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Gharbzadegi, Colonial Capitalism and the Racial State in Iran

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Gharbzadegi, Colonial Capitalism and the Racial State in Iran

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Abstract

This article argues that the political thought of one of twentieth-century Iran's foremost intellectuals, Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–1969) and his seminal work *Gharbzadegi* (1962), often translated as 'West-struck-ness' or 'Westoxication', can and should be understood through the critical study of race and racialisation. In contrast to the paradigms of 'nativism', 'Islamic atavism' and the demand for a return to 'cultural authenticity' that have traditionally framed the significance and reception of his thought, this article contends that Al-e Ahmad's notion of *gharbzadegi* provides crucial insights into how predatory forms of colonial capitalism stratify the economic world order in accordance with what W.E.B. Du Bois famously called the 'colour line'. The article submits that Al-e Ahmad's political thought illuminates the conditions of Eurocentric and racialised forms of knowledge production and immanent material practices, and how they structure the lived experiences of colonial and semi-colonial subjects, as well as providing a remarkable perspective on how 'race thinking' and the 'racial state' were conceived and institutionalised in twentieth-century Iran.

[Article starts:]

'I speak of solidarity with progressive human societies.'¹

In this article I argue that the political thought of one of twentieth-century Iran's foremost intellectuals, Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–1969), and his seminal work *Gharbzadegi* (1962), often translated as 'West-struck-ness' or 'Westoxication', can and should be understood through the critical study of race and racialisation.² In this respect, it sets out to challenge both *how* Al-e Ahmad has been read as well as *who* should be reading him. One of the dominant paradigms that has shaped the interpretation and reception of his work has been that of 'nativism', where he is often cast as a 'lay Islamist',³ or mere proponent of 'Muslim apologia'.⁴ This article contends that such a framing distorts a great deal of value in his intellectual legacy and the critical insights that might be gleaned from it in relation to decolonial theorising.⁵ Al-e Ahmad has rarely been taken seriously as a theorist of decoloniality in his own right, receiving only passing consideration beyond the field of area studies. This article seeks to challenge this deep-seated parochialisation of Al-e Ahmad and thus demonstrate how he shares a series of common preoccupations with more familiar anticolonial thinkers who have since emerged as both the beneficiaries and victims of 'canonisation'.

The common depiction of his intellectual trajectory as one of flirting with communism only to recoil into Islamic atavism, or as simply a precursor and ideological enabler of the 'Islamic Revolution', is the result not only of disciplinary parochialism and historicist presuppositions but of a species of methodological nationalism, which removes him from the wider 'Third World' and elides his substantive engagement with issues, intellectuals and movements emanating from the Global South.⁶ Al-e Ahmad finds himself parochialised and nativised because the myriad South-South connections that appear in his writings are not legible as 'international' or 'cosmopolitan'. Only dialogue with the thinkers of the Global North tends to be considered deserving of such labels. However, even when his engagements with Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Eugene

Ionesco, André Gide and Ingmar Bergman, among others, are acknowledged, he still cannot seem to elude the parochial, nativist stamp.

Another factor in the often-truncated interpretation of his contribution to postcolonial thought has been the way in which those keywords associated with his name, above all *gharbzadegi*, have found themselves overshadowed and overdetermined by their deployment and concretisation in the context of the post-revolutionary Iranian state.⁷ Indeed, a measure of *Gharbzadegi*'s 'success' is its present idiomatic status within contemporary Iran itself. Calling or referring to someone or something as *gharbzadeh* (West-struck) has emerged as a common denigration and shorthand for targeting those who fail to subscribe to the self-described Islamic order's conception of orthodoxy, or those deemed of dubious loyalty vis-à-vis the political system. This lexicon and the reception of Al-e Ahmad has become overwrought with questions of cultural 'authenticity' and political fealty with their many attending problems. *Gharbzadegi*'s proponents as well as its critics often concur with and affirm this shallow and one-dimensional rendering, seeing Al-e Ahmad's thought as irredeemably culturalist, revanchist, irrational and dangerous.⁸ In short, both post-revolutionary defenders of the 'Islamist' Al-e Ahmad and secular critics who blame him for the triumph of Ayatollah Khomeini and the clerical leadership agree that his thought is an unreflective defence of cultural authenticity.⁹

In the following pages I argue that his classic and still controversial work *Gharbzadegi* (1962) can and should be read differently. In stark contrast to the interpretation outlined above, there are solid grounds for why *Gharbzadegi* should be understood as a critical diagnosis of 1) how predatory forms of colonial capitalism stratify the economic world order in line with what W.E.B. Du Bois famously called the 'colour line', 2) how Eurocentric and racist knowledge and immanent material practices structure the lived experiences of colonial and semi-colonial subjects, and 3) the manner in which 'race thinking' and the 'racial state' were conceived and institutionalised in twentieth-century Iran.¹⁰ In this article I will primarily refer to *Gharbzadegi*, but I will also make extensive use of several other works, including the posthumously published *On the Service and Treason of the Intellectuals (Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran)* and a travelogue detailing Al-e Ahmad's visit to the United States.

Dependency theory and the repudiation of 'modernisation'

Al-e Ahmad was an ardent critic of modernisation theory – namely, the idea that there was a linear evolutionary path of development for non-Western societies whereby they shed 'tradition' and unwieldy 'premodern' vestiges and attachments, and ultimately achieve 'take off', emerging as urban, industrialised, mass-consumption societies. This critique of modernisation has often been conflated with a rejection of 'modernisation' and 'modernity' *tout court*. On the face of it, there might not be an obvious connection between the critical study of race and racialisation and the critique of 'modernisation'. Modernisation theory not only served as a crucial ideological justification for US-sponsored anti-communist violence but also rationalised the subservient position of 'still-not-yet-modern' nations in West Asia and beyond. The endpoint of modernisation not only valorised an asymptotic Eurocentric goal that could never be adequately reached but actually locked countries in the Global South into a deeply hierarchical and stratified economic system in which they were destined to play a subservient role. Despite promises and pretensions to the contrary, the 'traditional' could never become fully 'modern'. The stubborn persistence of alleged atavisms and unwieldy traditions testified to the essential difference separating countries such as Iran from the United States, and justified economic and military support for pro-Western elites and the violent disciplining of subject populations in modernisation's name. Zachary Lockman has powerfully shown how modernisation theory and Orientalism made comfortable bedfellows and reinforced racial stereotypes about Muslims and Arabs, and Iran was no exception in this regard.¹¹ In other words, the cultural essentialisation of 'underdevelopment' by the advocates of modernisation theory considerably overlapped with and reinforced processes of racialisation stratifying the global colour line.¹²

In *Gharbzadegi* Al-e Ahmad rehearses his own specific iteration of dependency theory.¹³ Arguably one of dependency theory's chief contributions was to undercut culturalist explanations for why 'the Rest' supposedly lagged behind 'the West' and instead understand the global economic order and its regimes of accumulation and dispossession as intimately bound together and part of a single system.¹⁴ Early in *Gharbzadegi*, Al-e Ahmad disabuses his Iranian readers of any

misconceived identification with 'Europe' and instead makes clear that Iran and Iranians share a common condition with other 'developing nations'. As he says, 'we – the Iranians – fall into the category of the backward and developing nations: we have more points in common with them than points of difference.'¹⁵

Raúl Prebisch, one of the leading thinkers of Latin American protectionism – who published his classic *The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems* in 1950 – as well as more radical Marxian exponents of dependency theory such as Andre Gunder Frank provided a crucial corrective to modernisation theory's myopic Eurocentrism and unilinear, stadial assumptions regarding the nature of social change in the 'developing' world.¹⁶ Despite their differences, these thinkers postulated that instead of some deep-seated resistance to 'modernise' rooted in the 'personality' and 'cultural traits' of non-Western societies,¹⁷ what in fact had transpired in the Third World was 'the development of underdevelopment'.¹⁸

One is hard-pressed to find direct evidence that Al-e Ahmad read Prebisch, let alone Frank, whose *The Development of Underdevelopment* was published four years after *Gharbzadegi*.¹⁹ Al-e Ahmad had, however, read Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, and he explicitly cites a translation of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), first published in Europe in *On the Service and Treason of the Intellectuals*.²⁰ *The Wretched of the Earth* was translated under the title *Duzakhiyan ruye zamin* by Abolhasan Banisadr, a student activist (and future president) studying in Paris. The first part was published in 1966–67 and the second in January 1969.²¹ Despite the disproportionate amount of attention that has been given to Fanon's analysis and prescriptions around anti-colonial violence, his uncompromising critiques of neocolonialism and co-opted postcolonial elites in the third chapter of the same work, translated as 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness', are often overlooked.²² Whether Al-e Ahmad was ultimately inspired by Fanon's critique of neocolonialism is unclear. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the Iranian dissident would have at the very least found confirmation for his ideas in Fanon, and ascertained that they both comprised part of a shared discursive field.

Modernisation theory, in addition to casting itself as an overtly anti-communist ideology,²³ rationalising the violent suppression of Iranian socialist and popular movements, provided cover

for ongoing processes of colonial extraction and expropriation.²⁴ Its proponents' often single-minded focus on 'culture' and cultural obstacles to economic transformation elided the history of primitive accumulation through which the global capitalist economic order had been constituted and the ongoing processes of accumulation by dispossession that oversaw the transfer of wealth from the periphery to the core:

One pole is the Occident, by which I mean all of Europe, Soviet Russia, and North America, the developed and industrialized nations that can use machines to turn raw materials into more complex forms that can be marketed as goods... The other pole is Asia and Africa, or the backward, developing or nonindustrial nations that have been made into consumers of Western goods.²⁵

Initially Al-e Ahmad is keen to stress the 'economic' as his central organising category. He forcefully remarks that he understands 'West' and 'East' as first and foremost 'economic concepts' (*mafahim-e eqtesadi*). He continues,

Western nations generally have high wages, low mortality, low fertility, well-organized social services, adequate foodstuffs (at least three thousand calories per day), per capita annual income of at least 3,000 tumans, and nominal democracy (the heritage of the French Revolution). The second group of nations has these characteristics: low wages, high mortality, even higher fertility, social services nil (or for hire), inadequate foodstuffs (at most one thousand calories per day), annual income less than 500 tumans, and no notion of democracy (the heritage of the first wave of imperialism).²⁶

On this reading there is an indisputable material basis upon which global inequality rests and the 'low wages, high morality' of the periphery emanates from a lack of democracy and a long history of imperial expropriation. In fact, Al-e Ahmad, like many other anti-colonial critics writing during this period, understands there to be an express relationship between the two.²⁷ As I have already

implied above and will demonstrate in the following pages, Al-e Ahmad's critique is far from purely 'economic' in character. He was also keen to expose the centrality of 'racialised inferiority' to colonial capitalism's *modus operandi*, whether in the guise of neocolonial modernisation theory or in the forms of 'race thinking' internalised and acted upon by postcolonial elites.

Third Force, *Gharbzadegi* and the significance of Khalil Maleki

For Al-e Ahmad and like-minded intellectuals who fell under the sway of the Iranian socialist thinker and political activist Khalil Maleki (1901–1969), the inexorability and attraction of alignment to either of the two main camps in the Cold War had found itself fundamentally questioned since at least the final years of the 1940s. The break with the communist Tudeh Party in the aftermath of the Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946, Maleki's myriad critiques of the Tudeh Party and the Soviet Union, and his advocacy of non-alignment made a considerable impression upon Al-e Ahmad.²⁸ He was intimately involved in these tumultuous events and was quick to follow Maleki's lead in several instances.²⁹ These interventions made novel political positions conceivable for a new generation that had just experienced a period during the mid-1940s in which the Tudeh Party had been a near-hegemonic presence in cultural, intellectual and political life.³⁰ But they had ultimately been left disappointed and underwhelmed by the party's succession of failures, blunders and shortcomings. This perception was compounded during the Mosaddeq premiership (1951–53), when the latter was vilified by the Tudeh Party-affiliated press on the presumption that, while staunchly opposed to the British, he would ultimately drag Iran into the pro-American camp in the Cold War.³¹

Maleki's articulation of non-alignment and notion of 'Third Force in general' acted as an essential precondition of Al-e Ahmad's formulation of *gharbzadegi*, even while considerable differences remained. Maleki's formulation was honed during the course of the brief tenure of the Mosaddeq administration. In this respect, it was a position forged of concrete circumstances, when Iran was in a real sense isolated and under naval blockade by a British Empire in decline, but simultaneously it reflected the proliferation of demands for self-determination across the Third World that was already under way.³² For example, in his article 'The Third Force Confronting the Two Social Bases

of Imperialism' Maleki unambiguously identifies Iranians with 'the people of Asia'.³³ Following the CIA-MI6-orchestrated coup that ousted Mosaddeq in June 1953, Al-e Ahmad was himself briefly arrested, presumably due to his proximity to Maleki and his active role in the publications of the Third Force.³⁴

In much of the secondary literature, *Gharbzadegi* is almost invariably situated in relation to the futural horizon of the 'Islamic Revolution' and widely portrayed as a decisive step in readying the discursive terrain for its 'Islamic' identity, as well as the inevitable ascension of the Shi'i clergy.³⁵ Far less frequently, however, is it understood in relation to Al-e Ahmad's complicated and intellectually turbulent relationship with Maleki and his conception of the 'Third Force in general'. For example, in *Gharbzadegi*, when dismissing Cold War bipolarity and the division of the world into two rival blocs, Al-e Ahmad cites Maleki's translation of Tibor Mende, a prominent commentator on 'Third World' affairs, thereby intimating how Al-e Ahmad continued to think and write in relation to his mentor.³⁶ It should also be born in mind that he remained a regular contributor to Maleki-affiliated publications through to late 1950s and a close friend of Hossein Malek, Maleki's half-brother, until the end of his life.³⁷ In *On the Service and Treason of the Intellectuals* he goes as far as to say 'whatever I have and say, I learnt from [Maleki].'³⁸

Gharbzadegi is rarely grasped as a counter-hegemonic critique of the entwined global processes of racialisation and colonial exploitation, which induced a debilitating sense of alienation among all those whom it afflicted, as well as Al-e Ahmad's attempt to think through what a commodious anti-colonial solidarity and agency might look like. Rather, much of the historiography tends to rip Al-e Ahmad and Maleki apart.³⁹ On this view, while Maleki demonstrated genuine foresight in retaining his deep-seated aversion to 'religion', Al-e Ahmad found himself bewitched by this very same force, thereby leading the Iranian intelligentsia into oblivion. This view only ends up caricaturing both men's views and positions at various junctures. Indeed, Maleki's articulation of the 'Third Force in general' as an agency breaking with the bipolarity of the Cold War was a crucial link in the chain. According to Al-e Ahmad, 'in global politics...[Maleki] chose a third way between the Soviets and America and this was prior to the congresses in Bandung and Cairo summoned the non-aligned nations to the third way. In Iran he propounded the Third Force, meaning the hungry and colonised nations.'⁴⁰ In the following sections I will show that Al-e Ahmad's intervention in

Gharbzadegi, among other writings, goes far deeper, and can be understood as tantamount to both a description and a critique of the constitutive role of race in Euro-Atlantic modernity.⁴¹

***Gharbzadegi*, Orientalism and racing the 'Muslim world'**

In *Gharbzadegi* as well as other writings, Al-e Ahmad's construction of a collective agency constantly vacillates between the more capacious 'darker nations' – namely, the colonial world in its entirety⁴² – and a subset thereof, the 'Islamic' world. In speaking of himself as 'a remnant of that Islamic totality',⁴³ he attempts to conjure up what Sohail Daulatzai and Cemil Aydin have dubbed in their respective writings the spirit of 'Muslim internationalism'.⁴⁴ Al-e Ahmad's summoning of a collective anti-colonial agency in the face of the onslaught of *gharbzadegi* resonates deeply with the process Aydin describes in the late nineteenth century whereby the 'Muslim world' came into being as Muslims increasingly found themselves subject to processes of 'racialised inferiority' by triumphalist European powers.⁴⁵ It also speaks to a more active challenge on the part of colonised peoples to what Daulatzai and Charles W. Mills have described as 'white supremacy as a global phenomenon'.⁴⁶ The critique of *gharbzadegi* is thus both a diagnosis of the manner in which the global political and economic order is predicated on the continuous racialisation and exploitation of colonial and semi-colonial labour,⁴⁷ as well as the conjuring up of a subaltern subject that might challenge its domination.

If Al-e Ahmad's critique rested its case at the material or economic level, *Gharbzadegi* would have harboured little to distinguish it from a long line of Marxist and anti-colonial critiques of European imperialism. However, as the analysis develops, it becomes clear that Al-e Ahmad envisions *gharbzadegi* and its ramifications as far exceeding the depredations of unequal exchange. He sees it as a discursive formation and set of discursive practices that constitute and inform not merely how the 'West' understands and interpellates those whom it dominates but how the dominated come to understand themselves, and are even produced with reference to racist and colonial epistemologies. As he says, 'raw materials are not only iron ore and oil, or...cotton...they are also myths, dogmas, music, and the higher worlds'.⁴⁸

It is in this respect, as several scholars and critics have observed, that Al-e Ahmad's critique can be said to both resemble and prefigure aspects of Edward W. Said's watershed intervention in *Orientalism*.⁴⁹ For *Gharbzadegi* is not merely an anti-colonial lamentation demanding the right to extract, industrialise and produce on par with the Global North, indigenising the very same economic and social structures that prevail in London, Paris or Washington – or Moscow, for that matter – albeit granted equal recognition as a stakeholder. As should gradually become clear, Al-e Ahmad understands coloniality to both encompass and surpass economic exploitation and plunder. From Al-e Ahmad's occasional comments on the devastation wrought in the aftermath of the European colonial conquest of the Americas,⁵⁰ he might have comfortably concurred with Karl Marx's famous description of the dawn of primitive accumulation in chapter 31 of *Capital*: the 'discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production'.⁵¹

But Al-e Ahmad, like Said, also understood that the power of coloniality was coeval with a certain 'imaginative geography' and a kind of symbolic violence: 'The "West" began calling us (the area from the eastern Mediterranean to India) the "East" just when it arose from its medieval hibernation, when it came in search of sun, spices, silk, and other goods'.⁵² It is this conjunction of naming and Othering that Said speaks of when he proclaims that the 'Orient was almost a European invention'.⁵³ In *Gharbzadegi*, Al-e Ahmad too was trying his utmost to delineate a 'style of thought' and determine the manner in which European imperial powers exercised power over the 'East', representing, restructuring and even 'producing' it.⁵⁴

According to Al-e Ahmad, the '*gharbzadeh* hangs on the words and handouts of the West. He has nothing to do with what goes on in our little world, in this corner of the East... He seeks to learn only what some orientalist has said and written about the questions within his field'.⁵⁵ He continues, '[o]n the subject of Islamic philosophy, the customs of Yogis in India, the prevalence of superstitions in Indonesia, the national character of the Arabs, or any other Eastern subject, the *gharbzadeh* regards only Western writings as proper sources and criteria. This is how he comes to know even himself in terms of the language of the orientalist. With his own hands he has reduced

himself to the status of an object to be scrutinized under the microscope of the orientalist'.⁵⁶ On this view, Iranians have found themselves dominated by previously unfamiliar racial styles of thought and ways of knowing the world, and have become estranged from themselves, their history and their culture.⁵⁷ Members of the intelligentsia who only seek to understand themselves, their cultures and the challenges facing their societies through recourse to the standards, values and norms defined in the 'metropole' are labeled 'imported intellectuals' (*rowshanfekran-e varedati*).⁵⁸ He also on occasion refers to them as 'semi-colonized'.⁵⁹ They have a tenuous handle on the problems of their societies and for the most part hold the mass of ordinary people in disdain, shallowly imitating the same imperious arrogance and civilising attitude as the colonisers to which they defer.⁶⁰ In this respect, Al-e Ahmad's diagnosis resonates with Fanon's critical undertaking in *Black Skin, White Masks*, which sought to 'help the black man to free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment'⁶¹ and thereby pave the way for his 'disalienation'.⁶²

Apart from *The Wretched of the Earth*, Al-e Ahmad had very likely read fellow activist and intellectual Manuchehr Hezarkhani's translation of three leading figures of the Négritude movement – namely, Alioune Diop, Aimé Césaire and Jacques Rabemananjara – as well as Fanon's remarkable lecture 'Racism and Culture' (which in fact became the title of the book in Persian), all of which were delivered to the Congress of Black Writers and Artists convened in Paris in 1956.⁶³ It is worth noting that it was also Hezarkhani who first introduced Al-e Ahmad to Antonio Gramsci, whose translations appeared in the literary periodical *Arash* between 1968 and 1969.⁶⁴ Hezarkhani's translation of an excerpt of Gramsci on intellectuals was later included in the first volume of *On the Service and Treason of the Intellectuals*. Hezarkhani's translations of Fanon and Césaire, among other representatives of the Négritude movement, expressed and resonated with the understanding that not only had Iranians been racialised subjects of colonial power but there was a considerable degree of porousness between race, 'culture talk'⁶⁵ and religious practices. In his introduction, Hezarkhani clearly outlines the disingenuousness of the European 'civilising mission' and how the racial and cultural debasement of non-European peoples has acted as a *sine qua non* of modern imperialism: 'it's a small step from debasing an "inferior race" to debasing humankind and negating personhood and human dignity, and how quickly the advocates of

“freedom-equality-fraternity” take this step... To transform the peoples of indigenous societies into the arm of labour, it was necessary that they cease to be human’.⁶⁶ Ann Laura Stoler has described this dynamic in terms of race’s ‘polyvalent mobility’⁶⁷ as a political concept, where it ‘moves as easily between different political projects as it seizes piecemeal on different elements of earlier discourses reworked for new and revised political ends’.⁶⁸

The powerful interventions by Fanon and Césaire undeniably resonated with the notion that Iranians had since at least the late nineteenth century progressively found themselves inculcated to disdain and dismiss out of hand their own physical appearance and features, aesthetic sensibilities, cultural practices, beliefs and traditions. In other words, an ‘inferiority complex’ had both emerged and stood as an obstacle to a decisive break with mental, spiritual, political and economic dependency.⁶⁹ But this is only part of the reason that their views on colonialism and indigenous culture proved so poignant for Al-e Ahmad and other Iranian intellectuals.

Another crucial issue that Césaire broached in his lecture ‘Culture and Colonization’, which was translated by Hezarkhani in the aforementioned collection,⁷⁰ was that of the coloniser’s ‘selective giving’ and conscious de-development of the peoples over whom it rules.⁷¹ Al-e Ahmad points to the huge disparities dividing Iran and the metropole in terms of educational resources and infrastructure and their corresponding cognitive architecture and networks for the production of knowledge: ‘the Western intellectual in the “metropole” is free to experience all of the educational institutes and laboratories, and museums, all of which were enriched through the pillaging (*gharat*) of the colonies’.⁷² The Iranian intellectual, by contrast, who resides in ‘a semi-colonial sphere’ has neither access to the aforementioned educational and research infrastructure, nor its stolen cultural heritage, which today fill European museums and archives. Furthermore, this condition is compounded by his lacking even the right to express himself freely, all the while facing ‘the ever-increasing assault of colonialism’.⁷³ He thus sees contemporary disparities around education and the production of knowledge as originating in the legacies of colonialism – legacies that are compounded and entrenched through Western governments’ ongoing practice of neo-colonial rule and concomitant support for corrupt, autocratic postcolonial elites.⁷⁴

In the summer of 1965 Al-e Ahmad visited the United States to attend the Harvard International Summer Seminar. In his account of the trip he displays some familiarity with the African American novelists James Baldwin and Richard Wright. Al-e Ahmad even met and conversed with Ralph Ellison, the acclaimed author of *The Invisible Man* (1952), after Ellison delivered a scheduled lecture to the cohort, where they discussed the conditions facing African Americans in the United States.⁷⁵ Al-e Ahmad's remarks to Ellison were garbled and insensitive, demonstrating that he was not only ill-informed about the nature of white supremacy and the specific nature of anti-black racism in the United States but was also vulnerable himself to *gharbzadegi's* power, something that he readily admits in passing.⁷⁶ In his account he mentions how he was impressed by Ellison's grasp of the work of novelist William Faulkner and that the problems of African Americans begin with the two 'great refuges' they had created for themselves: Christianity and jazz.⁷⁷ His visceral understanding of colonial racism and 'global white supremacy' was often lacking when it came to understanding the condition of African Americans in the United States. This stands in visible contrast to his searing attack on elements of the French intelligentsia for their anti-Arab bigotry during the Arab–Israeli War of 1967.⁷⁸ This is even while he made a point of noting in his travelogue that all of the service personnel during a dinner held at the home of a wealthy businessman during his stay at Harvard were black.⁷⁹ Elsewhere, Al-e Ahmad would strongly condemn the drafting of African Americans into the United States' imperialist war in Vietnam, which he understood not only as a case of structural racism but as part of the American state's necropolitical war on the black community, effectively disposing of what it deemed a troublesome 'surplus' inner-city population.⁸⁰ The reason for relaying this anecdote and Hezarkhani's translations of and engagement with the *Présence africaine* conference, despite the fact that they both post-date *Gharbzadegi*, is to convey how much the question of race was on the agenda, and how it informed Al-e Ahmad's analyses both intuitively and analytically. Race and colonial racism represented crucial problematics within the discursive field in which he and other critical Iranian intellectuals were situated.

***Gharbzadegi* against the racial state**

There is also good reason to read *Gharbzadegi* as a critique of the violent form of racial modernity and project of racialised state-building that was witnessed in Iran under the Pahlavis, and that had been set in motion under the Qajars by the unceasing encroachment and penetration of Iran and West Asia by first Britain, then France and Imperial Russia, and subsequently the United States and the Soviet Union. Iran was no exception in its experience of the co-articulation of race, the modern state form and its modern ideological state apparatuses.⁸¹ *Gharbzadegi* is thus not only trying to fashion an anti-colonial identity deeply rooted in the social fabric of Iran but also critique what Al-e Ahmad saw as both a colonial and racialised process of state formation that reached its apogee with the first Pahlavi dynast.

The truth was hidden by bludgeoning the people into a uniform mode of dress through snatching the traditional felt hat off the men and the veil off the women, as the ultimate in progress, and by building a railroad across the country – not with oil income but with taxes on sugar – whose major *raison d'être* turned out to be supplying the front at Stalingrad during World War II.⁸²

The coercive-intensive and violent path to modern statehood seen in Iran was forged in large part through the military, which itself underwent a considerable reorganisation during the first decades of the twentieth century, when it essentially consisted of multiple regional and tribal armed forces.⁸³ Despite continuities with the Qajar era, Reza Shah's reforms were far more capacious in scope and encompassed everything from railways and the legal system to his controversial and highly gendered sartorial reforms. The peoples of *Iran zamin* would be made into 'modern Iranians' whether they liked it or not, and at the point of a bayonet if necessary.⁸⁴ This was particularly evident in the policies of forced sedentarisation and the policing and brutal enforcement of cultural and linguistic homogeneity. Al-e Ahmad's friend and fellow novelist Reza Baraheni, who was born and raised in Tabriz and whose mother tongue was Azeri, has vividly described his own experience of this process in his book *The Crowned Cannibals*: 'The Persians and the Persian-oriented government had taken away from me a language, an identity, a culture and a rhythm'.⁸⁵ Baraheni, who was markedly influenced by Al-e Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi*, and was

among the first to provide excerpts of the work in English, went so far as to denounce the Pahlavi order as 'a racist regime fashioned on Aryanomania'.⁸⁶

Baraheni was indicting the Persian chauvinism that so profoundly shaped the state-building process, with its pursuit of the coercive-intensive assimilation of non-Persian ethnic minorities by prohibiting or devaluing their cultural forms and languages in public space, and its commitment to undermining their intergenerational transmission through local educational and cultural institutions. This was a dramatic example of what Fanon called 'cultural racism' in his powerful essay 'Racism and Culture' – an essay that, as argued above, we have good grounds to believe Al-e Ahmad read.⁸⁷ Al-e Ahmad's critique of neo-coloniality on the economic and political, as well as the cultural, linguistic, psychological and religious, levels was not only an upbraiding of colonial modernity's spurious claims to universality; it was a direct assault on the Pahlavi state as a racial state, and the racial grammar by means of which assimilation on the side of hegemonic 'white' nations effaces the exclusionary and murderous violence upon which it is predicated. Such policies detrimentally impacted not only Kurdish, Gilaki, Baluch, Arab and Azeri communities but also nomadic ones such as the Shabsavan, Lur, Qashqa'i and Bakhtiari. In fact, Al-e Ahmad explicitly recognises the profound alienation and unsettling existential diremption imposed upon Azeri intellectuals such as Hasan Taqizadeh and his own mentor Khalil Maleki, who were compelled to inhabit intellectual and political lives not only separate from but also antagonistic to their mother tongue.⁸⁸ Stephanie Cronin's pioneering research has vividly illustrated several episodes often euphemistically referred to in the literature as 'pacification' (note the colonial connotations) relating to tribal and regional opposition to the new order led by Reza Khan (post-1925, Reza Shah), and the latter's brutal imposition of forced settlement upon the tribes and internal conquest across several Iranian provinces, including Gilan, Khorasan and Azerbaijan.⁸⁹

Apart from merely being a case of suppressing regional challenges to a central government committed to holding power exclusively in its hands, it can be said to represent the emergence of a social formation that sought to neutralise alternative political imaginaries. This included political imaginaries potentially envisioned by, but by no means exclusive to, the Soviet Republic of Gilan and the Republic of Mahabad, or other burgeoning political formations in the first decades of the twentieth century, such as the Communist Party of Iran or the Social Democratic *Ejtema'iyun-e*

'amiyun, whose orientation and perspective with respect to questions of ethnicity, language, centre–periphery relations, and European imperialism in the context of Iran and Iranian nationhood differed considerably from those subsequently espoused by Reza Khan. This is even while some of them may have shared a number of the same high-modernist assumptions. More importantly, these campaigns sought not only to restore 'order' to Iran's unruly provinces but also to institute a new racial regime that would produce modern and obedient Persian subjects – 'subjects' who were expected to abide by the commands of the monarch as moral steward and great civiliser of his people. The Pahlavi state availed itself in this way of both sovereign and disciplinary power in its construction of a racial order without precedent in Iran, which would impress itself on everything from architecture and shrines to medieval poets and language reform, high-school textbooks and curricula.

The construction of this racial state went beyond simply opting for 'pre-Islamic' identity and Aryanism over 'Islamic' identity or 'civic nationalism'. The coercive-intensive path of state-building that was initially pursued in the twenties and thirties established a whole new regime of governmentality by which behaviour, manners, comportments, clothing, language, sexuality and much else could be monitored, policed, disciplined and 'corrected'. It was a thoroughly racial governmentality that was unapologetic in its aspiration for acceptance as part of Euro-Atlantic modernity and recognition as falling on the 'white' side of the colour line. Moreover, as has been assiduously shown by Mostafa Vaziri and Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, Iran's recrudescant 'Aryan' identity, upon which Pahlavi-era elites drew in order to justify their state-building project, was thoroughly imbricated in Orientalist and colonial knowledge formations, foremost in the field of linguistics enshrining Persian's status as an Indo-European language.⁹⁰ In the words of Vaziri, '[p]hilology was used as a basis for theorizing race and for stripping the Orient's complex historical fabric into narrow national contexts'.⁹¹ The crucial role played by late-nineteenth-century Orientalist scholarship, in which the names of Ernest Renan and Arthur de Gobineau prominently feature,⁹² and its contribution to the intellectualisation of what Vasant Kaiwar has termed the 'Aryan model of history' and its correlate, the 'Semitic hypothesis' delineated by Gil Anidjar, need not be relitigated here. There is considerable debate among scholars of Iranian nationalism as to whether Saidian approaches mirror Eurocentric diffusionist accounts. I cannot possibly adjudicate this

debate here, but I will say that I think the comparison flawed. Saidian approaches do not overlook or negate the 'agency' of Iranian intellectuals and elites (which in such critiques is always emptied of both content and context) but merely acknowledge the indisputable and pervasive asymmetry of power that defines the terrain upon which subaltern agency is exercised, and that is always already mediated, though not straightforwardly determined, by colonial knowledge production and the veridical procedures it has historically postulated about Iran and the Muslim-majority world more broadly. This is a dynamic to which Al-e Ahmad was clearly attuned.⁹³

In *Gharbzadegi*, Al-e Ahmad can be read as mounting a challenge to the form of racial modernity spearheaded and institutionalised by the Pahlavis, with its attachment to Persian primordialism and ambition to fashion a homogeneous and mythologised Aryan nation.⁹⁴ It is a racial modernity that sought to 'liberate' itself from those 'Semitic' elements, in this case associated foremost with Arab peoples and the Islamic faith, cast as foreign, hostile and essentially responsible for the subsequent degeneration of the racial body politic.⁹⁵ The pretence to secularisation and racialisation of Islam as 'Semitic', and thus alien, go hand in hand. As Anidjar has powerfully argued, we can see here that 'religion and race are contemporary, indeed, coextensive and, moreover, co-concealing categories'.⁹⁶ Indeed, the binary of 'alien Semitic Islam' in contradistinction to 'autochthonous Aryan Iran' is a fitting illustration of a case where race and religion have become both co-extensive and co-concealing categories. In the penultimate chapter of *Gharbzadegi* Al-e Ahmad names these mythological attachments of the racial state the 'melancholia of grandiosity' and the 'melancholia of glorying in the ancient (*bastani*) past', where

[e]very little man is led to see his own grandeur in those grandeurs that are (falsely) associated with him: in the grandeur of the nationalistic demonstrations... The melancholia of glorying in the nation's remote past... You mostly *hear* this kind of melancholia manifested: asinine self-glorification, with plentiful references to Darius, Cyrus, and Rostam, the sort of thing that pours from every radio in the country and from there fills our publications.⁹⁷

When Al-e Ahmad returns time and again to the domination of the 'machine' and its coincidence (though not identity) with colonial capitalism,⁹⁸ we might think of this critique as one that aims squarely at the reification of social relations and categories that conform to and naturalise historically specific orders of difference within the racial state,⁹⁹ and the practices of self-Orientalisation that they overdetermine and engender.¹⁰⁰ In other words, the critique of *gharbzadegi* and the 'machine' can be interpreted as a critique as well as an ambivalent and groping metaphor for Iran's own specific iteration of colonial capitalism and the 'racial grammar of colonial common sense' upon which it relies.¹⁰¹

During the first half of the twentieth century, colonial power in the guise of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) loomed large in Iran, foremost in the southwestern province of Khuzestan and towns such as Masjed Soleiman and Abadan. Above and beyond the neocolonial context in which prospecting rights and oil concessions were negotiated with the enfeebled Qajar monarchy, just as ARAMCO established its own 'Jim Crow' regime in the oil town of Dhahran in Saudi Arabia,¹⁰² APOC founded and governed a system of racial stratification in which recently proletarianised Bakhtiari tribesmen were cast as the lowest of the low.¹⁰³ According to Touraj Atabaki, as 'a tripartite city, Abadan was spatially divided according to the social-stratification principles imposed by British colonialism. A highly stratified racial hierarchy existed, which APOC's British employees brought with them from home and from India. The city was divided between Europeans at the top, Indians in the middle and native Persians at the bottom'.¹⁰⁴ This racial regime was part of what L.P. Elwell-Sutton sardonically called in his 1955 monograph APOC's 'civilizing mission'.¹⁰⁵ Al-e Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi* constituted a critical response to this very intersection of colonial capitalism and racial state formation and the global economic order it reflected in microcosm.

Democratic criticism and colonial capitalism's eschatology of destruction

It has been remarked that Al-e Ahmad's characterisation of the archetypal *gharbzadeh* man as 'effeminate' smacks of sexism.¹⁰⁶ Al-e Ahmad could be insensitive, slapdash, imprecise, polemical and even sexist in his manner of expression. Part of this is stylistic as well as performative and

emanates from a desire to provoke and jolt the reader. But it is also undeniably a product of his own socialisation and constitution by the very same practices and structures of domination he railed against. Al-e Ahmad was not, however, engaging the question of women's rights on the terrain and terms that his liberal critics have anachronistically ascribed to him. His searing critique of the Shah's so-called 'White Revolution' and its enfranchisement of women was not a critique of women's emancipation *per se* but a rejection of state feminism's instrumentalisation of women's enfranchisement in a bid to cast a dictatorial system as both a civilising force and in the role of 'liberator'. In this regard it was yet another iteration of his critique of the Pahlavi racial state, which time and again had sought to control and define the public appearance, external behaviours and cultural practices of Iranian women, and extinguish all stigma and signs associated with civilisational 'backwardness'. He was also of the opinion that it announced a new phase of women's subordination in the form of wage labour as a result of their incorporation into the Iranian labour market. Al-e Ahmad's issue with the 'White Revolution' was not that it gave Iranian women the vote but that, so long as dictatorship prevailed, it was devoid of any substantive content. Like Reza Shah's enforced prohibition of the veil in the mid-1930s, which sought to assimilate Iranian women to European behaviours, comportments and norms, in the Iran of the 1960s:

We have contented ourselves with tearing the veil from their faces and opening a number of schools to them. But then what? Nothing. We believe women cannot be judges, cannot serve as witnesses, and as for voting or serving in the Majlis, the whole idea is idiotic, since even men have no such right, really – no one has the right to vote.¹⁰⁷

This passage was not a facile call for 'regression' and rolling back women's rights but Al-e Ahmad candidly highlighting the hypocrisy of bestowing the 'vote' upon women under conditions of encroaching dictatorship and a repressive police state. Notwithstanding the notable differences between the two Pahlavi shahs, Al-e Ahmad clearly saw Mohammadreza Pahlavi's ersatz tribute

to women's rights as of a piece with his father's earlier campaign of sartorial reforms and mandatory unveiling.¹⁰⁸ Despite entailing distinct strategies of governmentality, for Al-e Ahmad they formed part of a continuum. Though not adequately conveyed by the translation, Al-e Ahmad also criticises the male prerogative of divorce as yet another example by means of which women's civil liberties continue to be undermined, if not flouted altogether.¹⁰⁹ Iranian women would eventually acquire certain rights to divorce with the passing of the Family Protection Law in 1967. This is not to say that Al-e Ahmad's views of gender are without issue, but rather to acknowledge that the matter is far more complicated than critics are often prepared to admit.

Democracy is a subject to which Al-e Ahmad returns on several occasions, and yet in discussions of *Gharbzadegi* it is rarely remarked upon. As mentioned above, Al-e Ahmad saw a clear link between *gharbzadegi*, encompassing as it does both Iran's racial state and the global colour line, and Iran's own authoritarian conundrum. Furthermore, he not only does not dismiss several principles crucial to sustaining democratic life but also laments their absence in Iran, which he connects to the *modus operandi* of neo-colonialism and its decisive role in perpetuating authoritarianism in the Third World:

We know nothing of Western democracy or of its preconditions and implications: freedom of speech, freedom of expression of belief, freedom of access to the media, which here are monopolized by the state, freedom of publication of views contrary to those of the government of the time. None of these exists; yet our governments feign democracy, if only to shut the mouth of this or that foreign power which is due to give them a loan.¹¹⁰

Al-e Ahmad insists that state television and radio 'must be for the benefit and at the disposal of the public, through elected councils of writers and intellectuals; they must be run without any material or propagandistic motive'.¹¹¹ In his estimation Iranians had been deprived of any chance of democratic self-rule, while its hollow 'imitation', of which he saw the Shah's plebiscite on the 'White Revolution' as an illustrative case, was itself a symptom of *gharbzadegi*, entangling Iranians ever further in relations of domination and alienation.¹¹² In fact, in chapter ten of *Gharbzadegi*, Al-

e Ahmad stipulates a series of conditions pertaining to when one might finally speak of 'democracy' in Iran. The enumerated list is conventional to say the least and includes reining in the power of landed elites and tribal sheikhs – in other words, patrimonialism and its impact on the democratic process; a free press, free association and party-political competition; and robust constraints on the security apparatus.¹¹³ Though hardly the ultimate horizon of Al-e Ahmad's decolonial vision, these were tantamount to a set of initial demands for the purpose of undoing the racial state's hierarchical structures and apparatuses of control.

Al-e Ahmad was surely pessimistic that Iran and humanity at large would be saved by 'Western democracy'. But, again, his pessimism was not an outgrowth of nativist revanchism or Islamic supremacism¹¹⁴ but born of a profound understanding of the coloniality of power and the depredations of global capitalism – an understanding that stood in critical conversation with European intellectuals who were dubious about humanity's capacity to eschew its own destruction in the nuclear age. As mentioned, his chief influences in settling on the metaphor of a 'plague' (*ta'un*) to describe *gharbzadegi* were none other than Camus, Ionesco and Bergman and the colonisation of the life-world it enacts. Thus, apart from speaking to the neo-colonial domination of Iran and the Third World and the 'racialised inferiority' upon which it rests, Al-e Ahmad also sought to voice his objections to the burgeoning culture industry, consumerist society and 'heteronomous' needs, to which many of his fellow middle-class Iranians aspired.¹¹⁵

Gharbzadegi ends on a pessimistic note, where the onslaught of the 'machine' displaces the awaited 'resurrection' of traditional religion with an eschatology of self-annihilation, the prospect of which is met only with God's silence. This final chapter harbours valences of the absurd, which run through much of Al-e Ahmad's writing. For throughout *Gharbzadegi* there are undeniably moments at which Al-e Ahmad intimates that even if the colonial world mastered the 'machine' and learned to produce and harness its powers, such mastery would only conclude in another modality of domination and ensnarement and all-encompassing technological enframing.¹¹⁶

Despite this grim and well-nigh-totalising fate, Al-e Ahmad's critique of colonial capitalism and the permanent war-complex upon which it depends should be seen as recursive and bristling with insights that speak to the potential for resistance, the retrieval of autonomy and the possibilities

for self-determination. Al-e Ahmad's clinging to the emancipatory role of the intellectual and the subversive repercussions of critique in the advancement of the common presented just such an example: 'anytime the individual breaks with their solitariness and engages the common (*ejtema*'), and this means coming out of one's small corner and one's home, city, language, province and religion, and one sees the world as the encompassing unity of humanity of different peoples, languages, customs, cultures and religions'.¹¹⁷ In moments such as these we are able to discern the elements of Al-e Ahmad's continued fidelity to a complex and tragic form of planetary humanism, and the possibility for a transcendence of crippling existential anxiety, despite the ever-present violence of the racial state and the continued power of coloniality. For 'it is hard to think freely (*azad andishi*) in the face of the state (*hokumat*) with its colonial and semi-colonial foundations'.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

This article has sought to demonstrate that Al-e Ahmad, and specifically his seminal work, *Gharbzadegi*, can be read profitably through the critical approach to race and the manifold logics of racialisation. This is manifest in his critique of 'modernisation theory' and neo-colonial capitalism and the stratification of the global economic order consistent with the global 'colour line'. It also materialises in his forceful critique of Iran's racial state under both Pahlavi monarchs and how the process of modern Iranian state formation had unfolded. For far too long Al-e Ahmad and his theoretical insights have been provincialised and circumscribed under the category of 'nativism', a category that is formed explicitly in relation to colonial and settler-colonial regimes of power. In the words of Mahmood Mamdani, 'Unlike what is commonly thought, native does not designate a condition that is original and authentic. Rather...the native is the creation of the colonial state: colonized, the native is pinned down, localized, thrown out of civilization as an outcast, confined to custom, and then defined as its product'.¹¹⁹ The category of 'nativism' perpetuates a facile homogenisation of all thinkers and movements who sought to resist and challenge the encroachment of Western colonialism and colonial knowledges, and elides the substantive political and ideological differences that divided their Iranian critics, while assimilating

them to a static and unchanging 'custom' and 'culture'. This designation is at least partly responsible, I submit, for why Al-e Ahmad has still not been taken up as a major figure and source of inspiration for decolonial theorising.

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¹ In the course of this article I have relied upon R. Campbell's translation of *Gharbzadegi*, and have cross-referenced it with the original, modifying the translation when this seemed appropriate. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, trans. R. Campbell, Introduction by Hamid Algar (ed.), Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1984, Loc 1265. *Gharbzadegi* (Qom: Nashr-e khorram, 1385 [2006]), p 94.

² Karim Murji and John Solomos (eds), *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, Introduction. George M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements*, Berkeley University of California Press, 2000, chapter 5.

³ Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, Loc 5402.

⁴ Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement*, New York: Basingstoke: St Martin's Press; Macmillan Press, 1996, p 83.

⁵ This disagreement over Al-e Ahmad's legacy extends to those who knew him first-hand. The writer and translator Dariush Ashuri was among the earliest to critique Al-e Ahmad's role in popularising the discourse of 'cultural authenticity' and what he regarded as its pernicious effects, whereas others, such as the political activist and translator Manouchehr Hezarkhani, have forcefully rejected this interpretation. Dariush Ashuri, *Ma va moderniyat* Tehran: Serat, 1377 [1998], pp 133–4. Manouchehr Hezarkhani, *Harvard University Iranian Oral History Project*, interview by Zia Sedghi, 1 June 1984, pp 18–19.

⁶ In his own compelling analysis of Al-e Ahmad's oeuvre, Ali Mirsepassi, for example, claims 'Al-e Ahmad's return to Islam was a quest to realize a national modernity in Iran'. Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, Loc 1534. Arash Davari insightfully critiques a similar historiographical tendency vis-à-vis the reception and interpretation of Ali Shari'ati since 1979. Arash Davari, 'A Return to Which Self? 'Ali Shari'ati and Frantz Fanon on the Political Ethics of Insurrectionary Violence', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34 (1), 2014, p 87.

⁷ In this article I will not translate *gharbzadegi* or its cognates, in order to retain something of the term's polyvalence in Persian, which none of the English translations manages to properly convey. *Gharbzadegi* will signify Al-e Ahmad's 1962 essay, and *gharbzadegi* will denote the phenomenon and uneven process Al-e Ahmad attempts to describe and analyse in this essay and other writings.

⁸ I will not rehearse the history of *Gharbzadegi*'s publication here because there is already plenty of literature on the subject. As is well known, the term was originally coined by the 'oral philosopher' Ahmad Fardid, whose scattered writings and pronouncements Ali Mirsepassi has analysed in his important and exhaustive monograph. Ali Mirsepassi, *Transnationalism in Iranian Political Thought: The Life and Times of Ahmad Fardid*, New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 2017. I have, however, long been of the opinion and concur with Afshin Matin-asgari that the influence of Heidegger on Al-e Ahmad should not be exaggerated. Afshin Matin-asgari, *Both Eastern and Western: An Intellectual History of Iranian Modernity*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p 175.

Contrary to Matin-asgari's assertion that there is no evidence that Al-e Ahmad read Heidegger, Al-e Ahmad does quote a translation of Heidegger in *On the Service and Treason of the Intellectuals*. How seriously he read Heidegger is a speculative enterprise that I will not pursue here, but on the basis of this one page-length quotation his hold on Heidegger's thought appears to be quite tenuous. It is also worth bearing in mind that even this would have been mediated by French translations and Heidegger's reception by French phenomenologists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as well as Fardid's own idiosyncratic interpretation. In fact, Al-e Ahmad cites the journals *Les Temps modernes* and *Arguments* directly. The former was, of course, founded by Sartre and de Beauvoir in 1945, while the latter was co-founded by Roland Barthes in 1956, and largely comprised intellectuals who had recently broken with the French Communist Party (PCF). This does not provide anything like a 'smoking gun' for the German philosopher's overweening influence upon Al-e Ahmad, since for this single quotation of Heidegger there are myriad references to other intellectuals whose politics and philosophical orientations were, in many respects, irreconcilable with those of Heidegger. These include G.W.F. Hegel, Marx, Sartre, Camus, Gide, Fanon and Césaire, to name but a few. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran* Vol. 1, Tehran: Entesharat-e kharazmi, 1357 [1979], pp 35-36.

⁹ Hamid Algar's introduction to the English translation of *Gharbzadegi* also clearly falls into this category.

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, London and New York: Penguin 2017 [1951], Chapter 6. David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 2002, pp 5–7.

¹¹ Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, 2nd edn, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp 136–40.

¹² Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997, Introduction. Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, Princeton and Oxford Princeton University Press 2019, chapter 1.

¹³ Brad Hanson mentions this point of comparison with 'dependency theory' in an early article, but it remains largely undertheorised. Brad Hanson, 'The "Westoxication" of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangī, Al-e Ahmad, and

Shariati', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15(1), 1983, p 13. Vijay Prashad also briefly covered this aspect of Al-e Ahmad's thought in his history of the Third World, though his analysis remains rather broad and does not capture those aspects that were original to Al-e Ahmad. Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, Kindle edn, New York and London: The New Press, 2007, p 80.

¹⁴ Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, p 158.

¹⁵ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 397; Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, p 14.

¹⁶ See Cody Stephens, 'The Accidental Marxist: Andre Gunder Frank and the "Neo-Marxist" Theory of Underdevelopment, 1958–1967', *Modern Intellectual History* 15(2), 2018.

¹⁷ Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, p 136.

¹⁸ Andre Gunder Frank, 'The Development of Underdevelopment', *Monthly Review*, September 1966.

¹⁹ Ramin Nassehi has argued that American-trained Iranian technocrats who had enthusiastically adopted 'modernisation theory' in the mid- to late 1950s would in the aftermath of an economic downturn and around the same time that Al-e Ahmad published *Gharbzadegi* begin to expound elements of the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis, and advocate for Import Substitution Industrialisation, while continuing to combine it with some of the core features of modernisation theory. Ramin Nassehi, 'Domesticating Cold War Economic Ideas: The Rise of Iranian Developmentalism in the 1950s and 1960s', in *The Age of Aryamehr: Late Pahlavi Iran and its Global Entanglements*, Roham Alvandi (ed.), London Gingko, 2018, pp 52–3. For a critical appraisal of the Pahlavi import substitution strategy and its shortcomings, see Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-modernism, 1926–1979*, London: Macmillan, 1981, pp 237, 278.

²⁰ While *On the Service and Treason of the Intellectuals* was published posthumously, all the articles had been written either in draft form, while some were published prior to Al-e Ahmad's death in 1969. Al-e Ahmad wrote the first plan for the book in December–January 1963–64 (Dey 1342), and the first draft was completed and distributed between 'friends and acquaintances' in the autumn of 1964 (1343). Furthermore, two chapters included in the book were published in 1966 (1345) in the journal *Jahan-e now*. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran* Vol. 2, Tehran: Entesharat-e kharazmi, 1357 [1979], pp 16, 28.

²¹ Hitherto, it was not known with any certainty who exactly translated which parts of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, since it has often been mistakenly attributed to Ali Shari'ati. In two interviews Abolhasan Banisadr has confirmed to the author that it was in fact he who was the first to translate *The Wretched of the Earth*. He had previously not heard of Fanon and translated the book on Shari'ati's recommendation during the relatively short time they overlapped in Paris. Abolhasan Banisadr, interview by Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 25 July 2020. I analyse this history at length in Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 'Some of the Pioneers of the Return to Self in the Third World', in *Spirit and Defiance: Ali Shariati in Translation*, Arash Davari, Siavash Saffari, and Maryam Rabiee (eds), (forthcoming).

²² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 2004, chapter 3.

²³ See W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, 3rd edn, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990 [1960].

²⁴ Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, p 137.

²⁵ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 391; Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, pp 13–14.

²⁶ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 409; Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, p 15.

²⁷ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran* Vol. 1, p 48.

²⁸ On Khalil Maleki and Al-e Ahmad's secession from the Tudeh Party, see Homa Katouzian, *Khalil Maleki: The Human Face of Iranian Socialism, Radical Histories of the Middle East*, London: Oneworld Academic, 2018, chapter 2. Sepehr Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966, pp 128–35.

²⁹ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 2, p 215.

³⁰ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982, p 334.

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- ³¹ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p 322.
- ³² Homa Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1990, p 103.
- ³³ Khalil Maleki, 'Niru-ye sevvom dar moqabel-e do paigah-e ejtema'i-ye emperialism (30 March–26 April 1953)', in *Majmu'eh-ye maqalat-e Khalil Maleki*, Reza Azari Shahrezai (ed.), Tehran: Nashr-e akhtaran, 1396 [2017], p 2414.
- ³⁴ Robert Wells, 'Jalal Ale Ahmad: Writer and Political Activist', University of Edinburgh, 1982, p 30.
- ³⁵ This point is also made by Golnar Nikpour in a perspicacious article analysing Al-e Ahmad's hajj travelogue in conjunction with that of Malcolm X. Golnar Nikpour, 'Revolutionary Journeys, Revolutionary Practice: The Hajj Writings of Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Malcolm X', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34(1), 2014, p 69. See also Hamid Dabashi's groundbreaking analysis of Al-e Ahmad's life and work in Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006, chapter 1.
- ³⁶ Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, p 16.
- ³⁷ 'Varshekastegi-ye matbu'at', *Elm va zendegi*, Farvardin 1338, March–April 1959.
- ³⁸ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 2, p 215.
- ³⁹ Two exceptions in this regard are Wells, 'Jalal Ale Ahmad: Writer and Political Activist', p 7, and Matin-asgari, *Both Eastern and Western*, chapter 5.
- ⁴⁰ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 2, p 214.
- ⁴¹ David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p 3.
- ⁴² This is clear when, for example, he uses the 'East' as a metonym, also encompassing countries such as China and India. Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 1011.
- ⁴³ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 502.
- ⁴⁴ Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom beyond America*, Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 2012, chapter 1. Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History*, Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 2017, chapter 6.
- ⁴⁵ Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, p 57.
- ⁴⁶ Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon*, p 6. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Loc 122.
- ⁴⁷ Stuart Hall, *Essential Essays: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, Durham and London Duke University Press, 2019, Loc 4039.
- ⁴⁸ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 391; Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, p 14.
- ⁴⁹ Algar notes the parallels with Said's *Orientalism* in his introduction to the English translation of *Gharbzadegi*.
- ⁵⁰ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 618, 694.
- ⁵¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes, Kindle edn, London and New York: Penguin Books, 1976, Loc 13081.
- ⁵² Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 467; Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, pp 21–2.
- ⁵³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage, 1979, p 1.
- ⁵⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, p 3. Inspired by Foucault, Timothy Mitchell powerfully addresses the new forms of productive power that emerged with the reorganisation of the Egyptian state in its relation to colonial encroachment. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, Loc 5.
- ⁵⁵ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 1620–1630; *Gharbzadegi*, pp 125–6.
- ⁵⁶ *Occidentosis*, Loc 1643 [my italics]; *Gharbzadegi*, p 127.
- ⁵⁷ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 1, p 45.
- ⁵⁸ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 1, p 48.
- ⁵⁹ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 1, p 47.
- ⁶⁰ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 2, p 25.

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- ⁶¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann, Introduction, Paul Gilroy (ed.), London and New York: Pluto Press, 2017.
- ⁶² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Loc 634. Frantz Fanon, 'Racism and Culture', in *Toward the African Revolution*, New York: Grove Press, 1967, p 38.
- ⁶³ Alioune Diop, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire et al., *Nezhad parasti va farhan*, trans. Manuchehr Hezarkhani, 2nd printing edn, Tehran: Ketab-e zaman, 1348 [1969]).
- ⁶⁴ Manuchehr Hezarkhani was a prolific intellectual and translator of radical theory and literature during these years and translated a series of articles by Antonio Gramsci for the literary journal *Arash* during 1968–69. For more information on the impact of these translations on the Iranian intellectual scene, especially the thought of Mostafa Sho‘aiyan, see Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Rebel's Journey: Mostafa Sho'aiyan and Revolutionary Theory in Iran*, Radical Histories of the Middle East, Loc 1733.
- ⁶⁵ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2004, p 20.
- ⁶⁶ Diop et al., *Nezhad parasti va farhang*, pp 7–8.
- ⁶⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, Durham and London Duke University Press, 2016, Loc 6240.
- ⁶⁸ Stoler, *Duress*, Loc 6171.
- ⁶⁹ Aimé Césaire, 'Culture and Colonization', *Social Text* 28(2), 2010, p 140.
- ⁷⁰ In a rare interview Hezarkhani confirmed to the author that he regularly corresponded with Al-e Ahmad on these issues. Manouchehr Hezarkhani, interview by Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, 21 August 2020.
- ⁷¹ Césaire, 'Culture and Colonization', p 135
- ⁷² Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 1, p 47.
- ⁷³ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 1, p 47.
- ⁷⁴ In recent years these issues have been powerfully examined by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, London and New York: Verso, 2019, chapter 1.
- ⁷⁵ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Safar-e amrika*, Tehran Nashr-e atiyeh, 1380 [2000]), pp 322–3.
- ⁷⁶ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 2161.
- ⁷⁷ Al-e Ahmad, *Safar-e amrika*, p 323.
- ⁷⁸ See Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi and Yaacov Yadgar, 'Jalal's Angels of Deliverance and Destruction: Genealogies of Theo-politics, Sovereignty and Coloniality in Iran and Israel', *Modern Intellectual History*, August 2019.
- ⁷⁹ Al-e Ahmad, *Safar-e amrika*, p 321.
- ⁸⁰ *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 1, p 28.
- ⁸¹ Goldberg, *The Racial State*, p 4. Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian, Kindle edn, London and New York: Verso, 2014, appendix 2.
- ⁸² Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 989; Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadeg*, pp 69–70.
- ⁸³ Al-e Ahmad demonstrates a firm grasp of this central role of the military in Iranian state formation in volume two of *On the Service and Treason of the Intellectuals*. *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 2, p 15. Stephanie Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910–1926*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris Academic Studies, 1997, chapter 3.
- ⁸⁴ Ayatollah Khomeini described Reza Shah's violent reorganisation of the modern Iranian state in just these terms in the early 1940s. Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, *Revolution and its Discontents: Reform and Political Thought in Iran*, The Global Middle East, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019, p 85.
- ⁸⁵ Reza Baraheni, *The Crowned Cannibals: Writings on Repression in Iran*, with an Introduction by E.L. Doctorow, New York: Vintage Books, 1977, p 111.
- ⁸⁶ Baraheni, *The Crowned Cannibals*, p 112.

⁸⁷ Fanon, 'Racism and Culture', p 32.

⁸⁸ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 2, p 207.

⁸⁹ Al-e Ahmad repeatedly highlights the multilingual character of Iran and upbraids the regime of Reza Shah for its efforts to brutally impose homogeneity on the country. Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran* Vol. 2, pp 103–5. Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, p 69. Stephanie Cronin, *Soldiers, Shahs and Subalterns in Iran: Opposition, Protest and Revolt, 1921–1941*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, chapters 2 and 3. 'Re-Interpreting Modern Iran: Tribe and State in the Twentieth Century', *Iranian Studies* 42(3), 200). This issue is further complicated by the manner in which British colonialism often sought to manipulate and/or profit from ethnic and tribal strife in central and southwestern Iran, as well as from tensions with the Tehran government.

⁹⁰ Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity*, 2nd edn, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013, chapters 2 and 3. Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, 'Self-orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of the "Aryan" Discourse in Iran', *Iranian Studies* 44(4), 2011.

⁹¹ Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation*, p 56.

⁹² Al-e Ahmad mentions Gobineau, who served as a French diplomat in Iran between 1855 and 1858, by name. Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 1663.

⁹³ Vasant Kaiwar, 'The Aryan Model of History and the Oriental Renaissance: The Politics of Identity in an Age of Revolutions, Colonialism, and Nationalism', in *Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orient, Nation*, Vasant Kaiwar and Sucheta Mazumdar (eds), Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003. Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008, chapter 1. Afshin Marashi, *Exile and the Nation: The Parsi Community of India and the Making of Modern Iran*, Austin University of Texas Press 2020, Loc 164. Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 1, p 47.

⁹⁴ For more on 'the nationalist memory-narrative of invasions and revivals', see Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, 'Better a Warm Hug than a Cold Bath: Nationalist Memory and the Failures of Iranian Historiography', *Iranian Studies* 49, 2016.

⁹⁵ A large swathe of Reza Zia-Ebrahimi's monograph focuses on the reverse of this process – namely, how late-Qajar era intellectuals such as Fath 'Ali Akhundzadeh and Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani sought to reconceive the Iranian nation's origins and imaginative geography and thereby purge it of all 'Semitic' and unwanted foreign influences. *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, chapters 2 and 4. Al-e Ahmad's own rather critical review of Abdolhossein Zarrinkub's *Do qarn-e sokut* provides yet more evidence of his deep-seated scepticism about the primordialist 'nationalist memory narrative'. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, 'Dar bareh-ye "do qarn-e sokut"', *Elm va zendegi* 1(2), Bahman 1330 [January-February 1952]).

⁹⁶ Anidjar, *Semites*, p 28.

⁹⁷ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 2260; Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, p 183.

⁹⁸ *Occidentosis*, Loc 2254.

⁹⁹ Hall, *Essential Essays*, Vol. 1, Loc 4960.

¹⁰⁰ On self-Orientalisation, see Kaiwar, 'The Aryan Model of History and the Oriental Renaissance', Loc 331.

¹⁰¹ Stoler, *Duress*, Loc 7434. Also see Hezarkhani's introduction, where he links the rise of the European bourgeoisie to the growing pervasiveness of racist ideology, clearly echoing Césaire and Fanon. Diop et al., *Nezhad parasti va farhang*, p 6. Fanon, 'Racism and Culture', pp 37–8. The Pahlavi regime's turn to what Ali Mirsepassi has called 'state-sponsored Westoxification' discourse, despite its in many respects antithetical political orientation, would not predominate until the mid- to late 1970s, almost a decade and a half after Al-e Ahmad published *Gharbzadegi*. Ali Mirsepassi, *Iran's Quiet Revolution: The Downfall of the Pahlavi State*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019, chapter 2.

¹⁰² Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007, p xiii.

¹⁰³ Touraj Atabaki, 'From 'Amaleh (Labor) to Kargar (Worker): Recruitment, Work Discipline and Making of the Working Class in the Persian/Iranian Oil Industry,' *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 84, 2013.

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- ¹⁰⁴ 'Far from Home, But at Home: Indian Migrant Workers in the Iranian Oil Industry', *Studies in History* 31(1), 2015, p 104.
- ¹⁰⁵ L. P. Elwell-Sutton, *Persian Oil: A Study in Power Politics* London: Lawrence and Wishart 1955, chapter 8.
- ¹⁰⁶ Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, p 123. Hammed Shahidian, 'The Iranian Left and the "Woman Question" in the Revolution of 1978–79', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, 1994, p 231. Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, p 84.
- ¹⁰⁷ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 1159; Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, p 83.
- ¹⁰⁸ See Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi and Afshin Matin-asgari, 'Unveiling Ambiguities: Revisiting 1930s Iran's kashf-i hijab Campaign', in *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World: Gender, Modernism and the Politics of Dress*, Stephanie Cronin (ed.), London and New York: Routledge, 2014.
- ¹⁰⁹ Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, p 83.
- ¹¹⁰ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 1821; Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, p 142.
- ¹¹¹ Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 1773.
- ¹¹² Al-e Ahmad specifically mentions the Shah's plebiscite on the 'White Revolution' in later editions of *Gharbzadegi*. Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 1835.
- ¹¹³ Chapter 8 of the English translation. Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, Loc 1845. Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi*, p 144.
- ¹¹⁴ Throughout numerous points in his writings, Al-e Ahmad is unsparing in his criticism of religious dogmatism (*ta'sob*) and 'blind obedience'. Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 1, p 32.
- ¹¹⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, London and New York: Routledge 1991 [1964], Loc 679. In the Iranian context, Cyrus Schayegh has described this period with its combination of high modernism and expansion of mass consumerism as one indulging in 'the politics of material promise'. Cyrus Schayegh, 'Mass Consumerism, the Politics of Promise, and the Cold War in the Third World', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54(3), 2012, p 626.
- ¹¹⁶ These moments, which are regularly subverted elsewhere in his writing, are perhaps Al-e Ahmad at his most 'Heideggerian', though his lashing out against the world of mass consumption and social conformity shares just as much, if not more, in common with Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the 'culture industry' in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, pp 94–136.
- ¹¹⁷ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, Vol. 1, pp 25–6.
- ¹¹⁸ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran* Vol. 1, p 46.
- ¹¹⁹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity*, Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2012, p 2.