

# Orientalized from Within: Modernity and Modern Anti-Imperial Iranian Intellectual *Gharbzadegi* and the Roots of Mental Wretchedness

Khalil Mahmoodi (Corresponding author)

Department of English, Abadan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abadan, Iran

Tel: 60-19-327-1619 E-mail: Khalil.mahmoodi@gmail.com

Esmail Zeiny Jelodar

School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia

Received: December 28, 2010 Accepted: January 20, 2011 doi:10.5539/ach.v3n2p19

## Abstract

In the conditions in which dominant global powers is still trying to expand their cultural hegemony, neo-colonialism, over the countries which are trying to hold their independence, through the creation of native intellectuals who are mentally *Gharbzadeh*, Westoxificated. This study finds it crucial to take the issue a step further ahead to discuss how the ideas of Ale-e Ahamad's famous theory of *Gharbzadegi* is still applicable in our time and reveals its representations in Said's well-known concept of Orientalism. These imperial powers through the controlling of the world's educational system and thoughts and ultimately the mindsets of the native intellectuals of the downtrodden countries would have produced Intellectuals who are mentally filled with Westernized knowledge. These people who are mostly kind, good in nature, and placid seem to be dominated by a sense of instrumental rationality which makes them obediently adaptable to the dominant power. These people have narrated our history so far and we have had enough.

**Keywords:** *Gharbzadegi*, Orientalism, Westoxification, Intellectuals, Aryan

## 1. Introduction

Iran has long undergone a huge number of swings and variations in economic, political and religious terms. If one looks at *what* appears to be true of Iran at different dates one might have extremely different images. If one goes back to the region of Reza shah and later on his heir, his son, Mohammad Reza Shah 1941-1979, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, the dominant Western and in particular U.S. view was rapidly modernizing, secularizing society allied with U.S. values and policy objectives, except regarding autocracy (Keddie, 1983, p. 1). The gradual absolute uncontested of the West and Western Values was taken as a destructive threat on some Iranian modern Intellectuals, at the top Jalal Al-e Ahmad.

According to Al-e Ahmad, the cultural echo and political resonation of Orientalism are confused by the capitalist desire to conquer the so-called third world. He asserts it is the West that is controlling our politicians and our native but westerly educated intellectuals or praises and flatters them "so it is natural that our politicians should pay more attention to Reuters" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 86-7). Al-e Ahmad's analysis and scrutiny shows that he was completely aware of the ways that Western Imperialism colonize a nation, in this case Iran, without taking control over the government, economy, and social conditions through direct force. Instead, Iranian colonization by certain European powers and later on by the United States involved the acquaintance of the Iranian upper-classes and education with the West. Al-e Ahmad discusses the Westoxificated community and realises that the split in identity which resulted from this indirect control of social mentality and geopolitical conditions, arises from Occidentosis well before the person leaves his homeland. He says, "Contrary to the widespread view, the greater the army of returnees from Europe, the less their power to act and the greater the distress of the institutions that absorb their impact. Because there has never been a plan for where to send these youths and what speciality, what

trade, what technology they should study, they have gone each to some part of the world to study or experience something completely different from others' experiences" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 118).

In a lecture under the title of "Representation of the Intellectual," Edward Said talks about the meaning of the word "intellectual" and the very vital role that this figure carries out in chaotic situation. He characterizes an intellectual this way:

The intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug (Said, 1994, p. 11).

Actually what Said means by this word is not simply to refer to a group of educated people who solely articulate work of a sophisticated nature, but to identify the crucial position that they can advocate to themselves as a public awakening force in their respective society against the foreign, occupying and plundering forces. They are, in fact, the defender of the oppressed and the silenced with the aim of having them gain a voice of themselves to speak. According to Said the intellectuals perform their duties in terms of two universal principals: first, that everyone is allowed to enjoy a certain level of freedom and justice from the world's powers and that "deliberate and inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously" (Said, 1994, p.11-12). In Said's definition of the term, Michelle Arbus acclaims (2009, p. 2) "intellectuals living in nations in crisis must take on the role of the soldiers of the pen, the rhetoricians, and essentially, the spokesmen of the people."

There is no any other place like twentieth century Iran where we can implement Said's theoretical concept of the term Intellectual. Mehrzad Boroujerdi (1996, p. 21) says that all through the Middle East modern intellectuals "have undermined the inexorable monopoly and sacerdotal makeup of the traditional elites" and have seized the power which was traditionally considered as a part of the clerical property. The role that the intellectuals operate in the Middle East countries like Iran is more social and political because these intellectuals as the forerunner of the society are responsible to form political parties and participate in elections and win parliamentary seats and if they can achieve a position in the government to defend the rights of their people. The Iranian intellectuals have always been at the forefront line of the battlefield of counterfeit the political, cultural, and economical foreign aggression and they have shown their passion for change by questioning their country's past and present.

These contemporary Iranian Intellectuals, Boroujerdi (1996, p. 22) believes, have been both observers of change within the country, as well as participants in the cultural transformation of Iran. There is no doubt that they had an active contribution in the evolution of the Iranian identity which occurred throughout Iran in the twentieth century. Their interpretation of the Iranians' past and present history and their interpretation of Western culture have absolutely influenced the worldview of Iranians towards issues such as nationalism and modernity. Boroujerdi (1998, p. 21) continues to show how the intellectuals served as "crucial intermediaries and interpreters between their own culture and that of the West." Most of Iranian educated people spent a huge amount of their life and educational duration time in the West, largely at the post-secondary institutions in Europe. As a result, the majority of Iranian intellectuals were both greatly influenced and some of them were highly critical of western thought. It is using these ideas of the intellectuals as mediators between Iranian society and the west that we see a variety of important intellectuals emerge who can be characterized as Occidentalists. One of these Iranian intellectuals is Jalal Al-e Ahmad who wrote *Gharzadegi* and *Dar Khedmat va Khianat-e Rowshanfekran* (the Intellectuals: How They Serve or Betray Their Country) and many other stories.

## 2. Ale-Ahmad and Coinage of the Word

Jalal Al-e Ahmad came from a religious family with a long line of respected clerics who held extremely religious tradition (Hillmann, 1982, p. 14). At the age of twenty, he witnessed the seizure of power by Reza Shah and "his determination to give his Iranian subjects a European look" (Hillmann, 1982, p. 119). Al-e Ahmad's youth actually spent between two counterfeit forces, one the sovereignty of absolute religious worldview of family, especially his father and on the other hand the sweeping transformation and striding of a traditional society toward the West and Westernized mode of life. His family who were enjoying economical prosperity till 1932, following the revocation of the clerical class of their notorial function and elimination of their income by the government, Al-e Ahmad had to work after elementary school. Of course this did not prevent him to complete his high school education by attending night school (Tabrizi, 1978, p. 63). When he was twenty, he was sent to a religious school by his father to follow his paternal job but very soon he left there and attended Tehran

University and this was the first sign of open defiance of his father that left them apart from each other for almost the rest of their lives.

In 1943, he got acquainted with Ahmad Kasravi, the Iranian anti-clerical reformer who was acting as a midway for many young Iranians who were angry with the political weakness of Islam, but were not brave enough to join Tudeh Party (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 271-95). During the same year, in addition to writing some works on the reformation of Islamic ideas which were never published by him, he joined the Tudeh Party. Tudeh party was established in 1941 when the allied occupation forced Reza Shah to abdicate his throne for his son. Al-e Ahamad describes this historical era as a time deep humiliation. There was no “killing and destruction and bombs,” but there was “famine and typhus and chaos, and the painful presence of occupation forces (Hillmann, 1982, p. 14).

The Tudeh Party emerged as the most powerful organized political Left group in the modern history of Iran and began to inoculate its own ideological ideas on the young Iranians. This party offered an ideology of “universal struggles” which appealed to many Iranians. Al-e Ahamad quickly made a place among the members as talented individual and in 1945 he was sent on a mission to Abadan to organize the industrial workers and promote the socialist cause (Mirsepassi, 2003, p. 99). By 1946, he succeeded to become the member of the Party’s Tehran Provincial committee, and was assigned to supervise the party publication which provide him with a great opportunity to publish his own book, *Our suffering* which featured “social realist” stories portraying political battles of the time (Hillmann, 1982, p. 16).

In 1947, a crisis in Party leadership occurred over events developing in Azerbaijan and the support of the party of the “autonomous state” of Azerbaijan under protection of the Soviet Red Army. Maleki, an important member of the Party along with Al-e Ahmad and a small group of members split from the Party especially when Stalin began to demand oil concessions from the Iranian government. Immediately after the split, the group lead by Maleki established their party and since they failed to gain recognition from the Soviet Union, they arbitrarily cancelled their party rather than daring to oppose the Soviet Union. After this experience, Al-e Ahmad withdrew from organized politics for several years and endured “a period of silence” (Hillmann, 1982, p. 16). Later on, he wrote his most important book, *Occidentosis: A Plague From the West* in which he began to bring the West under harsh criticism.

Mirsepassi (2003, p. 101) believes that Al-e Ahmad’s critique of the “West” is inspired by three different influences:

- (1) The encounter of Iran with the West and the history of Western domination and humiliation of this country by British empire and by 1953 U.S.-led coup which overthrew by popularly elected prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mosadeq;
- (2) Al-e Ahmad’s personal involvement with radical and nationalist movements and ideas and his disillusionment with secular political culture. To him the Iranian secular intellectuals had no “roots” in the country’s culture and were inordinately influenced by ideas and politics that were foreign and even irrelevant to the problems of Iran;
- (3) finally, his own reading of European literature and critical intellectuals such as Camus, Ionesco, Sartre, Jung, Heidegger, Kafaka, Becket, and their critiques of Western nihilism.

As I will discuss later in detail the terminology of *Gharbzadegi* was first coined by the prominent Iranian Heideggerian philosopher Ahmad Fardid but it become a widely circulated discourse until the publication of Jalal Al-e Ahmad’s prophetic book of the same name that was published in 1962. Fardid was an oral scholar of controversial ideas and character who derived the term *Gharb-zadegi* from his interpretation of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s (1889-1976) critique of modern technology and the ways in which it was employed. In a book titled *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger envisioned that

The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already affected man in his essence. The rule of Enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth (Heidegger, 1977, p. 28).

The decadence of the world had already begun in the west, maintained Heidegger, and through Western technology and culture was fast spreading to the East. This was the idea that Fardid borrowed from Heidegger and coined from it his own notion of *Gharbzadegi* or West-stricken-ness. Western notions of liberalism, democracy, and technology were in opposition to Eastern notions of spirituality and unity of the realm of spirit with that of nature. The West had dominated nature and environment technologically. It was also in the process of dominating the East culturally, through the imposition of its understanding of technology, ethics, and humanity. It was from these ideas of Fardid that Al-e Ahmad built up his own notion of *Gharbzadegi* or Westoxification.

### 3. Westoxification

This one hundred page manifesto on the loss of Iranian identity to the powerful forces of western cultural intrusion quickly became the intellectual pivotal hinge around which a big number of young Iranian thinkers gathered. Ehsan Yarshater (Partovi, 1998, p. 73) has argued that, “No other essay in modern Persian history has had the same vogue or achieved comparable success. Its title has become a catch phrase, used to epitomize in four syllables the basic ill of modern Persian society.” Etymological analysis of the word, I think, will clarify the implications that it entails and bring the word into light more to see the political concepts within it.

The literal translation of *Gharbzadegi* is West-struckness. Yet, as a concept the term has consistently invoked a notion of western intrusion into Iranian Islamic life; a kind of illness and/or intoxication; a foreignness or strangeness that take over the cultural and political body. The term *Gharb* shares its etymological origins with the word *Gharib* which means stranger or person who is unknown. In turn, the Arabic usage, which is *Al-gharb*, translates into “western land” or “of the west” with a special emphasis on location and place. Thus from its linguistic origins, *Gharbzadegi* associates the West with both strangeness and the unknown, signaling simultaneously a discomfort with and awe of the West. In turn, the suffix *Zadegi* means to be struck with or struck-down as one is struck by a bat, car or lightning but as one is struck with illness, pathogen, or toxin. It has an internal quality to it and reinforces the notion of a breached separation between the known and the unknown, between sameness and change, between health and illness. At its most literal, and perhaps simplistic, translation, then, *Gharbzadegi* can be understood as being struck with a kind of western strangeness or alienation that is so foreign to oneself that one does not know what to do with it. In turn, this strangeness has an intoxication character. As Deylami (2008, p.16) asserts:

It embroils its subjects into identifying with it so that the enthralling effects are no longer products of the West but the products of ourselves and of our own desires. The strangeness of the Other becomes the strangeness of members of the body politic. It encodes subjects into believing that what the West has to offer is what we should desire. And in the end, it is the strangers among us that fuel *Westoxification*. It is the recognition of this characteristic of *Westoxification*---the recognition of the ability to entice people into an alien way of life that becomes their own--- that fosters a sometimes nativistic orientation towards the rest of the world.

What is seminal about Al-e Ahmad’s critique of the West (*Gharbzadegi*) is that we cannot take this book as just a simple polemic; on the contrary it must be taken as a complicated concept. In fact Al-e Ahmad’s deepest social, religious and political life experiences accumulated in *Occidentosis*. The term *Gharbzadegi*, originally coined by a contemporary Iranian philosopher, Ahmad Fardid (1909-1994), though, as I said earlier, literally means to be afflicted or struck by the west, it has been translated differently into English as “plagued by the West,” “Weststruckness,” “Westoxification,” “Westoxication,” “Occidentism” “Westamination,” and “Euromania” (Omid, 1984, p. 142-143 ). In any case, most connotations of *Gharbzadegi* include the image of a nation or a state as an organism as are the medical images of disease and plague. Although this term was more philosophical in root in Fardid’s thinking, for Al-e Ahmad the question was less philosophical and more political. He believed that Muslim countries must begin from the point where they lost their cultural integrity and self-confidence (Gheissari, 1998, p. 89). Al-e Ahmad believed that the intellectuals of the nineteenth century failed to hold their connection with the populace and mostly traditional and Islamic customs of the society and in his view this was the most terrified mistake that Iranian intelligentsia could ever make. He considers the constitutionalists as “having the fatal flaw of dependence on western sources, not only for the actual text of their Constitution, but also for their approach” (Gheissari, 1998, p. 89). He proposes a more indigenous movement of self-assertion to deal with all contemporary problems, from economic and political dependency to urban social structures breakdown.

Much of what Al-e Ahmad describes and analyzes is not, of course, unique to Iran and might be countered almost anywhere imperialism has imposed itself in Asia or Africa (although Al-e Ahmad rightly makes the case that the conflict between Islam and the West has unique aspects). Parts of *Gharbzadegi* are therefore reminiscent of other works of cultural self-analysis by the victims of imperialism: some of these *Gharbzadegi* also anticipate with remarkable precision points made by Frantz Fanon and Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (1978). The generally invisible but significant links between Orientalist scholarship and imperialist politics; the meaningless claim of Orientalism to constitute a specialization in itself, without further definition; and the Orientalist’s assumption that the Muslim East is at bottom static and passive material for analysis by superior minds. Common to *Gharbzadegi* and Orientalism is even a denunciation of the Encyclopaedia of Islam (Hosseini, 2009, p. 11-12).

*Gharbzadegi* is a term with so many functional performances. Firstly, it portrays the dilemma of a changing society by offering a critical and historical description of a century of the Iranian intellectuals and enlightenment. Secondly, by bringing the question of national and ethnic identity to the surface once again, *Gharbzadegi* proclaimed a nativistic alternative to the universalism of the Iranian left well-known in the past decade. Thirdly, by having prepared an enthusiastic admiration for a passing era and its customs, *Gharbzadegi* produced an anti-modernist, populist discourse very much skeptical of all that the west had to offer. Finally, it persuaded many Iranian intellectuals to reevaluate their passive and unreflective embrace of western ideas and culture, and asked for an awakening and resistance to the hegemony of an alien culture which increasingly dominated the intellectual, social, political and economic life of the Iranian society (Boroujerdi, 2003, p. 24).

Contrary to what Boroujerdi (2003) claims in the preceding statement denoting that *Gharbzadegi* is an anti-modernist and all that west can offer connecting to modernity, I believe that at first glance, one may think that Al-e Ahmad's critique of the influx of western mythology as a desire to eradicate and destroy all the western influences, yet we can see that he really wants us to educate ourselves in western thought in order to understand the mechanics order. Al-e Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi* should be viewed as a search for an authentic Iranian identity or what Boroujerdi (1996, p.14) calls "nativism". Nativism, in Boroujerdi terms is "a doctrine that calls for resurgence, reinstatement or continuance of native or indigenous cultural customs, beliefs, and values." Nativism is a discourse of authenticity, part of a fundamental desire to "reconfigure modernity" to think back to a better, more peaceful time, in order to critique and transform our sense of 'the modern' (Mirsepassi, 2003, p. 417). *Gharbzadegi* never tries to reject the idea of modernity entirely, just as it comes to this understanding that machine is something that cannot be bypassed. Instead, Al-e Ahmad confirms that "it is necessary to reconfigure tradition in such a way that it can redirect modernity down a more locally authentic road" (Mirsepassi, 2003, p. 421).

#### 4. Western Civilization and Traumatic Cultural Effects

Deylami (2008, p. 56-57) argues that Al-e Ahmad believes that the history of machine can no longer be confined just to the west. The machine order has transgressed the borders of West and East. The mechanization, then, must be understood by all, but more specifically those who consume its products. For the Islamic subject to be able to control or at least take part in his own destiny he must do so through a complete understanding of how the development of the Westernized machine has come about. He claims that it is only through the historical knowledge of mechanization, which has developed in the west, that we can make a new form of mechanization that is culturally appropriate to perso-Islamic life. By writing this book, it apparently seems that Al-e Ahmad indented to increase the sensitivity of the Iranian nation toward the problem of growing rootlessness in their country, which perceived as a "disease." I speak of "*Gharbzadegi*" as of tuberculosis.... I am speaking of a disease: an accident from without, spreading in an environment rendered susceptible to it. Let us seek a diagnosis for this complaint and its cause—and, if possible, its cure (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 27).

Thus, *Gharbzadegi*, the plague of the West, attacks Iranians from within, leaving them as mere shells of human beings. Al-e Ahmad compares *Gharbzadegi* to a disease that kills wheat from within, (Hanson, 1983, p. 9) to a disease with two faces: the West and the *Gharbzadeh* (the "Westoxicated" or "weststruck" native). At the general level, Al-e Ahmad contrasts the two worlds, as in Orientalism, West (the Occident) and East (the Orient): one developed, industrialized, rich processors of the raw materials, and exporters of finished products as well as of culture; the other underdeveloped, agricultural, poor, producers of raw materials, and consumers of Western products as well as culture. Once the West/East was a two-way street of cultural borrowing and exchange, but it is no longer. With the end of competition between cultures, the East with feelings of servitude, inferiority, backwardness, and obsolescence accepts the western criteria of doing things. The plague of the West is twofold: it has destructive economic impacts as well as "traumatic" cultural effects, and these are closely interrelated and bound up.

Having been influenced by Heidegger and Fardid, Al-e Ahmad believed that technology and mechanism are two fundamental essences of Western civilization. For him, the West was not just an imperialist entity, but also the heart of technological development. Al-e Ahmad asserted that technology did not prepare the conditions for an equal exchange among nations, since some were exporters of it while others were its importers. Similarly, machines were not just mere instruments, but rather the embodiment of a mode of thought (Boroujerdi, 2003, p. 25). Viewing machinery and technology as a "talisman" to the Westoxicated, he formulated his basic concern in the following terms:

We have been unable to preserve our own historio-cultural character in the face of the machine and its fateful onslaught. Rather, we have been routed. We have been unable to take a considered stand in the face

of this contemporary monster. So long as we do not comprehend the real essence, basis, and philosophy of Western civilization, only aping the West outwardly and formally (by consuming its machines), we shall be like the ass going about in a lion's skin (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 31).

As a result, the current battle facing Iran is how to preserve their historio-cultural character in the face of the machine and its fateful onslaught. Thus it apparently seems that Iranians have no any other alternatives but either to avoid machine which in that case Iranians remain "Occidentosis" or they have to embrace Machine which makes Iranians to become "mechanotic", and like the West will overcome and overpowered by the technology (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 31). The very fundamental issue that has occupied Al-e Ahmad's mind is to realise what are the symptoms of *Gharbzadegi* and what it does to the people of Iran. He argues that *Gharbzadegi* "the aggregate of events in the life, culture, civilization, and modes of thought of a people having no supporting tradition, no historical continuity, no gradient of transformation, but having only what the machine brings them" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 34).

He says, "The important point is that we the people of the developing nations are not fabricating the machines. But, owing to economic and political determinants and to the global confrontation of rich and poor, we have had to be gentle and tractable consumers for the West's industrial goods or at best contented assemblers at low wages of what comes from the West. And this has necessitated our conforming ourselves, our governments, our cultures, and our daily lives to the machine" (Al-e Ahmad 1984: 30). Al-e Ahmad's observation shows that he understands how Western imperialism can colonize a nation, in this case Iran, without taking control over the government, economy, and social conditions through *direct* force. Instead, Iranian colonization by certain western European powers and the United States involved the acquiescence of the Iranian upper-classes, but nonetheless resulted in the oppression and submission of the lower-classes (Tahani-Bidmeshki, 2008, p. 9).

Those readers who are familiar with the groundbreaking work of Edward Said will find resonances of *Occidentosis* in *Orientalism*, which was published in 1978. Al-e Ahmad traces the disease of "Occidentosis" to its bare roots. He (1984, p. 27) says:

Occidentosis has two poles or extremes—two ends of one continuum. 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. These raw materials are not only iron ore and oil, or gut, cotton, and gum 'tragacanth'; they are also myths, dogmas, music, and the higher worlds. The other pole is Asia and Africa, or the backward, developing or nonindustrial nations that have been made into consumers of Western goods. However, the raw materials for these goods come from the developing nations: oil from the shores of the Gulf, hemp and spices from India, jazz from Africa, silk and opium from China, anthropology from Oceania, and sociology from Africa. These last two come from Latin America as well: from the Aztec and Inca peoples, sacrificed by the onslaught of Christianity. Everything in the developing nations comes from somewhere else. And we—Iranians—fall into the category of the backward and developing nations: we have more points in common with them than points of difference.

Indeed, Said's observations and analysis regarding Orientalism have resonances with the critical work of two important Caribbean thinkers as well; namely, Aime Cesaire and Frantz Fanon. Al-e Ahmad was familiar with the work of Fanon as they were contemporaries and may have even known the same group of intellectuals gathered in Paris in the mid-1900s. This is all to suggest that the so-called Third World recognized and identified the incredibly devastating abuse of power in their nations and the result was not only several wars for independence (such as Cuba's in 1953, Algeria's from 1954-1962, and Ghana's in 1957), but a literary and ideological battle took place side-by-side with the physical confrontations between colonized and colonizer. As Hamid Algar (qtd in Tahani-Bidmeshki, 2008, p. 8) says, "Much of what Al-e Ahmad describes and analyzes is not, of course, unique to Iran and might be encountered almost anywhere imperialism has imposed itself in Asia or Africa." Al-e Ahmad struggles to point out how the westerners intends to transform Iranian cultural identity through primarily economic dependence on the West by bringing to power Western governments and even through oil companies and at large with the takeover of the culture (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 62). By controlling the culture, al-e Ahmad asserts, the westerners are able to transform the Iranians into *Gharzedeh* (Occidentotic) individuals who "are like strangers to ourselves, in our food and dress, our homes, our manners, our publications, and most dangerous, our culture" (Al-e Ahmad 1984: 57). Thus, he concludes that a *Gharbzadeh* is *Herheri Mazhab*, "someone without belief or conviction." Therefore, these people are similar more to empty shells with limited knowledge and lack any sort of "authenticity." The significant characteristic of a *Gharbzadeh*, Al-e Ahmad argues, is fear- "fear of tomorrow, fear of dismissal, fear of anonymity, fear of discovery that the warehouse he has weighing down his head and tries to foist off as a brain is empty" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 95).

Because of this fear, the *Gharbzadeh* does not believe in his/her own abilities as an Iranian and always ready to wear the new Western-made identities.

This type of individual is completely dependent on the knowledge and information of the Westerners and even prefers to read books written by the Orientalists rather than his own compatriots (Al-e Ahmad 1984: 98-99). The *Gharbzadeh* individual has often to travel to Europe to study, because he believes, there is nothing to be offered to him intellectually within his own country (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 120). Another quality of an Occidentotic society which is economically totally Western dependent is its emphasis on the emancipation of women, and yet, in the tradition of the West, has turned women into "an army of consumers of power and lipstick"- another form of Occidentosis (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 70). Finally, as Mottahedeh (1985, p. 296) says, Al-e Ahmad "regarded education as a primary cause for the dislocation Iranians have suffered from the original values of their culture."

Paralleling the economic dependency in Al-e Ahmad's formulation is Iran's cultural dependency on the West. Of all the cultural institutions, perhaps education had, in Al-e Ahmad's view, become most *Gharbzadeh* (Westoxificated). From the West came the invidious "diploma disease," i.e., emphasis on credentials and certificates for employment purposes rather than concern for true educational wisdom (Mottahedeh 1985: 296). Al-e Ahmad harshly attacks Iranian scholars and graduates of the literature, law, and theology faculties for their aping of western Orientalists, their retreat into the "trivia" of the past, and their lack of concern for Iran's real problems: the invasion by the West, plunder, and industry. He expects little of social relevance from this group: "From this ragtag group what good or blessing can be expected? Except greater submersion into *Gharbzadegi*" (Gheissari, 1998, p. 88).

Al-e Ahmad also confronts the problem of Iranian returnees from Europe and the United States. These returnees expect government positions by virtue of their western education. Slots are created, but more often than not they end up "governmental deadwood," for the returnees have become not only alienated from Iranian culture but also, wittingly or unwittingly, the agents of the West: "They are perfect examples of something severed from its roots, this the result of *Gharb-Zadegi*. They are perfect specimens of individuals with their feet in the air. These are the ones who execute the notions and views of foreign advisors and experts" (Hanson, 1983, P. 11). Al-e Ahmad is pessimistic about the value of the services to the homeland of this "horde of European educated Iranians" until fundamental changes are made in the environment (Mottahedeh, 1985, p. 297). Al-e Ahmad takes on these educated returnees as mentally captivated creatures. According to the theory of mental captivity, the captive mind is characterized by a way of thinking that is dominated by western thought. This mental captivity does not place in the appropriation of western thought per se but rather in the uncritical and imitative manner in which western knowledge and ideology is assimilated. An uncritical demonstration effect results in imitation at all levels of life and construction of colonial subjects.

This colonial subject is a "dominated" (Huddart, 2006, p. 1) figure "under control of colonial powers" (Huddart, 2006, p. 1); a colonial subject is one who is "subjugated" and "ruled" (Said, 1994, p. 11) within the context of colonization. These mentally captivated individuals "colonial subjects" are forced into the imitation of the colonizers and consequently inferior positions. In performing mimicry, the colonial subjects are imitating the colonizer by taking on "the colonizer's.... institutions.... values" (Ashcroft, 1989, p. 139) and representations, or in other words, they are taking on the "white mask." Indeed, mimicry situates colonial subjects in an inferior position in which they are "robbed of their worth" (Fanon, 1967, p. 98) and thus forced them into a sense of mental instability described as *double consciousness or double vision*, a way of mental perception of the world that is split between two antagonistic cultures: that of the colonizer and that of the indigenous community. This sense of being captured between two divergent cultures, of being perpetually oscillated between these two cultures, of belonging to neither rather than both, of finding oneself captivated in a psychological limbo which has its origin not solely in the individual psychological imbalance but also in anguish of the cultural displacement within which one lives. This feeling of displacement is referred by Homi Bhabha as unhomeliness.

Consequently Al-e Ahmad came to this understanding that intellectualism in Iran has also fallen prey to *Westoxification*. This is because Iranians have come to believe that those who are educated in the West are more capable and proficient than those who are educated in the local schools. Thus those who been educated in the west have taken the educational system in their hands and this way try to produce more and more Westoxicated subjects (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 71-72). In Al-e Ahmad's view all those Iranian intellectuals who were looking to the West as an alternative are the agents who are most responsible for creating an environment liable to be affected by the Western influences and domination. He viewed intellectuals as the promoters of *Gharbzadegi*. He believed that Iranian intellectuals are to a great extent responsible for most the anguish and misery that Iranians bear.

## 5. *Garbzadeh*, Westoxicated Creature

In Al-e Ahmad's usage of the term *Gharbzadegi* or Westoxification, as I have already discussed, signified a sense of (toxic) contamination as well as a sense of intoxication, where it function as sweet, fatal poison:

A western-stricken man who is a member of the ruling establishment of the country has no place to stand. He is like a dust particle floating in space, or a straw floating on water. He has severed his ties with the essence of society, culture, and custom. He is not a bond between antiquity and modernity. He is not a dividing line between the old and the new. He is something unrelated to the past and someone with no understanding of the future. He is not a point on a line, but an imaginary point on a plane or in space---just like that dust particle (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 57).

Al-e Ahmad's emphasis is on the Westoxicated creature's disinterest in his/her own culture, society, and community, such a creature is not entirely uprooted from his/her community, she/he is not separated from her/his means of communication and language. She/he is just infatuated and fascinated by an alien culture and society. The more pronounced this infatuation becomes, the more s/he becomes, in Al-e Ahmad's view, alienated from her/his own community. The Iran of Pahlavi regime serves a model for Al-e Ahmad based on which to conceptualize his notion of Westoxification. In this era, the West was looked upon by the ruling elite as superior civilization that had to be emulated. According to the ruling and westernized educated elites, the only way to overcome this backwardness was to emulate the West and become "Westernized" from the tip of the toe to the top of the head" (Taqizadeh 1920/1978). As far as the ruling elites were concerned, becoming westernized meant the blind mimicry of the West. His concentration on the individual tendencies toward the West is what he believes is reflected in superficialities such as mode of dress and behaviour:

The West-stricken man chooses the easiest path. He is ready to "seize the opportunity," and appreciate the moment....He never troubles himself about anything. He can easily shrug off any problem.... the West-stricken man has no personality. The west-stricken man never takes his eyes off the west (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 69-72).

It is this notion of mimicry that Al-e Ahmad cites as the main defining feature of a Westoxicated person. It, however, is not a Bhabhaian (1990, 1994) notion of mimicry with the potential for the rupture and disturbance of the colonized order. In Al-e Ahmad's interpretation, it is more like a Fanonian notion of "nauseating mimicry" (Fanon, 1974). It is the mimicry of a person blindly imitating whatever she/he thinks is confirmed and approved by the West. The other feature of such a Westoxicated creature is a type of romanticizing about their own race and their own past. Perhaps one of the major elements that can be taken as the underlying explanation for this admiration and emulation of the West was the notion that there was supposedly a common Aryan ancestry between Europe's white race and Persian race in Iran. Following in the footsteps of Europe's nineteenth and twentieth century nationalism theories, these Iranian elites including the literary figures, began consciously or unconsciously to advertise that Iran is the birthplace of the most pure blood race, the Aryan race. This supposedly superior race's offspring had taken giant strides toward industrial, technological, and economic progress in the West. And the yet, the presumed ancestral home of this supposedly superior race was in a disastrous status. It was a horribly backward society economically, socially, politically, and industrially.

According to these elites, the main reason for Iran's dismal state of backwardness was none other than the introduction of Islam to the country in seventh century, which had resulted, among other things, in more than 1,000 years of Arab and Turkic rule over the supposedly Aryan inhabitants of Iran. The Arabs and the Turks had kept the country away from the certain advancement and progress that were to be the destiny of Iran's of presumably superior Aryan race. The only way to shackle the nation and the birthplace of Aryans of all these miserable condition lie in the complete emulation of the West. This imitation of the western experiences, according to Al-e Ahmad gradually led into production of a generation of intellectuals who seems to hold the belief that simply receiving an education outside of Iran will push the country toward a better socio-economic conditions without considering that sole Western education and imitation will not result into a fundamental change in the Iranian community.

## 6. Discussion

Al-e Ahmad as a native Iranian intellectual tries to show that there is a great difference between tradition and modernity as the old and the new elements and it is impossible to reconcile them at once. Al-e Ahmad believes that the identity of a nation is based exactly on the traditions and the mechanical substitution of the tradition with modernism threatens the nation's identity. Al-e Ahmad believed that there is a strong relation between the education and the major roots of *Gharbzadgi* and the construction of *Garbzadeh* individuals. According to Al-Ahmad the final results of such an educational system is the production of a corpse of Iranian intellectuals



and graduates who are mentally orientalist and imitators of the western Orientalists. These westernised individuals do not care about the real problems of Iran, the invasion by the West, plunder, and inhumane flux of industry. He had strong belief that we should not expect any social relevance from this group.

As I tried to show, in Al-e Ahmad's view, modernity in the sense which the two Pahlavis were following leads into the creation of a big rupture between the returnees from the West and America and the rest of the society, because these returnees not only alienated from the Iranian culture but also, consciously or unconsciously have become native informants of the West whose responsibility were to pave the way for the easier plunder of the wealth of the country. These mimic people represented a perfect example of people who have tear off all of their connection with their motherland culture and if not, their connection has become so discolour that might be uprooted from their motherland with the slightest blow of wind from the West. They are always ready to bend over toward the West as the source of inspiration and utopia.

Of the other elements of the Westoxification was the construction of the sense of backwardness of Iran against the West. This persuades the Iranian intellectuals to look for a compensation to lessen the intensity of such humiliation. This resulted in the rendering a sense of disgust toward all the elements that were regarded as the major constituents of the Iran's Social, economical backwardness. This feeling brought about a nationalistic and racial sense of supremacy which was viewing its survival in its close proximity with the West. According to these elites, as I have already mentioned, the main reason for Iran's dismal state of backwardness was Arab and Turkic rule over the supposedly Aryan inhabitants of Iran and according to these pan-Aryanisms, the obligatory imposition of Islam to the country in seventh century, in more than 1,000 years ago caused the degradation of the historical glory of the Iranians. The Arabs and the Turks had kept the country away from the certain advancement and progress that were to be the destiny of Iran's of presumably superior Aryan race. The only way to shackle the nation and the birthplace of Aryans of all these miserable condition lie in the complete emulation of the West.

## 7. Conclusion

The destructive influence of westerners in the creation of mentally orientalist native intellectuals is the pivotal point around which the *Garbzadegi* hinges. *Gharbzadegi* can actually be taken as manifesto through which Al-e Ahmad struggles to reveals the ills of western imperialism on westerly native educated returnees who give up all their reliance on their own selves, their eyes and ears, and "to give over the authority of [their] own senses to any pen held by any wretch who has said or written a word as an Orientalist" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 98-9). There is no doubt that Jalal Al-e Ahmad's notion of *Garbzadegi* survives as a literary text which left a remarkable impact on a big amount of intellectuals who saw the damage and the harm of the colonial relations and subordinate attitudes and ultimately encouraged the suppressed to revolt against the westerly imported cultures which was popularised by the dominant despotic governments and persuade the downtrodden to return to their cultural heritage for salvation from the exploitive desire of the capitalist-machine.

## References

- Abrahamian, E. (1982). *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ahmad, J. Al-e. (1984). *Occidentosis: A Plague From the West*, (R. Campbell, Trans.). Berkeley: Mizan Press.
- Arbus, M. (2009). *Writing the West: Modern Iranian Intellectuals and the Occidental Discourse*. Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., and Tiffin, H. (1989). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. New York: Routledge.
- Boroujerdi, M. (1998). Contesting Nationalist Constructions of Iranian Identity. *Critical studies of the Middle East*, 26(12).
- Boroujerdi, M. (1996). *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph*. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Boroujerdi, M. (Ed.). (2003). *The Ambivalent Modernity of Iranian Intellectuals*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.
- Deylami, S. S. (2008). *Strangers among Us: The critique of Westoxification in Perso-Islamic Political Thought*.
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black Skin White Mask*. New York: Grove Press.
- Fanon, F. (1974). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Gheissari, A. (1998). *Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century*. Austin: University of Texas.

- Hanson, B. (1983). The 'Westoxication' of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, Al-e Ahmad, and Shariati. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 1(15).
- Heidegger, M. (1977). *The Question concerning Technology* (William Lovit, Trans.). New York: Harper & Row Publisher.
- Hillmann, M. (1982). *Iranian Society: An Anthology of Writings by Jalal Al-e Ahmad*. In. Costa Mesa: CA: Mazda Publishers.
- Hosseini, A. (2009). *Jalal Al-e Ahmad: Wayfaring Towards Independence* [Electronic Version]. Echo. [Online] Available: [www.itf.org.ir/MagPdfFiles](http://www.itf.org.ir/MagPdfFiles) (10/11/2010).
- Huddart, D. (2006). *Homi Bhabha*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Keddie, N. (1983). *Roots of Revolution*. Binghamton, New York: The Ballou Press.
- Mirsepasi, A. (2003). *Intellectual Discourse and politics of modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mottahedeh, R. (1985). *The Mantel of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Omid, A. H. B. (1984). *Az Mast ke bar Mast*. Tehran: Donya-ye Ketab.
- Partovi, P. (1998). Authorial Intention and Illocutionary force in Jalal Al-I Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi*. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and Middle East*, 18(2).
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Routledge.
- Said, E. (1994). *Representations of Intellectuals*. London: Chatoo & Windus.
- Tabrizi, H. (1978). *Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Mardi dar Kas-a-Kash-e Tarikh-e Moaser*. Tabriz.
- Tahani-Bidmeshki, M. (2008). *Occidentosis: A Plague From The West (1958) Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969)* (Electronic Version). [Online] Available: [www.sarnevash.com](http://www.sarnevash.com)
- Taqizadeh, S. H. (1978). *Maqalat-e Taqizadeh (The Essays of Taqizadeh)*. Tehran: Entesharat-e Shokufan.