sign overhead.<sup>1</sup> The caricature looks harmless enough, until the viewer notices the signs by the door banning the atomic symbol as well as a stylized version of "Allah," which fit right into Khamenei's (or whichever intern writes his Instagram posts) scathing caption: "Becoming global means giving in to the culture that has been imposed on the economy, politics and security of the world by a few big powers. This is the same as dependence without any difference!"<sup>2</sup> The idea that globalization equates to dependence on larger Western nations is not Khamenei's own. Dependency theorists around the globe have echoed this same warning countless times. In the Persian language, this specific kind of Western- led dependence is often called 'Gharbzadegi', which can be translated as *weststruck* or *westoxified*.

In 1962, Jalal Al-e Ahmad published *Gharbzadegi*. This book and general term are central to understanding ideological debates in Iran today. Al-e Ahmad wrote this book at a pivotal time in Iranian history, and it would prove to be influential in the years ahead. A concept so important that it is found in the Instagram posts of Iran's current Grand Ayatollah is worth exploring in depth. Jalal Al-e Ahmad's rhetoric has continued to thrive in the Islamic Republic, but there is a striking difference between the original content of his work and the way his rhetoric is employed by the Iranian

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<sup>1</sup> Khamenei quote, "#Globalization," *Instagram*, October 19, 2016, accessed April 9, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

government. This paper will center around Jalal Al-e Ahmad's original work in *Gharbzadegi* and delve into his thoughts on Iran's economics and culture before finally examining how those ideas have been implemented long after *Gharbzadegi*'s publication.

Before delving into the contents of *Gharbzadegi*, some background on the author is appropriate. Jalal Al-e Ahmad was a writer, teacher, and scholar, born into a clerical family in Tehran.<sup>3</sup> In his early life, he was active in the Tudeh Party, Iran's largest communist party in that period, but left after becoming disillusioned with the party's Soviet loyalism.<sup>4</sup> Al-e Ahmad briefly rejoined the political scene with the advent of Mohammad Mossadegh's election to Prime Minister and the beginning of the oil nationalization project, until the CIA-led coup of 1953, which overthrew Mossadegh and his National Front government.<sup>5</sup> Western influence in Iran at this time was only continuing to grow, aided by Reza Shah Pahlavi's close relationship with the United States and other Western powers.<sup>6</sup> Al-e Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi* seems to be born from his observation of the world around him. He was by no means the first person to have these critiques; at this time, "western influence in Iran was already widely resented," and the book gained prominence despite heavy state censorship.<sup>7</sup> However, while resentment may have been common, Al-e Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi* "conveyed to a wider audience the critique of the Pahlavi regime that had previously been articulated by only a small group of intellectuals and political dissidents" as opposed to general displeasure.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Economics of *Gharbzadegi***

Written in the 1960s, *Gharbzadegi* was put to paper at the same time that the 'New Left' was emerging. The Cuban Revolution had just rocked Latin America and the rest of the world; across the globe, a wave of popular leftist

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<sup>3</sup> Brad Hanson, "The 'Westoxication' of Iran Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, al-e Ahmad, and Shariati," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15, no. 1(1983): 7.

<sup>4</sup> Peyman Vahabzadeh, "Bizhan Jazani and the Problems of Historiography of the Iranian Left," *Iranian Studies* 38, no.1 (2005): 174.

<sup>5</sup> Hanson, "The 'Westoxication' of Iran," 7.

<sup>6</sup> Evaleila Pesaran, "Towards an Anti-Western Stance: The Economic Discourse of Iran's 1979 Revolution," *Iranian Studies* 41, no.5 (2008): 696.

<sup>7</sup> Ahmad Alizadeh and John Green, *Gharbzadegi* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1983), viii.

<sup>8</sup> Pesaran, "Towards an Anti-Western Stance," 697.



action was brewing.<sup>9</sup> Combined with Al-e Ahmad's leftist background, this means that much of his economic analysis in *Gharbzadegi* has a decidedly leftist bent. However, the book is by no means explicitly or exclusively Marxist and it was not intended to serve as a leftist critic of the Iranian economy. Al-e Ahmad does not delve heavily into specific economics and rarely deals with raw numbers.<sup>10</sup> What he does do is focus on two very economic, very materialist ways that Iran has been westoxified and delve deeply into what that means for Iran and its position in the world. Al-e Ahmad comments specifically on oil and, in what more Marxist jargon would be considered the 'modes of production,' the machines.

In a Westerner's mind, oil is often one of the first things associated with Iran. Al-e Ahmad would be quick to note that this is because, to the Western world, Iran is not a land with a deep history, rich culture, and many peoples; rather, it is simply the site of resources to be exploited. Iran's oil in Al-e Ahmad's time had never been its own. Sold off in Qajar concession agreements and consolidated back into Western hands after 1953 (after Iran briefly attempted to take back what was its own), Al-e Ahmad considered oil to be where the West had "hatched ... in [to] [Iranian] politics and [Iranian] society."<sup>11</sup> This hatching, more than just the start of British and American interest in Iran, was the place from whence those nations began to leverage their control. In fact, Al-e Ahmad attributes the "rise of Reza Shah almost solely to Britain and oil."<sup>12</sup> Western interest in Iran does not end with oil, and Al-e Ahmad argues what many with a Marxist background would argue: because Britain and America are capitalist nations, they are always looking to expand their markets and move exploitation farther away from their own countries in order to keep the peace at home. This has led to the continued expansion of Western economic markets within Iran as well as "developing an internal Iranian market for the Iranian oil which [the West] control[ed]."<sup>13</sup>

These markets, unlike markets and patterns of trade that would have perhaps developed organically, tied Iran to countries that it had no immediate geographic interest in trading with. Even the Russians, a great

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<sup>9</sup> Rich Yeselson, "What New Left History Gave Us," Democracy Journal, December 8, 2014, <https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/35/what-new-left-history-gave-us/>.

<sup>10</sup> Hanson, "The 'Westoxication' of Iran," 8.

<sup>11</sup> Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 62.

<sup>12</sup> Hanson, "The 'Westoxication' of Iran," 10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

power that Al-e Ahmad felt in the past had tried to force its own will upon Iran, were now an alienated neighbor. Iran's borders had become "longer, thicker and more impenetrable...[Iran was] perpetually cut off [and] frontiers everywhere in the world [were] drawn solely along the lines ...of various corporations."<sup>14</sup> The streamlining of the Iranian economy to operate in a back and forth between themselves and Britain, as well as the United States, only exacerbated the inability of Iran and the surrounding region to develop in a way that would be more indigenous and untainted by westoxification. Even though Iran had achieved a brief period of control over its oil under Mossadegh, the Shah "had to give the consortium of oil companies concessions that were covered in an unrecognizable package" after the coup.<sup>15</sup> For oil itself to be profitable, it cannot be a standalone resource, nor can it simply be scooped up with a person's bare hands. Instead, it needs to be extracted, refined, and used to run machines. And this, to Al-e Ahmad, was an even greater curse of westoxification than mere Western interest in Iranian oil.

Machines themselves do not inherently bring westoxification. To put it in Marxist terms, they are simply the modes of production; namely, the tools used to get the job done, retrieve a resource, or produce a product, among a whole host of other functions. The catch with machines, and other modes of production, is who owns them, and who knows how to use them. Therefore, westoxification is not the machine, but rather "a characteristic of an era in which [Iran] has not yet obtained machines and does not understand the mysteries of their structure and construction."<sup>16</sup> This is Al-e Ahmad's main concern: Iran lacks the indigenous technology that the nation is "compelled to use because of the market and the economic constraints put on [them]."<sup>17</sup> Al-e Ahmad wants Iran to become like Japan, a nation that, in his eyes, was able to avoid westoxification, beat back Russian imperial power, and develop machines that were indigenous to Japan itself and therefore under their own monopolized domain.<sup>18</sup> Machines were not the end in Al-e Ahmad's eyes, but the means by which Iran could begin to wrestle itself away from the economic vice grip that westoxification had placed it under.

Iran's economy at this time was in flux. As it was undergoing a period of rapid urbanization, Iran was straddling two ways of life: a traditional,

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<sup>14</sup> Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 16.

indigenous pastoral economy and a new, booming urban economy which was largely driven by “big foreign economic interests like a trust.”<sup>19</sup> Al-e Ahmad takes issue to this transition in two main ways, the first being the more obvious fact that this drive to urbanize was not coming from Iran itself, but rather from foreign capital pouring into its urban areas. Investors were building factories, and where there were factories there were jobs. Often requiring little formal training and providing more stable constant pay than agricultural labor, low-level factory jobs attracted many Iranians from rural areas. The issue for Al-e Ahmad was not the movement to the city, but rather that the people building, owning, and running the factories were not Iranian, and that Iranians, except for a very select few, did not have the means to open their own factories, nor did they have the technological know-how. His second issue was that the technology that was flourishing in urban areas was not being brought to rural areas. The rural areas did not need factories, but farming equipment would have been welcome. The machines were not reaching these areas because there was no foreign investment interest in rural Iran, and the rural Iranians “[could] not obtain these tools.”<sup>20</sup>

Another issue, outside of raw investment capital, was the knowledge of how to operate and replicate these machines; or even the technological knowledge to create Iran’s own unique machines. This, in Al-e Ahmad’s eyes, was a failure stemming directly from Iran’s universities. Often located in urban areas, awash with exposure to the West and its machines, all the universities were doing was “merely producing good repairmen for Western industrial products.”<sup>21</sup> The lack of Iranian innovation meant that Iran was left to the technological whims of Western powers. Any project that the nation wanted to take on, any innovation that was to be, had to come from outside its borders. As long as the world’s economies continued to be driven by technological progress, Iran’s economy would continue its subordinate position - and the longer the technological know-how stayed out of Iranian hands, the harder it would be for Iran to take control of itself again.

Al-e Ahmad’s background in Marxist thought makes it no surprise that he identifies economics as the root that allowed westoxification to take hold in Iran. Oil, the resource on which the world relies, was incredibly valuable. Iran had plenty of oil, but no control over it. As Western nations sunk their teeth into Iran’s oil reserves, the West’s markets and economic interests spread outwards, enveloping the rest of the Iranian economy. By owning the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 150.

capital and possessing the knowledge to operate the modes of production, the West kept Iran infected. Al-e Ahmad did not think these machines were the solutions to all of Iran's problems, but rather the tools that could aide Iran in separating from the West. Al-e Ahmad wanted Iran to "adopt the machines, but [Iran] must not remain slaves to them."<sup>22</sup>

### **Culture and Gharbzadegi**

Westoxification was not merely an economic disease but a "cultural malaise," and Al-e Ahmad makes it very clear there is a sociological aspect to it as well.<sup>23</sup> With Iran's economic markets saturated with westoxification, it soon bled into its culture. Cultural change is always more pronounced than other kinds of change because it is the most visible. The machinations of oil companies go on behind closed doors, but culture is in the way people dress, in what they eat, or in the art they create. This makes cultural change more jarring, and more threatening. Al-e Ahmad finds this cultural westoxification in three arenas: architecture, dress, and education.

Iran has a proud history of magnificent and unique architecture. It is indigenous to Iran, is not mass produced, and carries a distinct style. Western architecture of the time, however, was anything but. The buildings shooting up in Iran's urban areas were made to be cheaply and quickly produced and were created in the style of apartment blocks in big Western cities. Not only are changes such as these merely aesthetic, but new housing styles can also change the way people live. While many Western visitors to Iran praised these new buildings as a sign of modernization, bringing Iran along into the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the 'wrest' (read West) of the world, "to many Iranians these new facades stood for nothing but blind imitation of Western styles - mere stupid mimicry."<sup>24</sup> Al-e Ahmad made his feelings clear on the matter, finding Iran's new cities to be cancerous and ugly.<sup>25</sup>

Not only were the facades of buildings changing, but the very layouts of the cities were changing as well. Public spaces were shrinking, with parks disappearing and Western-style cinemas appearing in their place. Neighborhoods were spreading further apart, making room for themselves where they could in between the cities' larger development projects. The

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>23</sup> Said Amir Arjomand, "The Reform Movement and the Debate on Modernity and Tradition in Contemporary Iran." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 4 (2002): 720.

<sup>24</sup> Pamela Karimi, "Westoxification," *Perspecta* 43, (2010), 192.

<sup>25</sup> Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 132.

strain of urbanization meant that neighborhoods popped up without larger city planning and lacked “water, power, telephones, social services, meeting places [and] libraries.”<sup>26</sup> Even as Iran’s cities boomed with Western capital and Western machinery, many of its new residents went without basic human services, let alone community spaces. The structures of communities were not just being westoxified in the public sphere, but in the private sphere as well.

More goes into housing than merely the beams that hold up the roof; housing requires people and dictates how those people live within the structure. These new buildings, built in the Western style, were meant to house Western-style nuclear families. Iranian family homes, which were traditionally multi-generational, encouraged a very different kind of family structure.<sup>27</sup> Changing the very basis of family structure radically upends culture. Multi-generational homes encourage more communal child raising, a greater respect for older generations, and the creation of larger social ties. Nuclear families, by contrast, often shift the burden of child care to a single person and are often alienating in comparison to communal living. Changing the way children are raised shifts cultural values dramatically, and while the Western model is often praised as the more ‘liberating’ model for women, nuclear family homes traditionally shift the burden of child rearing disproportionately upon the mother.

Buildings were not the only things undergoing a sudden transformation: sartorial reform that began under Reza Shah was picking up pace. In Western eyes, changing women’s dress in non-Western nations to more Western styles is often seen as a sign of progress, but a new pair of jeans does not guarantee equal rights or legal protections. Al-e Ahmad attacks this idea of progress, saying that Iran has “been satisfied to forcibly remove [women’s] veils...beyond that nothing. That’s enough for them.”<sup>28</sup> He goes on to note all the things sartorial reform has not achieved for women, including women’s continued inability to serve as a witness in court, lack of divorce rights, lack of voting rights, and inability to be a government representative, which remained unchanged even after the banning of the veil. Women’s liberation movements did not come to Iran with the advent of westoxification, and even those that existed in that period (ones that amounted to more than adopting Western clothing, anyway) were not rooted in Western powers, but rather the movements that opposed them. The Tudeh

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Karimi, “WESTOXIFICATION,” 194.

<sup>28</sup> Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 80.

party, which Al-e Ahmad had been a part of, had an active women's wing, and Mossadegh's National Front pushed to extended voting rights to women, although it was defeated by the more conservative members of the Ulama in the Majles.<sup>29</sup> These movements were not grounded in an attempted to imitate Western women, but rather out of indigenous pushes for equality.

Women's 'liberation' movements rooted in merely mimicking the West often had unintended effects. The forced unveiling under Reza Shah was an attempt to reform Iranian culture from the top down in favor of the style of the West. While the forced unveiling did not remain mandatory into his son's reign, the damage of that initial push and of widespread upper-class adoption of Western clothing styles had already been done. Women for whom veiling was a deeply held personal religious belief were faced with the choice of either leaving their homes or upholding their principles, and many chose the latter.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, if the head of a younger woman's family was against public unveiling, then she too would be kept inside, although this time not of her own accord.<sup>31</sup> The top down, foreign approach to sartorial reform masquerading as liberation was both empty of real progress and representative of yet another way for the nation to become even more consumed by westoxification.

As if the restructuring of the public sphere and family structure were not enough, as the Iranian state further embraced westoxification it enveloped the school system as well. Just as Iranian elites began the practice of sending their children off to receive the best education that Europe and the United States had to offer, those children returned to Iran to rebuild the nation's own school system in the Western image. This involved more than just building styles or school hierarchies; adopting an education system from another area is to adopt a different way of understanding the world. For instance, Western conceptions of history are linear, and history is often seen as having some distant end point. However, there are other ways of viewing history - whether they be cyclical or one of a host of other pedagogical methods. This linear view of history aides the Western narrative of a march towards progress, and aids in spreading westoxification by pushing a narrative of forward enlightenment that moves along the Western path. The new school system in Iran adopted Western methods that in Al-e Ahmad's eyes had "no

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<sup>29</sup> Hamed Shahidian, "The Iranian Left and the 'Woman Question' in the Revolution of 1978-79," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no.2 (1994): 223.

<sup>30</sup> Karimi, "Westoxification," 193.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

evidence of tradition...no sign of any culture of the past...no continuity between East and West.”<sup>32</sup> Al-e Ahmad’s own historiography in *Gharbzadegi* is not on the most firm of footings, but he does explicitly state that he would rather leave that to the historians.<sup>33</sup> The difference between Al-e Ahmad and an entire educational system is of course that Al-e Ahmad’s book was not intended to be the basis of schooling for generations of Iranians, but merely a socio-cultural critique.

The cultural entrenchment of westoxification was more viscerally felt than its economic counterpart because it could be seen in a much more intimate way. From the buildings lining the streets to what people wore walking down them, westoxification had permeated Iranian public life. It even got behind closed doors, affecting everything from children’s education to the way families lived and worked in their homes. The extent of this permeation was what made westoxification seem so suffocating and all-encompassing. If oil was the place from which westoxification hatched, it had grown far beyond its base indeed.

### **The Aftershocks of *Gharbzadegi***

Al-e Ahmad’s ideas did not sit stagnant in his book after he published it, nor did they remain confined to the salons of Tehran’s intelligentsia. Instead his ideological influence permeated through many different types of people, and their ways of building off of his work did not always reflect his original intent. Al-e Ahmad, as earlier mentioned, had no specific economic policy, just general principles. This allowed for a lot of rhetoric used both in *Gharbzadegi* and by other Iranian leftists to be placed into economic discourse, even if the policies are not reflective of Al-e Ahmad’s leftist thought. Another two of his more amorphous points are that of the role of religion in combating westoxification, and later, during the 1979 Iranian Revolution, what constitutes a westoxified person.

After the 1979 revolution, a new government and constitution for Iran were created and with them new economic policy. The participation and influence of the Iranian left during the revolution was undeniable, and while they did not hold power in Khomeini’s government their leftist economic thought did hold some sway. Many clerics supported a liberal, market-based economy with government influence extending to a liberal welfare state at

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<sup>32</sup> Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 148.

<sup>33</sup> Abbas Amanat, “The Study of History in Post-Revolutionary Iran: Nostalgia, Illusion, or Historical Awareness?,” *Iranian Studies* 22, no. 4 (1989): 5.

most.<sup>34</sup> However, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist clerics made well known their opinions. Relying on a blend of Marxist economics and Islamic theology, these clerics (such as Mahmoud Taleghani, a leftist cleric who was a leader during the revolution in his own right and was trusted by Ayatollah Khomeini) advocated for economic policies that included public land ownership and the state as the leading economic force, with private projects working downstream of leading public directives.<sup>35</sup> The nature of theology makes it difficult to create a decisive policy, and as the Iranian government's legitimacy is ultimately rooted in its religious justification, economic policy in the Islamic Republic has taken on an odd combination of rhetoric and policy.

Political rhetoric not matching with policy is not extraordinary, but the way leftist rhetoric is sustained in Iran in order to push largely neoliberal economic policy is unique. The economics of Jalal Al-e Ahmad favor Iranian-led economic initiatives and indigenous production as well as economic equality. Economic planning platforms lean heavily on this kind of rhetoric. The texts of these economic plans often call for emphasis on concepts like "social justice" and reduced poverty and social insecurity, and the text of the Iranian constitution even mandates government control over crude economic resources.<sup>36</sup> The policy in place and the policy proposals being made, however, only match in name. Policy implementation (such as the creation of private banking), austerity measures due to fluctuation in oil prices, and the burden of foreign debts, all stand in stark contrast to the language so readily employed by the Iranian government.<sup>37</sup> Oil, the very place where westoxification began to seep into Iran according to Al-e Ahmad, has now become a resource where the Iranian government is actively trying to court not only foreign investment, but the physical presence of foreign companies in Iran's oil fields as well. As much as the government wishes to tout Al-e Ahmad's anti-imperialist rhetoric and enshrine policy in leftist, indigenous language, their policies are far from Al-e Ahmad's thought.

Al-e Ahmad's relationship with religion was complex and evolved not only throughout his life, but also throughout his work. In *Gharbzadegi*, Al-

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<sup>34</sup> Mehrdad Valibeigi, "Islamic Economics and Economic Policy Formation in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Journal of Economic Issues* 27, no. 3 (1993): 795.

<sup>35</sup> Valibeigi, "Islamic Economics," 797.

<sup>36</sup> Jahangir Amuzegar, "Khatami and the Iranian Economy at Mid-Term," *Middle East Journal* 53, no. 4 (1999): 538.

<sup>37</sup> Amuzegar "Khatami and the Iranian Economy at Mid-Term," 544.



e Ahmad sees religion as a vehicle for stagnation and not the place from which resistance to westoxification should grow. The Ulama in *Gharbzadegi* are characterized as antiquated and, in attempting to “seek refuge in times long past and old out dated ceremonies, [the Ulama] is satisfied to be the gatekeeper at the graveyard.”<sup>38</sup> The solutions for westoxification had not grown out of the religious establishment and even though the Ulama are embedded in tradition, they are not the proper agents for the indigenous innovation that Al-e Ahmad prescribes to combat the disease. However, after writing *Gharbzadegi*, Al-e Ahmad’s later works are not as condemning of religion as they once were. Al-e Ahmad undertakes the Hajj and tells of his pilgrimage in his memoir *Khasi dar Miqāt*. In the book, he wrestles with the examples of westoxification he finds on his journey, but also seems to come away from it almost wholly embracing the faith. Al-e Ahmad ultimately died before recording his official position on religion in the role of combatting westoxification, but in his later life seems “to have accepted Islam as an indigenous, non-Western part of Iranian identity.”<sup>39</sup>

After Al-e Ahmad’s death, religion became firmly rooted as a legitimate position of resistance to westoxification. Ali Shari’ati, another prominent Iranian anti-imperialist intellectual, sees religion as something that is native to Iran, and because to be Iranian was “necessarily religious,” religion was the point from which Western encroachment could be rebuked.<sup>40</sup> Al-e Ahmad never knew, but beyond providing his fellow intellectuals with a framework for their own ideas, his work would go on to “provide Khomeini with an unwavering revolutionary discourse, steeped in strong existential, postcolonial, and Marxist philosophy.”<sup>41</sup>

The discursive tools Al-e Ahmad popularized were not only employed in the Iranian Revolution to ward off Western powers, a goal he would have been wholeheartedly in favor of, but also as tools that were turned against Iranians in ways that were not compatible with his political history and writing. While Al-e Ahmad did condemn wholesale adoption of Western dress, as well as state-sponsored, forced removal of the veil, he had no specific comments on the value of the veil itself, spending more time speaking about women’s ability to witness in court or to have the right to

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<sup>38</sup> Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 84.

<sup>39</sup> Hanson, “The ‘Westoxication’ of Iran,” 12.

<sup>40</sup> Pesaran, “Towards an Anti-Western Stance,” 699.

<sup>41</sup> Roxanne Varzi, “Iran’s French Revolution: Religion, Philosophy, and Crowds,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 637 (2011): 59.

divorce on their own terms.<sup>42</sup> However, during the Revolution, the concept of being westoxified was turned against Iranian women; not for spouting the ideals of Western nations or encouraging the adoption of Western culture, but rather for simply resisting the mandatory hijab. These women were attacked and had their voices silenced in the name of combating westoxification, even though they had been participating in the same revolution that had rid the country of the West's political and economic domination.<sup>43</sup> To this day, denouncing political opposition or reform as "Westernized" is a powerful rhetorical cudgel in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

*Gharbzadegi* was an intellectual catalyst that provided the framework for a variety of intellectual and social movements to build upon. The aftershocks of this work are still felt to this day, both within Iran and in context of larger discourse on the developing world. However, since Al-e Ahmad's death, the ideas presented in *Gharbzadegi* have at times been twisted from their original intent, while others who use *Gharbzadegi* as a framework for their own ideas purposefully obscure parts of the work that are incompatible with whatever agenda they are pushing in order to lay claim to the novel's larger narrative.

## Conclusion

The world will never know Jalal Al-e Ahmad's thoughts on Instagram. If one were to guess, he would probably oppose the Western app, the modern microcosm of a machine, in favor of perhaps a different photo sharing app of Iranian creation. But regardless of what one thinks on the matter, it does not change the fact that Ayatollah Khamenei uses that platform regularly to disseminate ideas to the world, contributing in turn to the continued dissemination of Jalal Al-e Ahmad's thought. Iran in the 21<sup>st</sup> century may have thrown out the westoxifying agents of Western imperialism, but not without consequence. The Islamic Republic of Iran is now subject to sanctions and international isolation spearheaded by the nations that used to wish to envelop every part of Iranian life. Today in 2018, scholars talk of neocolonialism, and the same Western powers that so ensnared Iran in westoxification in Al-e Ahmad's time still control most of the power and wealth across the globe. Al-e Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi* provided specific analysis on the way the West interacted with and controlled Iran, and his

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<sup>42</sup> Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 80.

<sup>43</sup> Val Moghadam, "Revolution, the State, Islam, and Women: Gender Politics in Iran and Afghanistan," *Social Text* 22 (1989): 44.

rhetoric still holds great power today. Growing out of Iran's oil fields, the sickness took hold of Iran's economy and controlled the tools it needed to produce while denying the country the technical skill and financial capital needed to create tools of its own. Westoxification then seeped into Iran's culture, allowing it to co-opt Iran's social structures in order to remake it in the West's own image and control that market as well. While Al-e Ahmad's words still hold power, they are often used to obscure policy that contradicts many of the values he espoused.

*Gharbzadegi's* ideas have withstood the test of time and have become a vital framework for the way Iranians to this day understand the dynamics of the world in which they live. Al-e Ahmad's work rings with a sentiment that holds true for many of the world's peoples, asserting that "why, after all, shouldn't the Eastern nations be aware of their own wealth? And why? Just because machines are Western, and we have to adopt them, have we supplanted all our Eastern criteria for life with Western ones?"<sup>44</sup> These questions have yet to be resolved, but *Gharbzadegi* at least provides a lasting framework from which to begin to understand them.

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<sup>44</sup> Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, 170.