THE IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF
THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IN IRAN

THEOLOGY *of* DISCONTENT

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WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

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In Memoriam
Ali Alemohammad (1922–1991)
more than a father

CHAPTER 1

Jalal Al-e Ahmad: The Dawn of "the Islamic Ideology"

"You seem to think that I want to convert you to a doctrine," George Sand conjectured once in a letter to Gustave Flaubert.[1] "Not at all, I don't think of such a thing. Everyone sets off from a point of view, the free choice of which I respect. In a few words, I can give a resume of mine, not to place oneself behind an opaque glass through which one can see only the reflection of one's own nose. To see as far as possible the good, the bad, about, around, yonder, everywhere; to perceive the continual gravitation of all tangible and intangible things towards the necessity of the decent, the good, the true, the beautiful."[2] Beyond the realm of individual conversions, doctrines of social and revolutionary concerns seek to operate at a mass politicized level. Individual agencies can merely mediate otherwise saturated revolutionary messages. "A point of view," under such circumstances of enticed collective treaty, sheds all pretensions of humility and relativism aside and calls all the gods of truth and certitude to its side. But even under these circumstances, it takes a certain bottomless pit of energy to reach for a spectacular visionary height from which to gaze at "the good, the bad, about, around, yonder, everywhere." There the individual stands, a testimony to his time perhaps, not necessarily the voice and visage of what is best or what is most enduring in the society that chooses to celebrate him for the moment. But there is something fundamentally typical about the man, his voice, and his vision that corresponds perfectly to what makes his moral and political community tick. "The necessity of the decent, the good, the true, the beautiful" is the underlying conviction that drives the man. The conviction may be false, its assumption pretentious. It may merely reflect the glorified image of a dehumanized society projected onto an individual, upon an ideal, towards a utopian ideology, invested in a denial. Yet it defines the ideologue thus conceived; and, in

doing so, it reflects back on the society that celebrates him and its collective self-consciousness. Such individuals, in dialogue with their history, stand at the threshold of their national destiny. There is no cause and effect here, no individual vs. material (economic) forces. Here the active imagination of a living collectivity, the excited shared memory of a nation, reaches for ideals it can hardly define, objectives it can barely articulate. Denial is the cost of all discontent.

To Live by the Pen

"No!" objects Mirza Asadollah, a conscious self-projection of Jalal Al-e Ahmad in his most successful fiction, *By the Pen,*

> If for all the blessings that I have wasted I am able to give something in return, I will have given meaning to my life. My children are the natural continuation of my life. . . . They are not the human meaning of my life. . . . Anyone else could have been . . . the father of these or any other children. But no one else can . . . be Mirza Asadollah the Scribe, who writes letters at the door of the mosque. I am the only one who has carried this load. I cannot leave it halfway down the road and run away. I must carry it to the end.[3]

Although Al-e Ahmad himself could not share the dismissive vanity of his created Mirza Asadollah in having natural children, or perhaps because he was denied the ability to father his own natural continuity, he always felt obligated to do something in return for the abundance of blessings that mere living entails. Al-e Ahmad was biologically incapable of having a child. In his vociferous writings and activities, he sublimated a biological inability into a tireless social force. Driving that force towards specific political objectives was an equally sublimated sense of "obligation."

This sense of obligation animated every aspect of Al-e Ahmad's relentless, tireless, and restless life. Like Mirza Asadollah the Scribe, Al-e Ahmad attended life with a commanding conviction that as he had theoretically, if not biologically, conceived himself, he had to register himself ideologically in the most active self-consciousness of his contemporaries. The load Al-e Ahmad felt compelled to carry—the burden of responsibility, the certitude of a seer—moved him from politics to literature to existentialism to the vast emptiness of Iranian deserts, and then around the world, to Europe, the United States, the Soviet Union, Israel, and, most important perhaps, to Mecca. Then he returned, even more convinced of the heavy load of his responsibility, the feelings and agonies of a man who only halfheartedly thought he had seen the light but fullheartedly tried to convince masses of his fellow countrymen of the utopia at their disposal.

His success or failure, fame or notoriety, cannot and should not be measured in the veracity or falsehood of his political message. Men of

conviction like Al-e Ahmad speak with their sentiments not their minds, act with their courage not their prudence, write with their anxieties not their deliberations, and lead with their hopes not their strategies. The place their historical exegencies afford them can be assayed only in terms of the aspirations they invoke, the convictions they personify, the maledictions they ideologize, and ultimately the public and private miseries they so deeply resent. The "No" they ever so loudly deliver screams of the insidious tyranny that has robbed them of their public and private dignity. Speaking for generations of betrayed hopes and against the overwhelming indignities of his own time, Al-e Ahmad simply said "No."

Ten Years Before the Revolution

Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–1969) died exactly ten years before the Islamic Revolution of 1979. If someone would have told him in 1969 that precisely a decade later a vast revolutionary movement would mobilize the Iranians and lead to the downfall of the Pahlavi monarchy and the establishment of a Republic, either he would have refused to believe this sequence of events or else, if he were somehow convinced of its actual future occurrence, he would have guessed its precise ideological composition with almost 100 percent accuracy. There is a claim worth examining further.

There is enough evidence in Al-e Ahmad's writings to show that he would have anticipated the ideological disposition of any serious revolutionary movement in Iran to be religious in nature. It is precisely an examination of this "evidence" that is the subject of this chapter. This examination will demonstrate that Al-e Ahmad's cumulative writings during the three decades that led to the Revolution were more instrumental than those of any other single individual in pointing elements of a mobilizing ideological language towards a revolutionary discourse, indispensable in the making of the Islamic Revolution.

Al-e Ahmad's writings thus constitute the first crucial link in a chain of cumulative ideological statements that collectively constitute what was later to be called "the Islamic Ideology." The writings of Ali Shari'ati, Morteza Motahhari, and others, as we shall examine them later, were, of course, central in the constitution of "the Islamic Ideology." But the collective writings of Al-e Ahmad, as well as the course of his political activities, were equally indispensable in making "the Islamic Ideology" the single most important mobilizing force prior to the Revolution. Although Al-e Ahmad never used this term in so many words, more than anyone else he prepared the necessary groundwork for its neologistic coinage and subsequent currency.

The origin and composition of Al-e Ahmad's contribution to the making of "the Islamic Ideology" and, in turn, to that of the Islamic Revolution

can be traced back to his experience with the Tudeh Party, the most pervasive political event of Al-e Ahmad's generation. But his attraction to the Tudeh Party must be prefaced with a brief overview of his early life.

Early Life

Al-e Ahmad was born in 1923 to a respectable religious family. The effects of his religious upbringing, at a time when the society at large was experiencing a vast and pervasive period of secularization, would remain with Al-e Ahmad for the rest of his life.[4]

The 1920s was a decade of some fundamental changes in Iran, as Reza Shah established his autocratic rule at the expense of both the remnants of the defunct Qajar aristocracy and the relatively deactivated and subdued clerics. While the old Qajar aristocrats, stripped of their claims to nobility, competed for the lucrative bureaucratic posts in the new regime, a conservative and apolitical generation of clerics, headed by the distinguished resuscitator of the Qom scholastic seminary, Ayatollah Ha'eri, was putting to rest the tumultuous memories of the Constitutional period.[5]

Although the rule of Reza Shah in the 1920s increasingly curtailed the public and political domains of the Shi'i clerics, the latter continued to receive communal respect in the immediate context of their lives. Al-e Ahmad's grandfather, Sayyid Taqi Taleqani, was a locally prominent and respected cleric who led the public prayer at his local mosque in Tehran. Deeply revered and honored, Sayyid Taqi Taleqani would attract crowds of well-wishers who would seek to kiss his hands and pay their respects when they spotted him on his way to the mosque.[6] Al-e Ahmad's father, Ahmad, the first son of Sayyid Taqi Taleqani, was an equally respected cleric who followed in his father's footsteps in religious piety and practice.

Much of Al-e Ahmad's childhood in the 1920s and his adolescence in the 1930s was spent in the shadow of his religious family. His father obviously wore the religious habit. So did Jalal Al-e Ahmad himself, up to and including his final high school years in the early 1940s. Wearing the religious habit in those days was more than merely an identification with Islam and the clerical order. It had been turned into a political statement. When, in 1928, Reza Shah restricted the use of the clerical habit, in the hope of substituting the tie and chapeau for the turban and aba, the measure caused much resentment in many religious circles. The young turbaned and robed Al-e Ahmad must have felt particularly antagonized by Reza Shah's determination to give his Iranian subjects a European look. The effects of these antagonisms would later surface in Al-e Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi (Westoxication)*, his most powerful indictment of blind "Westernization." At the time, however, wearing of the religious habit was

a particularly isolating factor, going against, as it were, the tide of the time.[7]

Two Mutually Exclusive Father Figures

Al-e Ahmad grew up with an exacting and demanding father whose religiosity had been aggravated by a society assuming an increasingly secular bend and by an absolutist tyrant determined to hasten the implementation of that secularism. In 1929 Reza Shah banned Muharram ceremonies, the annual commemoration of the death of al-Husayn, the third Shi'i Imam, in 628 C.E. Such policies greatly dismayed Al-e Ahmad's father. The six-year-old Al-e Ahmad's experience of the annual ceremony was thus partially curtailed by the abrupt cessation. In 1936 Reza Shah ordered the unveiling of Iranian women. This would greatly aggravate Al-e Ahmad's father. The lives of the young Al-e Ahmad's female relatives became much more restricted. Al-e Ahmad, in particular, felt the moral pressure of a father whose frustrations with society at large spelled ethical absolutism for his own household. Under the imposing shadow of two mutually exclusive father figures—one his own, the other Reza Shah—Al-e Ahmad was raised with paradoxical demands upon his character. These dual demands, aggravated in their intensity by being mutually exclusive and yet juxtaposed, pulled the young Al-e Ahmad in two diametrically opposed directions: one, the faith and practices of his biological father and ancestry, representing the old Persia; the other, the ideology and policies of an autocratic patriarch, forging the new Iran. Although later in life Al-e Ahmad would adopt a series of ideological stands fundamentally opposed to those of Reza Shah and his successor, Mohammad Reza Shah, the innate opposition between the authority of his own father, representing the old Shi'i Persia, and the father figure of a changing world, promising a new secular Iran, would remain with him permanently. *Westoxication,* his most celebrated contribution to modern Iranian political culture, is a crucial battlefield for this lifelong paradox.[8]

The 1940s was a decade of formidable turmoil and challenge for Iran in general and for the young Jalal Al-e Ahmad in particular. In 1941, two years into World War II, Iran was occupied by the Allied Forces. Reza Shah's flirtations with Hitler had made the Allied Forces particularly uneasy about the southern borders of the Soviet Union. Following the occupation, the Allied Forces forced Reza Shah to abdicate in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, and to retire to South Africa. In the confusion and turmoil of these drastic events, Iranian political life received a highly charged impetus. In 1941, the Tudeh Party, the chief institutional form of a socialist party in Iran and the most significant political movement of the period, was

founded, ostensibly to promote the cause of socialism through blatant advocacy of the Soviet interest.

Those were years of great changes, grand ideals, and minute atrocities. A dictatorial monarch had left, a young and inexperienced king had been nominally put on the peacock throne, and a massive political party was organized with the grandiloquent claim of leading the deprived Iranian masses into the paradise of the socialist camp. Hopes were high, fears abundant, tantalizing expectations prevalent. Hopes for an unarticulated democratic future, perceived as the mother of all progress, and fears from an equally unarticulated past, conceived as the cause of all malice, drove the young and restless generation of the 1940s. Among the young and restless, determined in will and yet confused in ideals, was Jalal Al-e Ahmad.

In the early years of the 1940s, Al-e Ahmad entered Dar al-Fonun, a prestigious high school that was the distant memory—yet still a true heir—of the Polytechnique College that Amir Kabir, the celebrated Qajar Prime Minister, had established in 1851 on the model of the École Polytechnique of Paris.

At that time, students concentrated on a particular subject in their senior high school years: natural sciences, mathematics or literature. Literature was Al-e Ahmad's choice. Although his high school friends do not remember him as a particularly good writer,[9] his choice of major foretold his later literary interests and achievements. Both natural sciences and mathematics were areas of concentration with the longest positivistic distance from Al-e Ahmad's notions of doctrinal religiosity. Concentrations in such areas would have committed the sophomore Al-e Ahmad to a frame of modern and positivistic conceptual references beyond his accustomed piety. Literature, on the other hand, was an area with a curriculum that included a healthy dose of Iranian history, prose and poetry, philosophy and logic—all the necessary ingredients for keeping Al-e Ahmad, albeit with a modern twist, tuned to his father's inherited discourse.

Al-e Ahmad's classmates remember him strolling through the school yard with his long aba, distributing religious pamphlets, attending various meetings of the Muslim Students Association, and actively propagating up-to-date Islamic causes.[10] Thus, well into his last years in high school, he could have expected to pursue a life—though not entirely of a traditional and scholastic nature—of piety, subservient to received notions of religious propriety, and congenial to his father's self-perception. That self-perception was increasingly antagonized by drastic secular changes in the larger society of Al-e Ahmad's youth.

Between Tehran and Najaf

The indications of Al-e Ahmad's break with his father and, through him, with his own received Islamic identity, became more evident when he left Iran for Najaf, Iraq, in 1943. He did not stay in Najaf for more than a few months and soon returned to Iran. Had he decided to follow his father's wishes and remain in Najaf, he would have been trained at the juridical capital of the Shi'i world and could have returned to Iran a full-fledged cleric. But Al-e Ahmad returned to Iran to finish high school and receive his diploma from Dar al-Fonun. If we remember that Dar al-Fonun was established in 1851, to the great dismay of some clerics, Al-e Ahmad's decision in 1943 to receive his high school diploma from a secular school in Tehran rather than continue his studies as a seminarian in Najaf becomes quite symbolic and gives a crucial hint as to his future ideological disposition: a disposition more in tune with Al-e Ahmad's self-created notion of cultural identity than with his active perceptions of his father's expectations.

A Side Step to Kasravi

The year 1943 turned out to be crucial in the life of the now twenty-year-old Al-e Ahmad. He was in his senior year at Dar al-Fonun when he was attracted to the ideas of Sayyid Ahmad Kasravi (d. 1946), who was to have an immediate and transitory impact on Al-e Ahmad, but perhaps with some crucial, lasting effects.

Sayyid Ahmad Kasravi, a social reformist with strong anticlerical views, was a self-styled historian and linguist. His book on the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906–1911 was the first major step towards collecting crucial primary data and providing a social reformist reading of them. Kasravi became increasingly attracted to social issues and felt compelled to propagate his literalist opinions about everything—from linguistics to poetry to theology. Because of his radical positivism, which included book-burning rituals, he attracted a group of followers who wished to reform the Iranian society on a perceived rational model. Within his extremely utilitarian frame of reference, Kasravi severely criticized all forms of popular piety. This put him in direct opposition to petit-clericals, religious functionaries, and radical Muslim activists. His tangles with the petit-clerics inevitably led to his assuming a flat literalism in his political discourse. The result was bizarre ideological statements, denouncing Hafez's poetry as much as Shi'i doctrinal principles, of both of which he had a crude and rather artificial understanding. Kasravi finally paid for his radical anticlericalism with his life. He was assassinated in 1946, at the doorstep of the Ministry of Justice in Tehran. His assassin, who escaped punishment, was Sayyid Hossein

Imami Kashani, a member of the radical "Devotees of Islam" organization *(Fada'ian-e Islam)*.[11]

Kasravi's ideas represent a crucial phase in the history of modern Iranian political discourse. His writings constitute a necessary and perhaps inevitable internal phase in the aborted metamorphosis of Iranian political culture from an innately religious to a patently secular frame of reference. His audience in the 1930s and 1940s consisted of semiliberated Muslim youths who were disillusioned with what they perceived to be the political ineptitude of their faith, but not radically enough to go to the other extreme and join the Tudeh Party. Many former members of the Tudeh Party report that Kasravi's group was always considered a stepping stone towards full membership in their Party.[12] The process seems quite natural. Kasravi stripped his followers of their last vestiges of common religiosity but failed to give them a strong enough ideological conviction in a promised utopia. That was offered by the Tudeh Party, to which many former Kasravites turned.

The son of a turbaned cleric, Al-e Ahmad's attraction to Ahmad Kasravi must have been quite turbulent to him and disquieting to his father. It indicates signs of a break, not only with his father, who must have considered Kasravi an infidel, but, perhaps more important, with his own religious identity. This was a significant but relatively minor step for Al-e Ahmad compared to his next move—becoming a full-fledged member of the Tudeh Party. But the anxieties and the courage required for the son of a cleric to join the Kasravi camp should never be underestimated. This particular characteristic of going against his peer pressure and making a decision that would antagonize his immediate cohorts would remain a permanent trait of Al-e Ahmad's character. His attraction to Kasravi also indicates an enlargement of Al-e Ahmad's political concerns from merely local and communal to national, regional, and, given Kasravi's quasi-European discourse, even global. Kasravi represented a new breed of Iranian intelligentsia who, although their roots were in a traditional scholastic system, sought to appropriate the European positivistic legacy without necessarily subscribing to a radical political ideology. Al-e Ahmad's participation in this experience would engross his political perception of the world and, along with it, his horizons and definitions of political activity.

Joining the Tudeh Party

Jalal Al-e Ahmad joined the Tudeh Party in 1943, only one year after he had been to Najaf, which could have led him to become a Shi'i cleric. The road from Najaf to Moscow, however, was paved by Ahmad Kasravi in Tehran.

The Tudeh Party was established in 1941 in the wake of the Allied occupation of Iran and the subsequent abdication of Reza Shah. The origin of the Iranian Communist movements dates back to the early twentieth century when, following the ideological acquaintance of Iranian intellectuals with socialism, the stage was set for active political involvement.[13] Iranian intellectuals became acquainted with Marxist ideas in Baku and Constantinople, among other major urban centers in the area, in the late nineteenth century.[14] Communist activities in the 1910s led to the establishment of the Adalat (Justice) Committee in 1916 as the first institutional form of Communism. In June 1920, the seed of the Adalat Committee flowered into the Persian Communist Party, with active engagement in and support from the young Soviet Union. As the Persian Communist Party continued its activities well into the Reza Shah's period, the circle of Taqi Erani commenced its activities in Europe in 1933, moved to Iran in 1935, and was brought to closure in April 1937 when Erani and fifty-two other members of his circle were arrested by the Reza Shah's police. Erani died in the prison hospital on 4 February 1940. More than a year later, following the Allied occupation of Iran and with the Red Army in the north, the Tudeh Party was founded in October 1941 by some members of "the 53" group of the Erani circle in conjunction with some "older Communists" they had met in Reza Shah's prison.[15]

Al-e Ahmad advanced very quickly within the Tudeh leadership. Only two years after joining the Party, he was sent to Abadan in 1945 to promote the cause of socialism and organize the workers in that crucial industrial city. The year 1945 was one of great hopes for and radical expectations from the Tudeh Party. The young and energetic party promised to deliver Iranian masses, as they said, from their avid miseries and, at the same time, gave the Iranian urban intellectuals a share of the glory for participating in the universal struggle on the side of the oppressed. This "universal struggle," however, carried within its glory some troubling seeds of discontent. Where would universal concerns end and national interests begin? How is one to see one's immediate and unique national identity as opposed to a remote and vague universal brotherhood of humankind under the banner of socialism? "The Pishehvari incident" would induce such issues to come to the surface.

Assuming a more radical foreign policy towards the Iranian government, the Soviet Union actively supported Sayyid Ja'far Pishehvari, a true Communist believer from the province of Azarbaijan, and his aspiration to establish a Soviet satellite state in his home province.[16] In September 1945, Pishehvari, supported by the Tudeh provincial committee in Azarbaijan, effectively called for insurrection and the establishment of an "autonomous state." By November, the movement, under the protection of the Red Army, had begun to capture the army garrisons. In early December the Pishehvari Democratic Party held elections for the autonomous Republic

and was overwhelmingly elected to the newly formed Azarbaijan parliament. The Tudeh Party in Tehran officially and unconditionally supported the insurrection. "With the successful seizure of power in Azarbaijan," it has been documented, "this group [the members of the Tudeh Party] in parliament became the official voice of the insurrection in the capital, and it used every occasion to advance its cause."[17] Despite these official statements, however, seeds of disapproval were being sown within the leading ranks of the Tudeh Party.

Leaving the Tudeh Party

Al-e Ahmad's famous break, the *enshe'ab*, with the Tudeh Party occurred in 1948. This break was led by Khalil Maleki, ostensibly because of the ill-fated attempt, led by Pishehvari's Democratic Party, to establish a Soviet satellite state in the Iranian Azarbaijan province. This break, however, could have been caused by other forces internal to the composition of the Tudeh leadership.[18] Prior to their break, Al-e Ahmad and Eshaq Eprim jointly wrote *Hezb-e Tudeh bar Sar-e Do Rah (The Tudeh Party at a Crossroads)*, in which they refleced on the inner tensions within the Party.

Al-e Ahmad's relationship with Khalil Maleki was always ambivalent. Although he followed Maleki in his break with the Tudeh Party, Al-e Ahmad did not like the idea of playing second fiddle to Maleki. He made an ex post facto reference to this fact in a comment about Ebrahim Golestan who, according to Al-e Ahmad, agreed with the secessionists but refused to join them, resigning from the Tudeh Party separately and on his own terms:

> Our first serious experience . . . with Golestan was in the course of [our] secession episode. He was with us. But he did not come along with us. When we seceded, he did too, but alone, and wrote a letter of resignation to the party, having maintained in it that "since my closest friends have left, I do not belong here anymore." He did confess that it was on the basis of our support that he had resigned from the party. But he was too selfish to come out among a group and remain anonymous. Because Khalil Maleki was our leader, and inevitably he would, like me, remain second or third rate.[19]

In another related comment to a fellow party member,[20] Al-e Ahmad had emphasized that he did not leave the Tudeh Party because of Maleki and that he did not consider himself any less significant than the maverick socialist. There are indications, however, that Al-e Ahmad may have reached an independent decision to leave the Tudeh Party after the episode of the oil crisis between Iran and the Soviet Union.

While the Soviet army was still in Iran, as part of the Allied Forces during World War II, Stalin tried to extract an oil concession from the

Iranian government. The demonstrations of the Tudeh Party on behalf of this concession were conducted literally under the military protection of the Red Army. Al-e Ahmad felt an accute feeling of shame for having organized demonstrations against his own government to give an oil concession to a foreign state, under the military protection of that state.[21]

Following the Pishehvari incident and the oil crisis, Khalil Maleki actively participated in the movement to break with the Tudeh Party, ostensibly because of these and other such extremes of pro-Soviet policies of the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party. However, his dissatisfaction with the party may also have had something to do with his initial ambition within the Tudeh Party hierarchy. When the Azarbaijan incident occurred in 1946, many members of the Party who, for a variety of reasons, were having second thoughts about their membership may have used the occasion as an excuse to leave. But even more essentially, it is important to distinguish between the Central Committee and the rank and file of the Tudeh organization, particularly in matters related to blind obedience to Soviet policies. From very early on, there were younger members of the Party who felt ill at ease in conforming to the pro-Soviet attitudes slavishly adopted by the Central Committee.

The possible ad hominem considerations of Maleki's personal ambitions, however, should not detract from genuine political and tactical objections to, as well as a general feeling of disillusion with, the whole Tudeh enterprise. Quite apart from questions of personal ambitions, Khalil Maleki demonstrated some genuine misapprehensions about the Party and its acting as a fifth column for the Soviet interests in Iran. As Al-e Ahmad once observed, Maleki objected to Sovietism—or, even worse, Stalinism—much sooner than Tito did.[22]

Politics After the Tudeh Party

Immediately after breaking with the Tudeh Party in 1948, the Maleki group, Al-e Ahmad among them, sought to organize the Socialist Tudeh League of Iran and tried to receive recognition from the Soviets. Three years later, in 1951, Al-e Ahmad joined Khalil Maleki and Mozaffar Baqa'i in organizing the Toilers Party of the Iranian Nation. Then, in 1952, he once again joined Khalil Maleki in founding the Third Force. During the Mosaddeq era, which led to the CIA coup d'état of 1953, Al-e Ahmad advocated the liberal-democratic programs of the Iranian prime minister.

Following his break with the Tudeh Party, Al-e Ahmad did not remain loyal to or steadfast with any particular political organization. Once the Tudeh Party, with all its might and promises, had failed his ideals—and perhaps ambitions—Al-e Ahmad could not remain confined within any less grandiose political apparatus. He joined Khalil Maleki and others in estab-

lishing these various political organizations chiefly to express his independence from the Tudeh Party. But very soon the whole idea of organized political action and, perhaps more important, the very secular and imported ideological foundations of these movements seem to have lost their interest or relevance for Al-e Ahmad. He was all prepared now for a new phase in his active and diversified career.

Turning to Literature

Before we focus our attention on some of Al-e Ahmad's crucial texts, instrumental in making "the Islamic Ideology" possible, we need a general grasp of the range of his extrapolitical activities, from literature to ethnographics, etc.

Al-e Ahmad's unique position among the major ideologues of the Islamic Revolution in Iran was writing not only critical social essays but also works of fiction. In a general assessment of his ideas, his works of fiction are at least as important as his essays. In formulating his contribution to the making of "the Islamic Ideology" and Revolution, both his literary and nonliterary output must be considered.

In 1945 Al-e Ahmad inaugurated a long and sustained contribution to the making of the modern Persian literature by publishing a short story, "Ziarat" (Pilgrimage), in *Sokhan* magazine, one of the leading literary journals of the time, which paid some attention to aspects of the modernist movements in Persian literature.[23] Al-e Ahmad had already made the acquaintance of Sadeq Hedayat, the founder of the modern Persian fiction, in 1945, and, although his creative imagination must have been active much earlier, the occasion further encouraged his literary aspirations. Al-e Ahmad's first collection of short stories, *Did va Bazdid* (Visit), appeared that same year.

Throughout his active intellectual life, Al-e Ahmad was at the very center of the most innovative movements in modernist Persian literature. Because of the political and engagé nature of this literature, Al-e Ahmad's acquaintance with and active participation in it made him particularly aware of the political pulse and posture of his time—a privilege other contributors to "the Islamic Ideology," perhaps with the exception of Ali Shari'ati, lacked.

In 1946 Al-e Ahmad made the acquaintance of Nima Yushij, the founding father of modernist Persian poetry. His dual acquaintance with Sadeq Hedayat and Nima Yushij put Al-e Ahmad in immediate contact with the two towering figures of modernist Persian literature. His friendship with Nima Yushij lasted a lifetime. In 1953, Al-e Ahmad and his wife moved to a new house next door to Nima Yushij and his wife Aliyah. This made their earlier friendship even stronger. Nima's closeness and confidence in Al-e Ahmad, as much as the old man's invincible suspicion of others

permitted him to trust anyone, became particularly evident when, upon his death, he entrusted the publication of his unpublished poems to three individuals, one of them Jalal Al-e Ahmad, who would later pay great homage to Nima by writing one of the earliest and most influential essays on Nima's life and poetry.

Whatever the critical merits of this essay, "The Old Man Was Our Eyes," it reflects Al-e Ahmad's unswerving courage in defending Nima's revolutionary changes in the received notions of Persian poetics, which Iranian classicists guarded with their lives. Al-e Ahmad saw and sought to utilize the great revolutionary potentials that Nima's poetry entailed. Modernist Persian literature was attracting an increasingly significant young intellectual milieu with considerable political possibilities as it forged a new politically charged symbolic frame of reference, energetic and active in its emerging semiotic organs, that for a time seemed as if it would supercede the received notions and norms of aesthetic authority. By participating in this frame of reference, quite apart from his other political activities, Al-e Ahmad sought and successfully gained a prominent place in the emerging political agenda of this literature.

Al-e Ahmad also secured in that literature an important niche for his own fiction. His fictional characters, however, are thinly disguised personae deeply rooted in his own biographical experiences. Simin Daneshvar, his distinguished wife who is a prominent writer in her own right, once observed that her major literary criticism of Al-e Ahmad's fiction was his constant presence in his own stories.[24] Others have verified this observation.[25] Whatever its literary merits, or lack thereof, Al-e Ahmad's recognizable personal voice in his fiction gave an immediacy and sincerity to his creative imagination that rendered them akin to actual experiences of his social milieu. This had a dual effect: It forced Al-e Ahmad into a realistic appreciation of his social and cultural context, and, at the same time, it brought his fiction to a wider reading constituency.

Both aspects distinguish Al-e Ahmad from most of his contemporary secular intellectual peers. Centered primarily in Tehran, and even in their secluded cafés, à la Quartier Latin, the Iranian secular intellectuals had but a romantic and thus condescending understanding of what they would call "common life" or "ordinary people." Deeply concerned with new experiments in artistic achievements, their creative imaginations set them worlds apart from their presumed constituency, let alone purported followers. But Al-e Ahmad's fictions demonstrate less concern with aesthetic experimentations and articulated techniques than with simply getting "the point" across. To keep this major thrust of his literary work operative, he had to remain always a realistic observer of Iranian cultural realities. Social realism thus remained the quintessential feature of his fiction.

As an indication of his primary concern with ordinary life as it is socially

experienced, the question of religion is very much present in Al-e Ahmad's short stories. This aspect of his fictions has been summarized as follows:

> On the whole, his characters are divided into two religious orientations: one is spiritually affected by all religious factors and reflections. His words, expressions, terminologies, similarities, invocations, and curses all have superstitious tone and form. It is obvious that [this type of character] has spent much of his life amongst staunch old believers, as well as the intimidated young believers. The other [type] is a character who wants to rebel against all religious and superstitious fetters and turn to science and to the real meaning of life. But since we simultaneously see both of these personae in him [that is, in Al-e Ahmad], we inevitably see him as a doubtful and spurious kind of individual who does not want to be recognized [as one type or another].[26]

The duality of Al-e Ahmad's character, negationally reflected in his fiction in terms of the degree and mode of religiosity, looms prominently in his intellectual disposition. What is crucial here is the functional expressions of this dual, on the surface mutually exclusive, disposition, this ambivalence towards religion in general, Islam in particular. Although this ambivalence could not have been resolved one way or another in Al-e Ahmad's fiction, it is quite evident, judging from his later nonfiction works, that in his actual political disposition, he moved increasingly towards a greater recognition of the symbolic hold religions command over people's receptive minds and active imaginations. If the aim were to change those minds and alter the course of those imaginations with politically mandated revolutionary zeal, then the whole plethora of religious symbolic commitments could not be ignored.

Phases and Forces in Al-e Ahmad's Fiction

Five distinct phases in Al-e Ahmad's short stories have been identified, in the course of which he moves from an enthusiastic youth constantly present in his plots to a mature artist who develops his characters more carefully and who then occasionally lets them do their own things.[27] "Their own things," however, are always socially and culturally circumscribed. From political commitments to social isolation to economic destitution—all the major concerns of Al-e Ahmad's generation appear in his fiction.

In *Nefrin-e Zamin (The Curse of the Land)* (1967), Al-e Ahmad had one of his characters severely criticize an economy that, with its total dependency on oil revenues, aborts the possibility of internal growth and infrastructural build-up.[28] But such economic mismanagements are merely symptoms of more serious problems. In this story, Al-e Ahmad would find the opportunity to examine the extent of "Westoxication" in his contemporary society, for him the central source of all problems:

> They have kept pounding into our heads for a lifetime that Europe is the Paradise on Earth. The book says so. The teacher, the radio, the government, the newspapers. You are a student at the Teacher's College, and they tell you if you are the head of your class, you'll be sent to Europe.[29]

Having been to Europe then would become a measure of success: "The tourist comes back [from Europe] with his eyes fully opened; the student with the robe of ministership, the merchant with the agency of [a European] company."[30] The proportions of "Westoxication" are extended deep into the Iranian economic structure, thereby threatening a self-sustained communal infrastructure:

> Now we have reached a point that people who until recently were selling cotton shoes from Sedeh are today importing plastic shoes from Indonesia; and those who were making samovar or silverware in Borujerd are selling electrical samovar and iron made by General Electric, along with high fidelity radiogram and 33 LP records.[31]

In the same book, Al-e Ahmad would seriously take issue with Marxism, an ideology that, despite its appeal to secular intellectuals, was still a product of "The West" and attraction to it a sign of "Westoxication":

> Would that mean that the means of production identifies the individual, that is, it is his Identification Card? . . . And these are all what that old bearded German has said, when more than a hundred years ago he emulated Moses and then we used to gargle his ideas in the Teachers College. But what about language? History? Religion? Customs?[32]

From religion to economics, Al-e Ahmad's fiction was always concerned with the most vital social issues. Preoccupation with the political and social implications of Iranian oil, for example, was a permanent feature of Al-e Ahmad's fiction. In *Sargozasht-e Kandu-ha (The Story of the Beehives)* (1958), he used the analogy of a "beehive" to suggest how the Iranian oil industry was being robbed by England and other colonial powers. Great Britain was depicted here as an ant that steals other people's property.[33] In this story, Al-e Ahmad also returned to an old theme, his anger against the leading elite of the Tudeh Party who fled the country following the 1953 coup d'état. Here he demonstrated a greater affinity with the younger generation who would continue their struggle against tyranny rather than go abroad and issue ill-suited manifestos:

> The young believe that exile is a grand euphemism the old have put on their flight. It's better calling it flight. Flight is what the scared do, those who cannot go through life's battle. If the old prefer flight, that is their prerogative. But the young have the stamina and can face the difficulties.[34]

By the Pen

In perhaps his most successful work of fiction, *Nun wa al-Qalam (By the Pen)* (1961), which dealt with the nature and multiplicity of these difficulties, Al-e Ahmad achieved in folkloric symbolism what he could not, because of a peculiar combination of his literary temperament and official censorship, do in his political essays. While it would have been impossible for him to describe publicly his feelings about the Shah's departure from Iran during the premiership of Mosaddeq in 1953, he could very easily have one of his characters in *Nun wa al-Qalam* proclaim:

> Our forefathers have not seen such things [that is, kings escaping]. . . . Every five or six generations or so, at best, such things would happen. . . . To tell you the truth, these days I give much importance to myself, especially to my eyes which have witnessed the evacuation of a court with all its pomp and ceremonies. . . . Which one of our fathers had witnessed such a thing?[35]

The primary success of *Nun wa al-Qalam* lies in its astonishing ability to operate at two levels: the internal logic of the fable itself, which is universal in tone and delivery, and the external political context that was time-specific to modern Iranian history. The following example clarifies this point:

> Don't keep asking me "what is to be done?" How do I know. Why don't you go and ask the leaders of the land, who as soon as something happens escape, or else go into forty-day seclusion?[36]

At the internal level of the fable the forty-day seclusion was a ritualistic and symbolic gesture that the Calendars, the revolutionaries who momentarily take power, did in the face of grave difficulties. But at the same time and referring to the actual historical context of the book, many would-be national leaders either escaped the turmoils of the 1951–53 Mosaddeq experience or else remained silent and secluded. The secondary meaning, perhaps more immediate for Al-e Ahmad, works at such a delicate, tangential, and referral level that it is precisely in its subtlety and nuanced intonation that it is successful and effective. The primary textual level of the fable gives Al-e Ahmad's insight symbolic and universal validity; its secondary contextual level gives it specific historical articulation. The result is a deep penetration into the workings of the Iranian political culture. It is precisely such abilities, however less frequently utilized, that set Al-e Ahmad worlds apart from the rest of his cohorts on the secular intellectual side. His acute sensitivity to the making of public mythologies and fables, best demonstrated in *Nun wa al-Qalam,* enabled him to see the simple, yet much neglected, workings of a political culture still in touch with its originating popular signals.

Al-e Ahmad's Prose

Related to Al-e Ahmad's literary achievements is his unique prose, which was particularly instrumental in widely propagating his political ideas. Much has been said about Al-e Ahmad's prose—for and against.[37] Some consider him a revolutionary stylist who advanced Persian literary prose to new frontiers. Others have severely criticized his defiance of the classical rules of grammar and diction, particularly his habitual verbless sentences. Many have pointed out in detail the technical flaws in Al-e Ahmad's use of grammatical Persian in both his essays and his works of fiction.[38] The fact remains, however, that Al-e Ahmad did introduce and develop a unique prose of his own, compelling and powerful in its furious and relentless diction. An entire generation of prose writers imitated Al-e Ahmad's diction —occasionally successfully, sometimes with ridiculous results. The result, at any rate, was a major impact on contemporary literary and political prose.

Al-e Ahmad's prose is characterized by a quick and telegraphic urgency that twists and turns and occasionally even bypasses traditional conventions of literary diction. The result is an immediacy of purpose, an intimacy of context, and, perhaps more important, a compelling urgency that grips the attention and does not easily let go. His prose flies in the face of time and patience. He wants to say something important; but the urgency of the message breaks apart the rhythm and reasons of the prose. He wants to say something fast in the shortest time and with the fewest possible words, leaving much to bear on the Persian equivalent of "etc."

The significance of Al-e Ahmad's prose should be understood in the context of an essential, almost ideological, bifurcation between the official academic prose, deeply entrenched in the rules and requirements of classical Persian diction, and the more spontaneously developed modern literary prose, in conceptual and terminological contact with colloquial speech. During the early twentieth century, about the time of the Constitutional Revolution, a modern literary prose gradually developed that consciously sought to draw from the vast pool of folkloric imagery. The resulting language had demonstrated great possibilities in reaching deep into the collective contemporaneity of historical identity with which an increasing number of secularly educated Iranians identified themselves. The official academic prose, however, was advocated by the leading professoriate of Persian literature who considered themselves the besieged custodians of the greatest prize and pride of the Iranian literary and cultural heritage.

With a deeply felt animosity, almost a *ressentiment,* towards the official academic prose, Al-e Ahmad identified with, and considerably contributed to, the efflorescence of a thriving engagé prose that, while changing in itself, sought to change its social context. In developing his unique prose, Al-e

Ahmad was perhaps the most influential essayist whose particular and unique diction became the model for many aspiring and even accomplished young writers. The appeal of his prose was due to a successful balance that he was able to create between a free adaptation of such classic prose writers as Sa'di and Naser Khosrow and a vigorous attention to contemporary Persian colloquialism. The stylish classicism of his intonations and the abrupt immediacy of his discourse gave Al-e Ahmad a biting and satirical language that was particularly suited to social criticism. The result of this generally successful prose was a traditional flavor that intimidated and yet attracted the seculars, while it harbored a modern twist that the orthodox classicists rejected. The immediate consequence of this paradoxical prose was an angry flow of critical consciousness that facilitated effective communication precisely because of the sincerity it expressed so effortlessly.

As a social essayist, master of this prose of his own making, Al-e Ahmad wrote, consciously, for a wide range of audience. Consequently, it would be a case of misplaced significance to try to detect the presence or lack of a systematic and careful exposition of an issue in his collected essays. He would rarely footnote an observation, document a claim, or sustain an elaborate argument. When he occasionally did footnote a proposition, it would appear mostly as an artificial faking of a discourse for which Al-e Ahmad was not prepared. Yet in doing so, he did occasionally try, as in his last important work, "On the Services and Treasons of the Intellectuals," to appeal to the academic and particularly social scientific discourse. But if he was not successful at convincing the specialist in a given field, Al-e Ahmad did manage to communicate his ideas to a relatively vast audience with a certain air of authority. This authority was extended to a range of contemporary political and cultural issues that Al-e Ahmad addressed. The contemporaneity and secular significance of such issues as the Iranian oil reserves and its economic management would render Al-e Ahmad's prose sensitive to the very pulses of his *Zeitgeist*. None of the other Islamic ideologues examined in this book shared Al-e Ahmad's penchant for matters of contemporary secular significance. From Shari'ati to Khomeini, every major religious ideologue saw the world from a specifically and pronouncedly "Islamic" point of view. This ipso facto alienated a wide range of putitatively secular political activists. The significance of Al-e Ahmad's unique prose and discourse was that while it increasingly signalled the political necessity, or perhaps even inevitability, of the religious symbols, it did so with an acute reflection of the most compelling political realities of the time, speaking, in their own language, to secular intellectuals.

Al-e Ahmad's Translations

In conjunction with developing his unique political prose, translating contemporary European sources on a variety of political and literary subjects was an occasion for Al-e Ahmad to convey specific ideological messages. When he found a prominent European author, someone like Albert Camus or André Gide, having said, as he thought they did, precisely what he had in mind, he would choose to translate him. This would give an added air of authority to the message. In translating André Gide's *Retour de L'U.R.S.S. (Return from the Soviet Union)*, for example, he meant to cast a soul-searching glance at his years with the Tudeh Party:

> In our own country how many enthusiastic souls have gotten in this path of deceit, and how many innocent lives have been wasted. How many young people have withered away their enthusiasm, ecstacy and youthful energy, and thus what a tremendous human asset we have lost! A regret for that lost asset and a deep sorrow for this prolonged deceit are among the causes of translating this book.[39]

These translations were also among the first initial steps that Al-e Ahmad was taking towards a full recognition of the primacy of local religious sentiments in the Iranian political culture. Before he would come to grips with the futility of the patently secular political language in Iran (by definition the displacement of a "Western" artifact for Al-e Ahmad), he could not have grasped the revolutionary potentials of the religiously charged messages. In his introduction to Andre Gide's *Return from the Soviet Union,* Al-e Ahmad would speak of the Soviet experience as a "deceitful mirage"[40] that had captivated the minds and souls of many European and, by extension, Muslim intellectuals.

The significance of Al-e Ahmad's translations of his contemporary literary sources from "The West" may be seen as providing him with an individualistic haven from the collective commitments of his years with the Tudeh Party. While the socialist ideals of the Tudeh Party had emphasized public virtues and collective salvations, almost all the "Western" literary sources he chose to translate reflected an existentialist emphasis on the primacy of the individual and private virtues. From his translations of Dostoyevski's *The Gambler* in 1948 to Camus' *The Stranger* in 1949 to Sartre's *Dirty Hands* in 1952 to Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* in 1966, Al-e Ahmad demonstrated a particular preoccupation with the major themes of the Existentialist movement. These translations, all dated after his break with the Tudeh Party, seem to have provided Al-e Ahmad with a necessary existentialist break from collective concerns with the potential revolutionary achievements of public virtues. Before he would reach for the specifics of his immediate political culture towards yet another (religious) version of

collective salvation, his passage from this existentialist and individualistic phase was all but inevitable.

Translating European sources into Persian, a crucial cultural phenomenon that has so far remained completely unexamined, was perhaps the single most important mechanism for creating "The West" as the most significant Other in the Muslim (Iranian) collective imagination. In this context, Al-e Ahmad's translations served two interrelated purposes. At a more immediate level, they provided him with an existentialist path out of the ideological impasse he had faced after his break with the Tudeh Party. Sartre and Camus, Dostoyevski and Gide became his sources of salvation. In them he found, whether he consciously recognized it or not, a meaningful refuge from collective commitments to organizational causes. But at the same time, these, and similar, translations contributed to the collective construction of the compelling image of "The West" as the most important generalized Other in the Iranian collective imagination. Importer of the most sensitive symbolic artifacts from "The West," Al-e Ahmad's generation continued to measure elements of its own identity in terms of a constructed dominant myth: "The West."

Turning to Ethnography

But at the same time, any contribution to translating "Western" intellectual sources smacked of "Westoxication": for Al-e Ahmad a debilitating disease. To balance the sentiments and impressions of such a self-inflicted "disease," Al-e Ahmad vigorously attended to the most rugged realities of his homeland: an attendance that would put him in touch with the most compelling facts of rural Iranians leading meager lives in the remotest part of the country. In 1955, Al-e Ahmad began a series of monographs on various Iranian villages, a kind of ad hoc ethnography that he undertook and encouraged others to do with no disciplinary preparation and yet with surprisingly impressive results. The primary purpose of these studies, as Al-e Ahmad himself testified, was to measure and analyze the exposure of typically Iranian villages to the "onslaught of machine and machine civilization."[41] While in the first two of these three studies, *Tat-neshin-ha-ye Boluk-e Zahra'* and *Urazan,* Al-e Ahmad managed to muster a neutral and almost social scientific language, in the last one, *Karg: Dorr-e Yatim-e Khalij,* he openly criticized "the devastation of an economic and cultural unit of this country"[42] in the face of "machine and machine civilization," his alternative terms for "The West."

The first of this series of ethnographies, the result of his trips to the villages of Qazvin in northwestern Iran, was a monograph called *Tat-neshin-ha-ye Boluk-e Zahra' (The Tatis of the Zahra Block).* Al-e Ahmad knew very well he was no trained ethnographer. He knew he was trespassing into territories unknown to him. He conducted his ethnographic studies, as he did most other things, knowing full well the limitations that affected him and his output: "You have run for a lifetime," Al-e Ahmad once addressed himself:

> searched every corner, and before you reach some understanding of yourself, you have committed stupidities, have gone ways astray, banged your head on walls, and from all these you have none but fragmented records. This too [*Tat-neshin-ha-ye Boluk-e Zahra'*] is one such fragmentary note. . . . And what can one do? . . . [Y]ou cannot throw away and burn even fragmentary notes. Because they are part of you, part of your juvenile enthusiasms, of a water that went into marshes, and no branch grew out of it.[43]

In June 1958, Al-e Ahmad was invited by the Oil Consortium, an invitation which was arranged by Ebrahim Golestan, to visit Kharg Island. The result of this trip was *Karg: Dorr-e Yatim-e Khalij (Kharg: The Orphaned Pearl of the Gulf),* in which he gathered some historical records and a collection of fieldwork he conducted while on the island. Here, too, Al-e Ahmad's primary concern was to attend to matters of popular beliefs and myths in the area. His interest in Kharg Island had much to do with the fact that here was an almost abandoned part of the country, where political activists and criminals were exiled, recently rejuvenated because of its oil installations to facilitate the flow of "black gold" to "The West." As Al-e Ahmad saw it, while oil installations on Kharg Island would create a relative economic and cultural expansion in the area, the development was isolated and irrelevant to the rest of the country, where "half of its fifty thousand villages still do not know what a match is,"[44] and that it was bound to isolate the economy and culture of the area from the rest of the nation.

He attended to his task of documenting the local culture of Kharg on the verge of destruction by the invading "Westernization" with the spirit of an observer who knows the object of his inquiry will soon be obliterated. He compared Iran to the weak and exhausted body of a sick man with an unnaturally big and strong head that was the oil industry, artificially dragging the country just to feed "The West." Beyond matters of economy, it was more this deep cultural alienation that Al-e Ahmad resented. Gradually, he anticipated, "the entire local and cultural identity and existence will be swept away. And why? So that a factory can operate in 'The West,' or that workers in Iceland or Newfoundland are not jobless."[45]

In *Urazan,* which Al-e Ahmad published in 1954, the most elementary unit of social organization, namely a small village, came under close scrutiny. There was nothing particular about this village except that Al-e Ahmad's ancestors had come from there.[46] His essay on this village is something of an ethnography with the prose and diction of a travelogue. Al-e

Ahmad had his introduction to this ethnography translated into English by his wife, Simin Daneshvar, presumably having a larger audience in mind. The book consists of religious beliefs, problems of irrigation, ceremonies around death, local diets, clothing, wedding festivities, social organization, and aspects of the local dialect. In identifying this village, Al-e Ahmad pointed out that

> it is one of several thousand Persian villages where ploughing is done in a primitive way, and the villagers often fight over the water supply and are deprived of public bath and a sufficient supply of sugar for their tea.[47]

In *Urazan* there is neither a school nor a hospital; there is no police department; the villagers had not yet seen a match.[48] Between 1947, when Al-e Ahmad last visited Urazan and took his notes, and 1977, when the book went through its seventh printing, not much improvement could have changed this particular unit of "the Japan of the Middle East." Such direct experiences of the most rugged realities of Iran gave Al-e Ahmad the moral authority, if nothing else, to speak of the most rudimentary lores of his native political culture.

Al-e Ahmad the Journalist

Such ethnographic studies, however, remained isolated writings with a limited readership. Journalism, of a particular sort, was Al-e Ahmad's key to the widest range of audience available to a writer of grave social and political concerns. In 1946, he became the manager of Sholehvar Printing House and launched a long and crucial career not only as a leading journalist but as an acute observer of Iranian periodicals from the 1940s through the 1960s. His tenure with the Tudeh Party from 1943 to 1948 gave him ample experience in journalism. For a while, in 1946, he contributed to *Rahbar,* the organ of the Tudeh Party. At the age of twenty-three, he was on the editorial staff of *Mardom,* the chief ideological journal of the Party. This put him on a par with the leading organizational and ideological patriarchs of the Party—in particular Fereydun Keshavarz and Ehsan Tabari.

Early in 1950, Al-e Ahmad joined the editorial board of *Shahed,* a journal published by Mozaffar Baqa'i. Later in his life he would attribute a redeeming quality to having edited this journal, suggesting that his disappointing affiliation with the Tudeh Party had caused in him a mental disease that was very difficult to get rid of:

> If I escaped the evil of this disease (which I am not quite sure I did), it was first because I sought a haven in writing, and second because the section of "searching in the papers" which lasted in *Shahed* for a year (1950–51) extracted all the poisons of this disease from my body and put it on paper, with my signature on it.[49]

Al-e Ahmad also collaborated in 1952 with Khalil Maleki in publishing the *Nabard-e Zendegi (The Battle of Life,* also published as *Elm va Zendegi [Science and Life]*) journal. Perhaps the most important effect of his career as a journalist was a sort of acrobatic prose Al-e Ahmad could perform in his writings about contemporary political issues. To be diligently aware of the pitfalls of treacherous politics, to be conscious of the rising expectations of a new generation of revolutionary youth, and to watch for the curves and slopes of Iranian intellectual and cultural exposure to "The West" were among the principal challenges that Al-e Ahmad successfully met in his extended writing career. Tightly controlled by state-sponsored and self-inflicted censorship, Iranian journalism from the 1950s to the 1960s gave Al-e Ahmad ample opportunity to develop a political prose—concealing in its revelations, revealing in its concealments—closely reflective of the most crucial problems of his generation.

Al-e Ahmad the Essayist

Journalism, with the tight hand of censorship holding its throat, had its inherent limitations for Al-e Ahmad. The overflow of social concerns inevitably sought a different channel of expression. Al-e Ahmad's long and impressive career in virtually making the engagé genre of modern Iranian social essays began in 1946 when he wrote a series of "reports" on the condition of high schools in Iran. By 1946, he had gained sufficient experience to justify his formidable acumen for sharp social criticism and had already been through a gamut of ideological commitments, leading him to the highest echelons of the Tudeh Party. In active and engaging command of a vibrant Persian prose, he had already published his first collection of short stories in 1945. His acquaintance with Hedayat and Nima had put him in touch with the avant garde literary movements of his day. By the time he launched his essay-writing career, Al-e Ahmad had also been among the editorial staffs of both *Mardom* and *Rahbar,* the chief ideological organ of the Tudeh Party.

Perhaps the lasting effect of the Tudeh Party on Al-e Ahmad was his critical eye for social maladies. Although he commenced his writing career in 1945 by publishing a short story, *Did va Bazdid* ("Visit"), it was in the collection of his essays, launched in 1946, that Al-e Ahmad ultimately left his mark on the modern Iranian political culture. In 1954 he published his *Seven Essays (Haft Maqaleh).* Some eight years later he published *Three More Essays (Seh Maqaleh-ye Digar). The Three-Year Balance Sheet (Karnameh-ye Seh Saleh)* also appeared in 1962. His *Hurried Appraisal (Arzyabi-ye Shetab Zadeh),* which was published in 1965, was the last collection of short, critical, and provocative essays he wrote. Although such long essays as *Gharbzadegi* (1962), *Yik Chah Va Do Chaleh* (1977), and *Dar*

Khedmat Va Khiyanat-e Roshanfekran (1977) are technically considered in this genre, their content requires separate examination.

Throughout these essays, Al-e Ahmad attends to the particular problems of his rapidly changing environment. But he occasionally ventures into what exactly is to be done. In addressing questions of crucial importance for his contemporary concerns, "The West" is always the dominant force:

> We need to take certain things from the West. But not everything. From the West, or in the West, we are looking for technology. Technology we have to import. We will also learn the science that goes with it. That [in itself] is not Western; it is universal. But not the social sciences and humanities. These, that is, from literature to history, economics, and jurisprudence, I [as an Iranian] have and know well. One can learn the scientific method from someone who knows. But as it pertains to the subject of social sciences and humanities, those I have. I have written on many occasions that Naser Khosrow almost a thousand years ago has told us how to do it. He has taught me how to write, not Newton or Sartre. Newton has written on mechanics, that is, on the foundation of hard sciences. Thus I inevitably need him. Electrical shaver and this tape recorder [I talk to], we need. That's all good and well. But what about our thoughts which are made up through social sciences and humanities? At the moment do we have anything other than these as tokens of our Iranian identity?[50]

That Iranians had lost their sense of historical identity was, for Al-e Ahmad, a premeditated scheme of European colonialism and its commercial interests: "The West and the [oil] companies not only do not care for local orders, forms and traditions, they even try to destroy . . . [them] as soon as possible."[51]

In his social essays, Al-e Ahmad paid particular attention to matters of common mythologies. Among the architects of Persian mythologies, Ferdowsi was particularly dear to Al-e Ahmad. "You and I," Al-e Ahmad once said, "if we are very healthy and powerful, will have exploded after seventy years, with no trace."[52] He realized the persistence with which collective mythologies endure the test of time in a society. Iranians, in fact, have expressed their deepest appreciation for Ferdowsi's preservation of their ancient myths by incorporating the poet himself into the corpus of their mythologies.

But such mythologies, Al-e Ahmad believed, were no idle entertainment. He was convinced that myths are "the most real of all realities."[53] Such realities constitute the most essential and immediate frames of reference within which members of a common culture assume their measures of social action. Such attention to the inner workings of common mythologies was instrumental in the final disposition of Al-e Ahmad's political agenda. He complained bitterly of the substitution of an artificial knowledge of Greek mythology for a genuine understanding of Iranian myths. "Still no average literate Iranian knows our national mythology," he regretted. "Who is Zarir or Garshasp? Or what is the myth of creation in this part of the world? But every newspaper is full of Greek mythology. . . . Why?"[54]

Al-e Ahmad's concern with the spread of "Westoxication" was a simultaneous fear for the future of Iranian identity. Here, as elsewhere, his ideological disposition, which was always sensitive to common myths, coincided with his political agenda of constructing an "anti-Western" Iranian identity. This identity was rooted, more than anything else, in the Persian language; and yet today " 'start,' 'consortium,' 'festival,' and 'exposition' are the passwords, even for the doroshky driver of yesterday who has just sold the horses, bought a cab on credit, and turned up as 'Mr. Driver.' "[55]

Al-e Ahmad's ultimate concern, perhaps even more crucial than pushing Iranian politics towards the mainstream of common symbolic (Islamic) consciousness, was for Iran to have an independent cultural identity on a par with "The Western" nation-states:

> Infrastructure, superstructure, struggle, peace, etc., are all good and well; but for me the problem is that so far as my infrastructure is oil and superstructure is gargling the chewed-out literary and industrial leftovers of the West, they will not take me that seriously. After living for forty years in this country, I at least have to have understood so much that in this international circus first you have to be a rival in order to be taken seriously. Then you can talk of war or peace.[56]

Al-e Ahmad persistently tried to instill a sense of self-respect and dignity in being an "Easterner." "Beware that the epoch of grand ideals should not be past for us."[57] But contrary to such grand ideals, the urban and bureaucratic corruption, a product of "Westernization" for Al-e Ahmad, was now spreading to Iranian villages.[58] The key industrial malaise was total dependency, ruining, as it had, the Iranian economy.[59]

Confronted with such grave difficulties, faced with the responsibility of assuming the ideological, if not the political, leadership of his nation, Al-e Ahmad saw himself as something between a teacher and a preacher:

> I am a teacher. . . . But here the situation is such that I cease to be a teacher. Yet I do not wish to change my definition as a teacher. Because there is a difference between a teacher and a preacher. A preacher usually invests in the emotions of a large crowd. While [a] teacher emphasizes the intelligence of a small group. The other difference is that a preacher begins and preaches with certitude. But a teacher begins and speaks with doubt. . . . Professionally, I am a teacher. Yet, I am not completely devoid of preaching either. I don't know what I am.[60]

Al-e Ahmad's Travels

Whenever such debilitating questions began to bother Al-e Ahmad, he left home and went on a long journey. He traveled extensively throughout his

life. His travels were always occasions for reflection and thorough reconsideration of his ideas. These journeys expanded and enriched his political disposition—whatever that might have been at any given time. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that Al-e Ahmad's travels, in and out of Iran, were as instrumental in shaping his political ideas as his readings or the company he kept. Although he usually went abroad with more or less set and determined ideas about the places he was about to visit, his trips to the United States, the Soviet Union, Israel, and Mecca led him to reconsider his ideas, radical at times, about "Westoxication," Stalinism, Zionism, and Islam, respectively. The Meccan trip, in fact, led to a thorough reconsideration of the political impact Islam could, might, and should have.

To Najaf with Faith?

Al-e Ahmad's first major trip abroad was to Najaf in 1943 to study at this historical site of Shi'i learning. In Iraq he visited Basrah, Khaniqayn, Samara, Karbala, Najaf, and Kazimayn. He had made this trip at his father's insistence in order to complete his scholastic learning, which he had pursued, simultaneously with his formal (secular) school, at a preliminary level at the Marvi School in Tehran. In Najaf he was meant to join his older brother, Mohammad Taqi Taleqani, and, under the guidance of an eminent Shi'i scholar, Shaykh Aqa Bozorg Tehrani, who was also a distant relative, study with Ayatollah Sayyid Abolhasan Isfahani, the leading Shi'i authority of the time. Al-e Ahmad would later reflect some of his impressions from this trip in his stories.[61]

Although he did not stay in Najaf for more than a few months, and although the wishes of his father to have another turbaned cleric as his son (Al-e Ahmad's older brother had become a rather prominent cleric) were not to be fulfilled, still this first trip to the scholastic capital of Shi'i jurisprudence must have left an indelible impression on the young Al-e Ahmad. For the rest of his political and intellectual life, he would possess a close intimacy with the received imperatives of his faith, one that most of his cohorts on the secular humanist side would not and could not share. This affinity had far-reaching impressions on Al-e Ahmad's political disposition, not the least of which was immediate support for Ayatollah Khomeini's June 1963 uprising. But these were affinities Al-e Ahmad would feel most defensive about. Years after he had abandoned his father's wishes of becoming a cleric, he would still become agitated at the mere suggestion that he was an "Akhond" after all.[62]

To Abadan with a Mission

Al-e Ahmad's first major trip inside Iran was in 1945 when, on a mission for the Tudeh Party, he went to organize the cause of socialism in Abadan.

Those were years of high hopes: years when Al-e Ahmad used his fresh but inexperienced political drive for a cause he thought was the most noble endeavor a man could undertake. His experiences in Abadan gave him an acute understanding of the inner workings of politics and, of course, harbored an appropriate dose of cynicism and disillusion that would not leave him unaffected.

To Qazvin to Know

Al-e Ahmad's trip to Qazvin in 1955 was the beginning of a long and sustained program of getting to know Iran at its most rustic, rugged, and realistic depths. He would gradually write ethnographic records of these trips. Whatever the ethnographic validity of these reports, a validity to which Al-e Ahmad had no printed claim, they demonstrate a deep and concentrated concern for the lowest and most common denominator of the Iranian society. These trips also gave Al-e Ahmad a realistic understanding of the diversified masses of people and their valid and legitimate cultural frames of reference. As opposed to the typical Iranian secular intellectual, who was an essentially urban creature with a minimum to nonexistent understanding of rural life, Al-e Ahmad, through these systematically planned excursions into the Iranian heartland, felt the very pulse of the people he wished to lead to a promised land, even though, as he grew older, he increasingly lost all presumptions of knowing precisely what constitution this promised land would have.

To Europe, to "The West"

In the summer of 1957, Al-e Ahmad made his first trip to Europe. His wife, Simin Daneshvar, accompanied him in this trip, which lasted for two months. They spent their vacations in France and England. He did not write a travelogue on this trip; but he reportedly kept a journal.[63]

His trips to Europe, and later to the United States, were perhaps logical and inevitable continuations of his primary concern, cultural and political, with "The West." Although in his *Westoxication* he severely criticized the awkward imitation of matters and manners "Western," he was, given the limitations of an intellectual of his generation, relatively well informed and, one might even say, erudite about his contemporary European intellectual scene. This erudition was particularly instrumental in a crucial phase of Al-e Ahmad's intellectual curve when, removed from his communal identity with the Tudeh Party, he became increasingly attracted to Existentialism and the freedom of experience it afforded the individual. It is later, upon this individuality, that Al-e Ahmad would construct his own unique definition of political commitment.

To Walk Through the Land

In 1958, Al-e Ahmad went to Khuzestan, a southern Iranian province, and traveled on foot from Behbahan to Kazerun, a distance of some 300 miles. In olden days, his ancestors would have performed their Hajj pilgrimage—or sometimes even their ordinary trips—on foot. From the distant provinces of Khorasan, Fars, or Azarbaijan, Iranians walked to Arabia, Syria, or Iraq. It was believed that a pilgrimage to a sacred precinct performed on foot would enhance the nobility and honor of one's religious duty in this world and would increase one's other-worldly rewards proportionately. Al-e Ahmad's walking through and around the Iranian deserts provides a glimpse of his replaced piety, his reconstituted enchantment.

Again to "The West"

Al-e Ahmad returned to Europe for four months in 1962, this time without his wife. On this trip he went to France, Switzerland, West Germany, Holland, and England. He had reportedly prepared his notes from this trip for publication in a book; but his sudden death aborted this plan.[64] Years later, when the autobiographical sketch *Sangi bar Guri* ("A Tombstone") was published, we would learn that during this trip he had a brief extramarital affair. "A Tombstone" deserves particular attention.

"A Tombstone" is a remarkable autobiographical document of unsurpassed sincerity in the modern history of the Iranian literary tradition. With a rare courage very few Iranians could have mustered and sustained, Al-e Ahmad articulated the darkest emotions of a man tradition-bound in his quintessential disposition and yet artificially exposed to the imported ideals of a liberal mind. His primary dilemma in "A Tombstone" is a translation in sexual terms of what he actually faced in the political arena. "A Tombstone" is the private confessions of Al-e Ahmad who had been told by physicians that he could not father his own children because of the low number of sperm in his semen. The technicalities of the problem aside, Al-e Ahmad gives a sincere and detailed account of a tormented traditionalist at once attracted to and repelled by the allure of a liberal mind, of a technological age, and, ultimately, of "The West." For the first time in his received history it had become conceivable for an Iranian man to accompany his wife to a male gynecologist. Only one generation earlier, Al-e Ahmad's father would have rather seen his wife dead than examined by a male gynecologist. With Al-e Ahmad's generation, however, the idea had begun to assume a certain degree of uneasy acceptability among the presumably liberal intellectuals. Those intellectuals would not have dared to speak publicly about the darker corners of their tormented privacies, which still saw something quintessentially troublesome in having a man (call him a physician, what difference does it make?) see, touch, and examine the most private parts of their wives. Al-e Ahmad had the courage to record his outrage when he took his wife to a male gynecologist:

> Do you really know what it means to be a pimp? I experienced it that very day. Yes. He laid my wife on the operation bed . . . just as I would on our bed. And then he rolled up his sleeves, his instruments in hand, and then the look in his eyes was such that I, all of a sudden, remembered my sister who finally did not consent to having an operation, to having the hands of a male stranger touch her. And that was [only] her breast. Cancer had eaten her up, and yet she ultimately did not consent to having an operation. The hair on the man's hand had been left out of the [surgical] gloves, and my wife had laid down in a position which I really could not. . . . But I did not even scream. I just saw I could not take it anymore. Just like pimps.[65]

Here was the trouble with "The West." Al-e Ahmad's experience in having to take his wife to a male gynecologist was a symbol of his central problems with "The West." On one hand, the realities of the circumstances, that Al-e Ahmad and his wife needed to have a child but could not, necessitated their seeking the most technologically advanced help possible. And yet in the process of doing so, they, now representing the entire modern Iranian society, had to sacrifice what was most dear and significant to them: their dignity as they defined it. No one in Al-e Ahmad's generation had the moral courage to admit this ethical paradox. And no ideologue could, or would, articulate the moral dilemma in a more compelling and personal narrative.

And to Israel

In the winter of 1962, following his European trip, Al-e Ahmad traveled to Israel for two weeks, where he was joined by his wife. His travel notes from this trip initially appeared in two journals in 1964 and 1967 and were later reedited and published by his brother Shams Al-e Ahmad in 1984.[66] On this trip, which lasted from 4 to 17 February 1963, Al-e Ahmad and his wife were guests of the Israeli government.[67] By 1963, the non-Stalinist socialist experiences of the Israeli kibbutzim held much interest and appeal for a non-Tudeh generation of Iranian socialists. Articles and essays by post-Tudeh socialists such as Khalil Maleki created and sustained a very positive image of the Israeli kibbutzim among many Iranian intellectuals.[68] Much to the dismay of the clericals at Qom, the non-Tudeh socialists, led by Khalil Maleki, projected a positive image of Israel and its socialist experiences with kibbutzim.

Publication of a portion of Al-e Ahmad's travelogue to Israel in September 1964 caused quite a stir among his clerical readers and followers in Qom. The future leader of the Islamic Republic, Sayyid Ali Khamenei, was

one of the disenchanted followers who, in fact, came to Tehran, contacted Al-e Ahmad and registered, kindly though, his dismay on behalf of the young clericals in Qom.[69] When, some three years later, Al-e Ahmad's travelogue to Israel appeared in a journal, the Shah's government immediately banned the journal and confiscated its last issue. This chapter, however, was very much welcomed in Qom because it was critical of the State of Israel. It is important to note that while the secular intellectuals in Tehran did not quite get to read this piece, the young clericals in Qom reprinted it first in five thousand and then in fifty thousand copies, wrote an introduction to it, and published it under the title of "Israel: The Agent of Imperialism" (its actual title, as it later appeared in the book, was "The Beginning of a Hatred").[70]

Al-e Ahmad occasionally appears not to share Maleki's and the other non-Tudeh socialists' optimism and enthusiasm for Israel. In fact, the publication of the second portion of his travelogue in 1967, which was critical of the Israeli government, angered Khalil Maleki considerably.[71] It has also been suggested, perhaps with some justification, that the publication of Al-e Ahmad's fragmented critical pieces on Israel in the late 1960s caused, or at least was partially responsible for, the appearance of a generation of publications critical of the state of Israel.[72]

In the first chapter of the book, however, which was partially published in 1964 and caused much anger among the young clericals in Qom, Al-e Ahmad saw the state of Israel not merely as a threat to Arab dreams of a united caliphate, for which he obviously had no sympathy, but also as the promising possibility of a new emergence for "The East" to balance the power of "The West":

> In the eyes of this Easterner, Israel, despite all its defects and despite all contradictions it harbors, is the basis of a power: The first step in the promise of a future which is not that late.[73]

As Al-e Ahmad saw it, from Tel Aviv to Tokyo there were the beginning signs of a new emergence for "The East" to stand, once again, vis-à-vis "The West." He saw essentially two negative attributes in the very presence of the state of Israel: First, it was a "Western" stronghold at the very gate of "The East"; and second, it was the price that the poor "East" had to pay for the atrocities "The West" had committed in Dachau and Buchenwald. But more than anything else, he saw Israel as an inspiring, almost symbolic, statement and position vis-à-vis "The West":

> For me as an Easterner, Israel is a model, [better] than any other model, of how to deal with the West. How to extract from its industries by the spiritual power of a [mass] martyrdom, how to take remunition from it and spend the capital thus obtained to advance the country, and how with the price of a short time of political dependency give permanence to our newly established enterprise.[74]

To top it all, Al-e Ahmad also appealed to the vast arena of Irano-Judaic relationships, and claimed Esther and Mordecai, Daniel and the reconstruction of the Temple by Cyrus. Yet the more immediate attraction of Al-e Ahmad, which dated back to his secession from the Tudeh Party in 1948, had to do with a non-Stalinist experience with socialist cooperatives—kibbutzim—that he and a number of other like-minded anti-Stalinist socialists began to know about and propagate in the late 1940s.

Al-e Ahmad confessed that this propagation of something positive about Israel was much to the dismay of the Qom clericals.[75] But he pursued his interest in Israel by reading the proceedings of the Nuremburg Trials, rereading the Old Testament, and writing two fictions about these experiences, one of which has apparently disappeared.[76] Al-e Ahmad goes a step further and genuinely expresses his approval of the state of Israel, simply because he has never seen, nor does he pretend to harbor, any sympathy from, or for, the Arabs. As a Shi'i Iranian, he lists a host of grievances—from being called an *Ajam* ("a non-Arab") and a *rafidi* ("a Shi'i"—both terms are derogatory) by the Arabs to the Egyptian dream of leading all the Muslim world—that prevents him from having any genuine historical (either religious or ethnic) identification with the Arab cause. Thus, Al-e Ahmad daringly concludes:

> Having so much suffered at the hands of these rootless Arabs, I am happy to see the presence of Israel in the East. The presence of Israel that can cut off the oil pipe of the Arab sheikhs, and that can implant the seed of seeking justice and equanimity in the heart of every Beduin Arab and that can cause much headache for the illegitimate and archaic regimes. These rotten scales on the stem of the old but strong tree of Islam . . . ought to be blown away by the whirlwind awe of the Israeli presence so that I as an Easterner can rid myself of the tyranny of the puppet regimes installed by the oil [companies].[77]

The duality of the immigrant character, the division between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim, also interested Al-e Ahmad. As he saw it, the Israeli attempt to establish Hebrew as the national language was a conscious, and apparently successful, attempt to meld the cultural differences of the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim into a new monolithic self-image—neither Eastern nor Western, almost like the Israeli territory that has only a North-South axis and lacks an East-West bar.

In Al-e Ahmad's version of the establishment of the state of Israel, not surprisingly, it is the British who emerge as the essential villains, systematically aborting all historical possibilities between 1918 and 1948 for a Jewish-Palestinian state.[78] Al-e Ahmad's sympathy for the Palestinians, however, in no way detracts from his admiration for the Israelis.

In the last chapter of this book Al-e Ahmad's tone of language changes completely. This chapter, which, according to Al-e Ahmad's brother was

first published in July 1967, after the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, demonstrates a visceral contempt for the European left and liberal intellectuals who were rallying their support for the Israeli cause. This radical change of voice in the last chapter can create some doubts about its authenticity. Although it is hard to prove that this chapter was actually concocted by someone else and injected in this volume, which has been edited by Al-e Ahmad's brother Shams, still its visceral anti-Israeli content makes it drastically different from the preceding four chapters of the book. What further substantiates this doubt is the abrupt ending of the preceding chapter that ends not with a complete sentence but with a subordinate clause. Further challenging a complete re-Islamization of Al-e Ahmad's memory are the tone and diction of this last chapter which are in radical opposition, in manner and matter, to what he has argued for in previous parts. While the other chapters carry the unmistakable charm and character of Al-e Ahmad's essay diction, this last chapter is actually in the form of a letter written by someone who was in Europe at the time and addressed to a like-minded individual in Iran. It is also quite evident from the content of this letter-cum-chapter that its author was actually in France some time around June and July of 1967. It is, however, quite possible that Al-e Ahmad did, in fact, write this chapter with a different tone and diction some four years after his initial reactions to Israel. Indeed, the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war and "The Western" support for Israel might very well have angered Al-e Ahmad enough to cause him to revise thoroughly his previous ideas about the state of Israel. In the absence of further reliable documents, we must leave this question unresolved.

This last chapter, at any rate, is a visceral condemnation of Israel, "The West," and "The Western" intellectuals:

> Because Nazism, this flowering achievement of Western bourgeoisie, dragged six million wretched Jews into man-baking furnaces, today two to three million Arabs of Palestine, Gaza, and Western Jordan ought to be massacred and scattered around under the auspices of Wall Street capitalists and Rothschild Bank. And because the European intellectuals, so called, were partially responsible for Hitler's atrocities, and yet did not utter a word at the time, now they are giving the same Jews the green light in the Middle East so that the people of Egypt, Syria, Algeria, and Iraq are whipped enough to forget about fighting against the Western colonialism, and would never again close the Suez Canal to the civilized nations![79]

In this last section, Al-e Ahmad—or whoever wrote the piece—contradicts everything he had written about Arabs or about the socialist experiences in Israel in the earlier sections of the book. In this part, Israel is no longer the hope of the East for emancipation from tyrant sheikhs. It is "the puppet supreme of capitalism and Western colonialism in the Middle East."[80] Arabs here are not the historical enemies of the Persians, but "Muslim brothers."[81] While in the earlier sections Al-e Ahmad projects himself as a pro-Jewish and benevolent observer, here he shows no hesitation in using such racist comments as "the proverbial Jewish stinginess" that prevents Israelis from capturing the Egyptian soldiers in Sinai and thus having to feed them.[82]

Lost in the Crowd

In the spring of 1964 Al-e Ahmad made perhaps the most crucial trip of his life: a pilgrimage to Mecca. In 1965 he edited his notes, and in 1966 he published them in a book called *Khasi dar Miqat (Lost in the Crowd)*.[83] The depth and intensity of the impact of this pilgrimage on Al-e Ahmad are hard to exaggerate. In retrospect, it seems that since his short trip to Najaf in 1943 and his father's aborted wishes for him to follow a career as a religious scholar, Al-e Ahmad had postponed his return to the birthplace of his faith, the most compelling source of his identity. But whereas Najaf is the intellectual and juridical capital of Shi'ism, Mecca is the very physical and spiritual heart of Islam, its proclamation to the world. This is not to read anachronistic existential values into Al-e Ahmad's pilgrimage. In view of his later political ideas, Islam in general and Shi'ism in particular assumed an increasingly pronounced significance for his ideological disposition. It is true that by 1964 Al-e Ahmad was too much in the sun. He had simply seen and experienced too much to turn through this pilgrimage into a full-fledged Muslim. A reconstitution of his religious disposition, an immediate personal reenchantment, is beyond the immediate impact of his spiritual experiences during this pilgrimage. This certainly was not a trip through which Al-e Ahmad would rediscover an undiluted Muslim, whatever that creature might be, within himself. Yet the very act of pilgrimage at the very heart of a decade that Al-e Ahmad's generation of intellectuals was exposed and thus transformed to the most varied forms of secularization testifies to the validity of something deeply religious in him.

Thus the crucial publication of 1966 was *Lost in the Crowd,* Al-e Ahmad's version of a profound confession of faith, however convoluted. This is where Al-e Ahmad's belated religiosity came to meet his updated political agenda. His pilgrimage to Mecca gave him ample opportunity to develop a rhetorical discourse that combines political engagement with a religiously sensitive prose:

> Under the cover of that sky and in that infinity, I recited every poem I'd ever memorized, mumbling to myself, looking into myself as carefully as I could until dawn. . . . It appears that even Ka'bah will have been built with steel-reinforced concrete by next year, just like the Prophet's mosque.[84]

Al-e Ahmad's reconstituted religiosity would find new, unconventional, and disguised forms of expressing itself. Here three dates are crucially

interrelated: Al-e Ahmad published *Westoxication* in 1962, performed his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964, and published his travel notes from Mecca, *Lost in the Crowd,* in 1966. Within the expanse of these four years, 1962–66, he outwardly expressed his deepest sense of recognized religiosity by performing his Hajj pilgrimage, once he had first intellectualized it into the most successfully disguised form of Islamicity in his conceptualization of *Westoxication.*

Here is how the relation between *Westoxication* and *Lost in the Crowd* works: Although chronologically *Westoxication* was published before *Lost in the Crowd,* in terms of its intellectual conception, it comes after. In effect, the reason behind this reversal can work out very well. Years before 1964, the germane idea of a pilgrimage to Mecca incubates in Al-e Ahmad's subconscious mind. But he cannot actually perform it before he has intellectually rationalized this most symbolic expression of a Muslim's belief. He finally provides this intellectual rationalization of his deepest desire to go to Mecca in *Westoxication:* his Islamicity expressed in terms of animosity to "the abode of war" or, more precisely, to "The West." Once, through the writing of *Westoxication,* Al-e Ahmad has rationalized an otherwise inexplicable religiosity in his secular modernity and thus extracted it from his subconscious, he comfortably and without the slightest sense of self-contradiction performs his pilgrimage in 1964. The interval between 1964, when Al-e Ahmad performed his pilgrimage, and 1966, when he published his travel notes, is accounted for, in part, by the time it naturally took to write and publish it, but also by the time necessary to reconcile the a priori intellectualization of the pilgrimage in *Westoxication* and its actual day-to-day record in *Lost in the Crowd.*

Off to the Socialist Paradise

In the same year that Al-e Ahmad performed his pilgrimage to Mecca, he made a trip, over the summer, to the Soviet Union. What a coincidence—if a coincidence! He was invited to go to the Soviet Union to participate in an International Anthropological Conference. By then his ethnographic monographs, *Urazan* (1954) and *Tat-neshin-ha-ye Boluk-e Zahra'* (1955) had been published. This trip took more than a month. Al-e Ahmad completed his notes from this trip in 1966 and published them in a journal, *Baru.* That journal was immediately banned and its issues confiscated by SAVAK. Shams Al-e Ahmad, his brother, is reportedly preparing a new edition of this book.[85]

With Kissinger at Harvard

In the summer of 1965 Al-e Ahmad traveled to the United States and participated in a conference at Harvard hosted by Henry M. Kissinger. This

trip, which lasted close to three months, included a short visit to Canada. He wrote close to 180 pages of notes on this trip, parts of which were rewritten and published in *Karnameh-ye Seh Saleh (The Three-Year Balance Sheet).* But the complete notes have not yet been published.[86]

Four Ka'bahs

Al-e Ahmad's wife, Simin Daneshvar, and his brother, Shams Al-e Ahmad, have a reference to a manuscript Al-e Ahmad was working on during his last days in 1969 which is worth considering here. They both report that he meant to publish four of his travelogues—to Mecca, Jerusalem, Europe and the United States, and the Soviet Union—under the general title of "Four Ka'bahs."[87] "Four directions of prayers" was the telling title that best characterized Al-e Ahmad's wandering soul in search of a communal identity for himself and his generation. Europe and the United States constituted one qiblah, the direction of obedience and prostration, tightly connected under the general rubric of "The West." This was the most compelling, the most appealing, and thus the most negationally charged direction to face and follow. Jerusalem, the new Israeli Jerusalem, was the intermediary direction, once faced in prayer by early Muslims, to which "Easterners" were to look in reconstructing a hopeful and appealing alternative to "The West." The Soviet Union was once the qiblah of Al-e Ahmad's choice, the direction to an earthly and immediate paradise. But ultimately, the qiblah closest to Al-e Ahmad's home and, perhaps, heart was Mecca, where he once saw that the unity of purpose of the Muslim collective self-consciousness could be reengendered. It would be presumptuous on our part to assume any particular preference of qiblah, direction of identity, towards the end of Al-e Ahmad's life. We best leave his wandering soul undetermined among these "four ka'bahs."

Westoxication

In 1967, Al-e Ahmad made two trips, one to Ardabil and Dasht-e Moghan, the other to Tabriz. His trip to Mashhad in 1968 brought him face to face with a man who would later carry forward the major ideological thrust that was his lasting legacy. In Mashhad, Al-e Ahmad met with Ali Shari'ati. His final trip was to Asalem, a village in Gilan, where he died of a heart attack in 1969.

But men of Al-e Ahmad's character live beyond their death, as crucial components of their contemporary spirit. Contributing to the remaking of that spirit was the most significant publication of 1962 for Al-e Ahmad and for the entire formative political culture of the 1960s—the appearance of *Westoxication.* In terms of its appeal to a generation of social activists, this

was perhaps the single most important essay published in modern Iranian history. In creating a wide range of positive and negative reactions, in constituting the very vocabulary of Iranian social criticism in the two decades preceding the Revolution, and in formulating the most essential "anti-Western" disposition of the Islamic revolutionary discourse, no other single text comes even close to *Westoxication*. The term "Westoxication" *(Gharbzadegi)* became so deeply entrenched in the Iranian political vocabulary of the 1960s and beyond that even Ayatollah Khomeini used it when he delivered his lectures and wrote his letters and proclamations in Iraq. No other term has captured the quintessential *Zeitgeist* of a generation like *Gharbzadegi*. Its ideological construction was a matter of political inevitability.

The fact that while Al-e Ahmad severely criticized "Westoxication" as a form of disease he himself, in his own highly alert discourse, was markedly "West-stricken" is an acute, however ironic, testimony to his own insight. He, for example, criticized—and occasionally even ridiculed—the secular-minded intellectuals' almost exclusive attention to "The Western" cultural heritage, at the expense of their own; and yet he himself was chiefly responsible for translating into Persian books by Sartre, Gide, Dostoyevski, Camus, and others. Al-e Ahmad's own "Westoxication," however, was the result of a more complicated process. He obviously believed in the theoretical validity of his own observation about the predominance of "The West" in modern Iranian political culture. He repeatedly referred to the fact that he was surprised at how well the book had been received. But he verified the validity of his own observation, a biting criticism of a social malaise, not on its own merits, but on its proximity to a German writer, Ernst Jünger, of whom he had already translated an essay into Persian. But the theoretical validity of his observation notwithstanding, the mere criticism of "Westoxication" would immediately put Al-e Ahmad on the defensive as a propagator of reactionary obscurantism. The accusation of being an "akhond" was always there. To counter this, he would always be alert to *prove* his "not being an akhond" by demonstrating his affinity for "high Western" culture: art, literature, and, yes, of course, good wine and palatable French cheese.[88]

The patent intention of *Westoxication* was to identify and criticize "Westoxication" as a pervasive social phenomenon that deeply disturbed Al-e Ahmad. By this term he meant the excessive and rather awkward preoccupation of certain influential segments of Iranian society with manners and matters "Western" in origin. He considered this preoccupation a major malady that had gradually but incessantly weakened the Iranian national character, the major component of which he considered to be the Shi'i ethos. "Westoxication," as Al-e Ahmad articulated it, was gradually eroding the essence of the Iranian national spirit more than anything else.

Although he was too close to see it, the extreme modes of Iranian nationalism or Shi'i religiosity were also being expressed in "Westoxicated" terms. And perhaps the greatest irony of Al-e Ahmad's lifelong achievements was that the ideological frame of reference he helped to shape, "the Islamic Ideology," was the deepest, most effective form of "Westoxication" ever. The mere juxtaposition of "Islam," which could not be an "ideology" in its own sacred self-understanding, and "Ideology," which, by definition, is a postreligious proposition, "false" in its Marxist stipulation, belies the contradiction that is resolved only in admitting the troublesome fact that in the very terms and terminologies of their opposing "Westoxication," Muslims have become even more "Westoxicated."

Much accidental affinity has gone into the construction of this text. Although *Westoxication* turned out to be the manifesto of "anti-Westernization," it begins with a verbatim translation of the lyrics of a popular American record. Here, on the very first page of the book, is a token of Al-e Ahmad's self-contradiction, which, in fact, goes a long way towards proving him right in his observations. The message of the American lyric appealed to Al-e Ahmad because it is narrated by a miner who keeps telling St. Peter to forget about his soul since he had sold it to the "company."[89] The narration, in Al-e Ahmad's reconstruction, became a symbolic statement for those who believed that individuals and societies were forfeiting their spiritual and intellectual authorities and legitimacies to abstract and technological entities institutionalized in industrial bureaucracies and deified into "The Machine," both of which abstractions had for Al-e Ahmad a "Western" ring to them.

The story of the publication of *Westoxication* is perhaps the most telling example of how ideas and forces of ideological consequence were generated in the 1960s. The ever-present force of censorship gave, inadvertently, a certain degree of legitimacy to these texts when they appeared in the Iranian underground political culture. The specifics of how Al-e Ahmad's essays were published, confiscated, censored, and secretly republished became the forceful elements of the urban legends that surrounded him. The case of *Westoxication* is the epitome of this crucial part of the political tone of the period. The content of *Westoxication*, or at least an earlier version of it, was first delivered to "the Committee for the Guidance of the Iranian Culture" *(Shora-ye Hedayat-e Farhang-e Iran)* in November-December 1961. When the committee published the proceedings of its meetings in February 1962, Al-e Ahmad's contribution was omitted. He spoke very bitterly about this:

> Ministry of Culture was neither worthy nor capable of publishing this report. . . . The time had not yet come for one of the offices at the Ministry of Culture to publish a report like this officially. The time had come, however, for the honorable members of that committee to tolerate listening to it.[90]

Al-e Ahmad first published *Westoxication* in 1962 privately and circulated it among his friends and cohorts, among whom was Mahmud Human, who taught philosophy at the Teacher's College in Tehran. Prompted by Al-e Ahmad's ideas, Human introduced him to the German nihilist Ernst Jünger. Eventually Human, assisted by Al-e Ahmad, translated a short book of Jünger's, titled, in its Persian translation, *Ubur az Khat (Crossing the Line; Über die Linie* is the German title). Human told Al-e Ahmad that he and Jünger "had seen one issue but with two eyes; had said one thing but with two languages."[91]

Westoxication was intended to be published in the first issue of *Ketab-e Mah*, a journal of the Keyhan Publishing Company. Although the first chapter of Ernst Jünger's *Crossing the Line*, translated by Human and Al-e Ahmad, was published in this issue, *Westoxication* was censored out.[92] Al-e Ahmad subsequently published the first version of the book in October 1962 in one thousand copies. Late in 1963 he revised *Westoxication* for a second, pocket-sized, printing. But this printing was confiscated by the government, and the publisher went bankrupt.[93] Early in 1964 he completely rewrote the book and sent this version to Europe so that Iranian students there could get it published; but they did not. It is this penultimate version that Al-e Ahmad wished to revise but did not and published it rather apologetically.[94]

Al-e Ahmad admits that he borrowed the term "Westoxication" from Ahmad Fardid, a professor of philosophy at the Teachers Training College. Fardid had used the term in the same committee at which Al-e Ahmad had delivered his report.[95]

The Success of a Text

There is no underestimating the influence this single text had on the political culture of the 1960s. From its very inception, and while Al-e Ahmad was still alive, *Westoxication* immediately became a success. Numerous photocopies were prepared and distributed clandestinely in Iran and beyond. Al-e Ahmad himself spoke sarcastically about this state of publication which led to his book being "more trumpeted than discussed."[96] But *Westoxication* was read and discussed in high schools and universities as the first bibliographical item on a hidden syllabus with which the Iranian youth of the 1960s came to political self-consciousness. You were accepted into cliques of political activists by virtue of your ability to quote passages from the text verbatim. This popularity was achieved more on symbolic rites of initiation than on any meaningful critical ground. Al-e Ahmad was acutely aware of the ideologically charged language of his treatise. His apology to the readers belies his aspirations for a more conceptually balanced and theoretically nuanced language: "You must forgive [me]," he said, "that after so many distillations, still my pen is rebellious."[97]

Al-e Ahmad was particularly conscious of the fact that he wrote in a hurried and inaccurate discourse. This self-conscious recognition of the methodic inaccuracies of the language was a feature that both Shari'ati and Motahhari would share with Al-e Ahmad. The common leitmotif of Al-e Ahmad, Shari'ati, Motahhari, and, in fact, most other ideologues of the Islamic Revolution in Iran is that they would have been more accurate and careful in their writings had they only had more time to develop their thoughts. Al-e Ahmad's self-consciousness was best evidenced when he felt he was trespassing into territories of sociological and economic disciplines:

> This report does not operate at a level to provide a definition of these two poles (the East and the West) of economic, political, sociological, psychological planes, or that of two civilizations. [That would] be an accurate task. . . . But as you shall see, not knowing better, I have had to seek help, every once in a while, from certain generalities in these fields.[98]

Again in a reference to his not being qualified to address the problem properly, he gave the example of detecting a coming earthquake:

> At any rate, it is time that the exact features of an earthquake will have to be inquired from the seismograph at a university. Yet, before the seismograph registers anything, the peasant's horse, ignoble as it might be, has escaped to the safe desert. This author wants, at least, to see something with a sense of smell sharper than that of a shepherd's dog, and a sight reaching further than a crow—that others have missed, or have not seen anything . . . [worth] exposing it.[99]

The success of *Westoxication* ought to be attributed to its having captured the imagination of a generation in search of a revolutionary identity, a language of revolt. During the 1940s, the Tudeh Party gave massive institutional and ideological expression to secular tendencies dormant in Iran at least since the turn of the century. During this decade, Islam, as a bona fide and relevant revolutionary language, was in its quietest and most defensive posture. After the 1953 coup and the debacle of the Tudeh Party with the Mosaddeq experience, the predominance of secular ideologies, particularly institutionalized Marxism, began to dwindle. From the post-Mosaddeq era onward, the Iranians became increasingly receptive to other modes of ideological persuasions, whether localized nationalism and liberalism or the non-Tudeh Marxism of various urban guerrilla groups. Al-e Ahmad's *Westoxication*, coming from a former member of the Tudeh Party, suddenly exposed a whole new set of possibilities, in terms of ideological build-ups, for potential revolutionary activities.

To be sure, Al-e Ahmad himself did not grasp the full range of ideological potentials he had made possible:

I myself believe that it was just a discussion of a contemporary problem, and at best one or two years later it would disappear. But as you see the pain is still in the organs, and the sickness increases its circles of contamination wider and wider.[100]

For Al-e Ahmad, "Westoxication" was a kind of disease[101] that had infected the Iranian (Eastern) body. The disease obviously had come from "The West," but the Iranian (or even Islamic) body was weak enough to give it momentum and space to spread. "Westoxication" was thus an abnormality, a distortion, a sickness, an aberration from the normal, the natural, and the healthy. Al-e Ahmad took "The West" and "Westoxication" not merely in their reference to the material dimensions of an advanced level of economic production, but also, and more important, in the ideological sense of a complex organization of intellectual and artistic achievements.[102] This dual power of "The West" made annihilation of "The East" into its ever-larger circles ever more comprehensive and exhaustive.

A Hidden Agenda

In addition to its manifest and stated objectives, *Westoxication* had a hidden, more serious, agenda than simply identifying a social disease. The nonstated, or perhaps even unintended, agenda was, in fact, so hidden that even Al-e Ahmad himself did not fully see it. The hidden, yet actual, agenda of the book was to disclose, to a degree Al-e Ahmad could not have foreseen, the range of possibilities inherent in concocting a vital and ideologically potent Islamic political discourse. Although his secular cohorts failed to see it, Al-e Ahmad's recognition was very simple and derived from mere observations from experienced history. The experiences of the Tobacco Revolt of 1890–91 and the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 had clearly demonstrated that the clerics' call for political action was followed more immediately than the similar intentions of the lay politicians. The Mosaddeq episode had proven to Al-e Ahmad that even lay politicians with closer affinities to the clericals had a better and more nuanced response to their call than those with latent or blatant anticlerical commitments. The Tudeh Party and its catastrophic failures to mobilize a mass movement had proven to him beyond any doubt that alien symbolics, translated and executed by crude, deceptive, and theoretically illiterate locals, had no chance of striking a responsive chord in their presumed constituency. A year after the publication of *Westoxication* (1962), Khomeini's June 1963 revolt would further verify Al-e Ahmad's accurate but limited observation that clerical figures of authority carry more clout with the masses than any other (secular) claimant.

But this observation, accurate and historically verifiable as it was, was

not carried out to its logical theoretical conclusions in *Westoxication*. That was a different matter, realized in other texts by other ideologues. As for Al-e Ahmad, he was too much in the sun. He saw something in the shadow of Shi'ism, but was unable to articulate it precisely. In two successive books, *Westoxication* and "On the Services and Treasons of the Intellectuals," Al-e Ahmad narrowed in on the necessity and viability of the clerical order, politicized into mass revolutionary mobilization. Between that objective and what was finally achieved through the collective effort of all the ideologues of "the Islamic Ideology," there is a considerable distance Al-e Ahmad could not see or measure. It was left primarily to Shari'ati and Motahhari to see through the vast ideological gamut the Shi'i tradition had in store. Other ideologues discussed in this book, knowingly or inadvertently, added further material and momentum, dimensions and angles, to the ideological structure constructed by the Al-e Ahmad-Shari'ati-Motahhari triumverate. The penultimate result, the inevitable revolutionary precondition, was a coming together, in the course of the three to four prerevolutionary decades, of a monolithic claim on the viability of "the Islamic Ideology" as a supreme revolutionary doctrine.

Although Al-e Ahmad merely tangentially saw and addressed, as if in serendipity, this possibility of a Shi'i-born political consciousness and discourse, and although its actual fulfillment was the work of others, still without Al-e Ahmad having actually bridged, in the Iranians' collective political consciousness of the post-World War II era, a necessary epistemological gap between the historical exegencies of the day and the politically mute Islamic discourse of the time, the almost simultaneous development of an engagé language of Shari'ati and Motahhari would not have been as socially relevant as it later proved to be.

Perhaps the crucial factor in this link is Al-e Ahmad's sympathetic treatment of the clerical establishment in an otherwise patently secular discourse. His sympathy for the clerics and his condemnation of the government's crackdown on their demonstrations was quite evident in *Westoxication:*

In a world where the fates of governments and international borders are determined at conference tables not at battlefields . . . preparing parachuters and commando regiments only becomes handy to suppress the demonstration of the university students or to quell the demonstrations of the students at Feyziyyah.[103]

Taking sides with the clerics was concomitant with a deep-rooted, almost obsessive, suspicion of all foreign elements. Thus, sharing a particular proclivity of his generation of political observers, Al-e Ahmad articulated the deep-rooted Iranian propensity for the conspiratorial theories of history, always concomitant with bestowing omnipotent power on the mighty "West" and, by doing so, refusing to assume the slightest responsibility for

national calamities and yet, at the same time, claiming every false presumption of honor for a presumed past glory. Here is how he saw the whole episode of the Mosaddeq experience and the coup that followed it:

> There is a minimum of freedom until 1951 when the oil is nationalized, and then the United States checkmates and the pawns are changed, one after the other. One has to be put into the box of nonexistence,[104] the other checkmated, so that the American capitalism can take away 40% of the consortium shares, precisely the share that belonged to the British Admiralty. And that is the story of 28 Mordad 1332 (19 August 1953) national uprising![105]

Islam and the Necessity of a Modern Political Discourse

Catering to such conspiratorial conceptions of history further endeared the text of Al-e Ahmad's political discourse to its immediate circle of interpreters. Substantiating this feeling of trust and comfort was Al-e Ahmad's attendance to what was most dear to an Iranian sense of self-perceived identity: the Persian language. Thus, in *Westoxication* Al-e Ahmad developed a successful polemical discourse that sought to connect modern political issues to the traditional conceptual setting of the Persian language, perhaps the single most important ingredient in the Iranian identity. The origin of this modern political discourse goes back to the constitutional period and the emergence of a simplified Persian prose, exorcised of its breathtaking formalism. Al-e Ahmad's persistent move towards a historically updated sensitivity in his prose, diction, and discourse does not in any way imply a simultaneous refutation of traditional modes and modalities of writing. In fact, he persistently criticized the Iranian educational system for the artificiality of its approach to classical studies:

> In the programs of all these schools, there is no indication of reliance on tradition, no trace of the culture of the past, no relationship whatsoever between home and school, between society as a whole and the individual.[106]

Such possibilities that energize a religiously charged revolutionary discourse may, however, be turned against it. Attending the specific revolutionary potentials of his received religious language, Al-e Ahmad had to confront its particular political pitfalls. His ultimate attention to the necessity of religious consciousness in uniting and mobilizing the Iranian masses inevitably caused the anger and animosity of many secularists, especially the radical revolutionaries who insisted on instilling a Marxist class consciousness in their purported constituency. These critics have periodically accused Al-e Ahmad of backwardness and fanaticism.[107] And at the same time, many religiously oriented critics have refused to believe in what they consider to be the politically motivated intrusions into the totality of religious dogmas. They, too, refuse to acknowledge Al-e Ahmad except for precisely the opposite charge of opportunism with Islamic doctrines.[108]

Yet there can be little doubt that Al-e Ahmad was quite serious in his conception of an Islamically charged political ideology. In fact, his attention to the essentiality of religious symbolism in the Iranian political culture is gradually surfacing. It has now become evident that he had approached a number of people for a translation of the Qur'an into Persian, but this time with "a more easily understandable language."[109] The existing translations of the Qur'an into Persian were merely verbatim renditions, because of a doctrinal belief in the immutability of the word of God and, as such, rather difficult to comprehend. A politically charged and relevant translation of the Qur'an, despite its doctrinal inhibition, would have put the Holy Text more readily at the disposal of the ideologues of "the Islamic Ideology."

Al-e Ahmad's reawakened alertness to religious symbolics in general and his attention to the Qur'an in particular are also evident in Ayatollah Taleqani's recollections of him. "The first thing you ought to know," Taleqani once wrote about Al-e Ahmad, "is that Jalal was my cousin."[110] Of Al-e Ahmad's father, Taleqani said that he was "dogmatic" in his faith and that Jalal's turn to the Tudeh Party was a reaction to this dogmatism. Taleqani regretted that Al-e Ahmad had been diverted to the Tudeh Party. But he was happy that, in his estimation, "later, after the demise of the Tudeh gang, [and] once his erudition deepened, he *almost* [emphasis is Taleqani's] returned to our own people, to our own habits and customs, and became attracted to religion."[111] It is also interesting to note that Taleqani identified *Westoxication* and *Lost in the Crowd* as Al-e Ahmad's best books. These two books, as noted earlier, have an intimate relationship in revealing the inner tensions of Al-e Ahmad in reconstructing his religious identity. Taleqani also testifies that when he had his classes in Qur'anic exegesis, Al-e Ahmad attended them regularly. "Lately," Taleqani concluded,

> Jalal had become very good [in his faith] and grown interested in the Islamic tradition. Two weeks before his death, we were coming down from Shemiran. He insisted that I should visit him in his cottage in Asalem. . . . He said, "Let's go and chat." I was looking forward to going there when I heard of his death.[112]

When Al-e Ahmad advanced his rather mute ideas of using Islam for revolutionary purposes, he was not intellectually prepared to fortify his proposals with ideological legitimacy. In fact, he was not himself totally aware of the revolutionary potentials of his acutely political "return to self." But as a necessary first step in *Westoxication,* he reached a full recognition of the ineptitude of Iranian political activism (particularly that

of the Tudeh Party) in mobilizing Iranians for a meaningful program of revolt:

> They [the critics] have taken issue with me as to why in this book [*Westoxication*] I have ignored people's struggle in political matters: from the constitutional period to the present time. I have not ignored this struggle. I have passed by it in silence. Because if the leadership of so much struggle (despite all its afflictions, imprisonment, murder, and exile) was proper, our conditions nowadays would have been much better. Of course, the people are not to be blamed for so much defeat. It is the impervious *(ghalat)* leadership of these movements that has caused such an outcome.[113]

"The impervious leadership" was Al-e Ahmad's judgment against the secular (if not outright antireligious) ideologies of the Tudeh and other similar political parties. With *Westoxication*, Al-e Ahmad mobilized whatever was at his limited disposal to point towards an Islamically sensitive discourse. He had much too little to mobilize in terms of his actual working knowledge of the Islamics, but, for the last decade of his life, he was increasingly distanced, insofar as his ideological disposition may be assayed, from the Iranian secular intellectuals. While the disappointment of Al-e Ahmad's secular contemporaries with his apparent religiosity was expressed in mild and benign sarcasm during his lifetime, it turned into rather bitter denouncements after the success of the Islamic Revolution.[114]

Constructing a Revolutionary Identity

Al-e Ahmad's increasing attention to the political validity of the Islamic ideological discourse was not only charged against rival oppositional forces in the secular realm; it also condemned the state-sponsored emphasis on the pre-Islamic Iranian identity. He considered the early Pahlavi insistence on the pre-Islamic history as an essentially "Western" plot to distort the contemporary Iranian notion of historical identity. He accused "The Western" colonial powers and their local cohorts of having

> stirred only one passion, that of the ancient Iran. Passion for Cyrus, Darius, and Zoroaster. Belief in pre-Islamic Iranian history. . . . As if from the Sassanid period until the government of [Reza Shah's] coup d'état only two and a half days had passed, and that even in sleep.[115]

On the whole, Al-e Ahmad considered the early Pahlavi period, the 1920s, an era of massive "Westernization," predicated on a calculated denial of the Iranian Islamic heritage. During this period, even Bayer Aspirin, he complained, advertised its product through an appeal to Achaemanid symbols.[116] There was also a systematic resuscitation of Zoroastrian symbols, congenial to the spirit of denying the relevance of Islam. These were also

designed, Al-e Ahmad proposed, to sever the Iranian link to its Islamic heritage and identity.

That Islamic identity, reinterpreted with contemporary historical exegencies, was instrumental in Al-e Ahmad's reconstruction of a religiously charged political ideology. In opposing a positivistic definition of politics, he clearly demonstrated an acute understanding of how religion and what he called "superstitions" are relevant in the making of a collective political consciousness. In this, he was a pioneer in his generation:

> Even if politics is a science, it is one of those very loosely defined [branches of the] humanities, with its foundations on the latent collective consciousness—from religion to superstitious behaviors, from language to codes of etiquette.[117]

But while attentive to such symbolic features of his political culture, he had no false assumptions about the realities of his historical immediacies. One of his characters in *Nun wa al-Qalam (By the Pen)* proclaims: "I am principally opposed to every kind of government. Because every government is necessarily founded on violence."[118] This almost identical phrasing of Al-e Ahmad's and Weber's definitions of state,[119] stripped his understanding of politics of all false presumptions of justice and fairness about the nature of political activity and led him to search for what was realistically feasible in his society and usable for revolutionary purposes.

Unless properly located in specific historical circumstances, revolutionary purposes shall always remain at a tangential theoretical level, incapable of mobilizing the masses. In *Westoxication*, Al-e Ahmad clearly saw the significance of what he aptly called "the historical consciousness of a nation"[120] that he thought was being jeopardized by the onslaught of "Western" cultural hegemony. The clearest expression of this cultural hegemony was where the myth of the Pahlavi dynasty was being constructed by the colonial power, at which time Al-e Ahmad suggested,

> in order to create confusion in a nation's historical consciousness, they wanted to ignore its immediate historical period and connect the might of the [1920] coup d'état straight to the tails of Cyrus the Great and Ardashir, as if there is no distance of some thirteen hundred years in between. Note this very crucial issue, and that only through this and by loosening the "religio-cultural" background of the contemporary man, would it be possible to pave the way for the onslaught of Westoxication . . . unveiling [of women], the European hat, prevention of religious ceremonies, the demolition of *Tekyeh-ye Dowlat*, prevention of *taʿziyeh*, restricting the ulama'. . . .[121]

The gradual but persistent loss of this crucial dimension of the Iranian collective identity was, in Al-e Ahmad's perception, concurrent with a massive but artificial exposure to manners and matters "Western." His concern with "Westoxication" led him to believe in the immediate, yet artificial, subjugation of the Iranian national character to convoluted per-

ceptions about and from "The West." That subjugation went deep into the primacy of technology in "The West":

> We have not been able to preserve our "cultural-historical" identity in the face of the machine and its inevitable onslaught. Instead, we have been dissolved. The point is that we have not been able to assume a calculated and evaluated position vis-à-vis this monster of our time.[122]

The primacy of the "machine" in "The Western" technological age spelled confusion in the national character of the Iranians. Far from formulating "a calculated and evaluated position vis-à-vis this monster of our time" (that is, the machine), the Iranians of Al-e Ahmad's generation either were massively petrified out of their wits by its awe, were significantly assimilated into its orbit, or rejected it altogether along with its presumed moral corruption. Al-e Ahmad was, of course, far from having formulated a sustained program of exactly how "a calculated and evaluated response" should be attempted. But the operational impact of *Westoxication* was to signal the presence of a process that, if unchecked, would have thoroughly metamorphosized the Iranian collective consciousness in a pseudo-"Western" direction. Put simply, Al-e Ahmad captured the heart of his disillusioned age: a rising political and intellectual elite who increasingly saw themselves as a people wronged, their hopes betrayed, their dreams misinterpreted, all at the hands of a massive abstraction they called "The West." The alienation went deep into the (un)making of the Iranian character:

> We have now altogether forgotten the sense of competition. It has been substituted by the sense of helplessness, the sense of servitude. We no longer see ourselves as deserving any right. . . . Nay, even if we seek to justify an aspect of our this- or other-worldly affairs we evaluate them on their ["The Westerners' "] principles, following the injunctions of their advisers and counselors. We study like them; take census like them; do research like them. But even that is all right, because science has assumed a kind of universal methodology. Scientific methods have no sign of any specific country. But the interesting thing is that we get married like the Westerners do; imitate liberalism like they do; evaluate the world, dress, and write like they do. As if our own principles have all been superseded. . . . Yes, now from those two old rivals finally one has ended up cleaning after the circus; the other one runs the show. And what a show! A pornograhic scandal, stupefying, stultifying assininity. So that they can plunder the oil.[123]

To the degree that the terms corresponded to a collectively presumed reality, the decades of sustained "Westoxication" had not penetrated deep enough to create a sense of self-hatred. Al-e Ahmad's *Westoxication* may, in fact, be considered the alert response of a living organism rejecting what it considered to be a "foreign" element. The "foreign" element, that is, the collectively presumed forceful imposition of "Western" cultural hegemony,

had never been faced in equal terms but as an extension of an uneven relation of power: "The West" vs. (the Islamic) Iran.

A face-to-face interaction with "The West," as presumed in pre-Islamic Iranian history or early Islamic history, would have resulted in much fruitful interpenetration of cultural mores. But on unequal terms with "The West," the Iranian collective consciousness was translating "The Western" military might into the equally mighty moral hegemony. On the surface, Al-e Ahmad's *Westoxication* was a harsh and lasting blow against "The Western" morality and its presumed universal validity. But in effect it could not but further substantiate the mythical construction of "The West" as the most compelling generalized "Other" in the Iranian "Self"-understanding. In a celebrated and also much disputed passage in *Westoxication*, Al-e Ahmad stated:

> that the religious leader siding with *mashru'eh* [= literally "based on religious law," a term coined to rhyme but negate *mashruteh*, "Constitutionalism"] was hanged in the course of the Constitutional Revolution was itself a sign of retreat [in the face of overflowing "Westernization"]. I agree . . . that the martyred master [Shaykh Fazlollah] Nuri had to be hanged not because he opposed "Constitutionalism"—which he initially had supported—but because he had favored a form of government based on sacred Islamic law. But I also add that because he defended the totality of Islam. . . . At any rate, it is from that day that the seal of Westoxication like a stigma was cauterized on our brow. And thus I consider the body of that most revered [man] upon the gallows a flag mounted on the roof of this land as a sign of the predomination of Westoxication after a two-hundred-year struggle.[124]

Besieged by the overwhelming force of the Constitutionalists to "Westernize" the Iranian government, Shaykh Fazlollah Nuri had been killed by secular Westoxicated liberals so that Islam would be eliminated as a viable political force. Recognizing the significance of Islam as a legitimate source of a revolutionary ideology, Al-e Ahmad sought to resuscitate the opposition to the influx of "Western" ideological forces during the constitutional period.

Shaykh Fadlollah Nuri was defeated and hanged and his pleas silenced. "Westernization" triumphed over the local forces of the Islamic culture and religion. In order to carry out the resurrection and the political requirements of an Islamically charged ideology, a new breed of intellectuals was needed. In *Westoxication*, Al-e Ahmad's notion of an intellectual par excellence returned to the nineteenth-century models.

> If in those days [the nineteenth century] only Atabak and Amir Kabir were subjects of indoctrination, each a wise old man with a bundle of experience gained in a lifetime and through their traditions and oriental criteria, and with their feet fettered with beliefs, customs, and habits of this part of the world, nowadays the subject of conversion or indoctrination of European admirers is the group of intellectuals who

are deeply Westoxicated, lacking both the stamina of Atabak and Amir Kabir, and the shrewdness of Hajj Mirza Aqasi.[125]

What is remarkable here is that as late as the mid-1960s—or as early as the 1960s in retrospect—Al-e Ahmad perceived "age," "experience," "tradition," "Oriental criteria," "beliefs," "customs," and "habits" as valid and bona fide principles in terms of which an Iranian intellectual should be characterized and with which matters of collective behavior, constructive or revolutionary, organized. Such perceptions of political propriety would put Al-e Ahmad immediately at odds with his secular intellectual cohorts. But at the same time it would make him more conscious of the hidden possibilities of the Shi'i political culture.

Hidden Possibilities

Al-e Ahmad's intuitive sensitivities to the Shi'i political culture began to discern a range of possibilities within the received specifics of people's shared memory. Without, for example, having any serious grasp of the juridical complexities of the question of "the Hidden Imam," he had an acute understanding of the political ramifications of this canonical belief:

90 percent of the dearly beloved people of this country think of the government as the instrument of tyranny, and the usurper of the legitimate right of "His Majesty the Prince of the Age, May God Almighty Hasten His Appearance." So they have every right not to pay their taxes, cheat the government authorities, escape conscription through all kinds of excuses, and don't give a straight answer to any census official.[126]

Because of the prevalence of such sentiments, people were more conducive to calls for revolutionary mobilizations when issued by religious authorities. The example in modern Iranian history that Al-e Ahmad thought best demonstrated how the common Islamic bounds can be used politically was the episode of the nationalization of oil by Mosaddeq in the early 1950s. Al-e Ahmad ardently believed that if the nationalization of oil movement was successful, it was due to a symbiotic cooperation, a coincidence of interest, between political and religious forces, that is, between Mosaddeq and some of the clerical elements:

The leaders in those days were shrewd enough to lead the struggle in such a way that through collaboration with the religious leaders every uneducated common person would identify the government as the instrument of tyranny which gave the oil to the [British] company and then treated its own subjects harshly. This is the greatest lesson that intellectuals and [political] leaders ought to have learned from that incident.[127]

Whereas here, and elsewhere, Al-e Ahmad thought of using the existing and operative religious sentiments politically, Shari'ati would go one step

further and seek to instill new and powerful political commitments by selectively reactivating aspects of Islamic historical and mythological tradition. Motahhari, in turn, would lend intellectual credence to Al-e Ahmad's timid but groundbreaking suggestions and Shari'ati's revolutionary achievements. In a footnote to the above passage, Al-e Ahmad would also suggest, again tacitly and through a reference to a French observer,[128] that not only in Iran but throughout the Muslim world the infusion of religious sentiments into politics is bound to produce effective results. This is attainable, Al-e Ahmad argued through Grousset, despite the Sunni-Shi'i schism that divides Iranians from most of the Arabs. At the end of this footnote,[129] Al-e Ahmad repeats that "what I have said in concealment, this [French] gentleman has said a bit more clearly," which is again a reference to how openly Al-e Ahmad was willing, or able, to discuss his notion of the political uses of Islam. This is a kind of dual censorship on Al-e Ahmad's part: one obviously by the government officials, the other from the religious establishment in Qom, of whose reactions to suggestions of the political uses of Islam, with the exception of Khomeini, he was unsure.

It is worth remembering that until 1961—that is, a year before the publication of *Westoxication*—Ayatollah Borujerdi was the supreme juridical figure in Iran. His political quietism would make Al-e Ahmad doubtful of how actively the religious establishment would react to his ideas. But a year after the publication of *Westoxication,* Khomeini's June 1963 uprising against the Shah would inevitably leave Al-e Ahmad more convinced of the serious implications of his ideas.

Al-e Ahmad's conviction was well founded. The key concept of "Westoxication" had reached deep into the collective political commitments of his contemporaries, and he thought of taking full advantage of that:

let's stick to something, perhaps we can hold on to our identity. Not the way Turkey ended up. You see what I mean? That's why I keep thinking about this issue, and am rather hoping that after five years these dime-a-dozen things I have said in *Westoxication* will have subsided, like water, under the foundation. . . . [Thus the book] is still alive. While I thought it would not last for two months, and it shall die out, that is to say, it would be forgotten. But apparently it has not. Because they still talk about it.[130]

Al-e Ahmad's political concern for the revolutionary uses of Islam, however, cannot in any way be interpreted as concern for the future relevance of religion, understood in an abstract sense. In fact, he clearly saw how religion and other traditional thrusts of collective symbolics could be used effectively for counterrevolutionary and colonialist objectives:

In the kind of world we live in, the more national boundaries are tightened, the more powerful the ethnic traditions, the more serious the raw ambitions of ye old

king, the more widespread the religious dogmas, so much deeper would be the jail dungeons of nations and peoples.[131]

"On the Services and Treasons of the Intellectuals"

The final formulation of Al-e Ahmad's political uses of Islam was to be realized in his long essay, *Dar Khedmat va Khiyanat-e Roshanfekran*, "On the Services and Treasons of the Intellectuals" (hereafter "On the Intellectuals"). This essay was difficult to publish.[132] Al-e Ahmad began working on the text of "On the Intellectuals" right after Khomeini's 1963 uprising and its bloody suppression.[133] He thought the Iranian secular intellectuals were to blame for the failure of the movement.[134] At one of his regular weekly luncheons with some of his Dar al-Fonun and Tudeh Party friends, Al-e Ahmad harshly criticized his former Tudeh comrades and accused them of sharing responsibility for the failure of the movement.[135] In fact, after Al-e Ahmad's violent criticism, these weekly luncheons were effectively cancelled.

"On the Intellectuals" is the strongest and most eloquently argued condemnation of the secular intellectuals. With a combined experience of more than three decades in Iranian political culture, Al-e Ahmad concluded that the secular intellectuals were a spineless bunch of self-centered hypocrites who could only look to "The West" for hopes, aspirations, and guidance:

> The Iranian intellectual has gradually turned into a root which is not [planted] in the soil of this land. He always has his eyes on Europe, and always dreams of escaping there. . . . When the BBC [the British Broadcasting Corporation] insults the deposed First Person [Reza Shah] of the ruling class personally, the intellectual cannot but jump on the bandwagon! Thus all of a sudden everyone joins the Tudeh Party, . . . condemning religion as reactionary, and the government as despotic.[136]

Here Al-e Ahmad took the Tudeh Party as the supreme example of a group of "rootless" secular intellectuals. His accusations went much further than that. He clearly accused the Tudeh Party, and all its historical experience, of not merely mistakes but of graver misdeeds:

> During all this time [the 1940s], it was only the Tudeh Party that had a voice and moved a group of people and had some impact, upon which there were also many mistakes, wrongdoings, and even treason, and for these very reasons we seceded from it in 1948.[137]

Upon such conclusions, Al-e Ahmad moved towards a more realistic understanding of the Iranian political culture. He clearly saw what set of specific operations of collective symbols could eventually move the people. Specific historical episodes have demonstrated that revolutionary movements can be successful only when directed by figures and symbolics of authority

closest to the masses of Iranian sentiments. A good example occurred during the Mosaddeq era when

> in the nationalization of oil episode, because the clerics and liberal intellectuals of the day were united in their anticolonial move, people of the street were mobilized, and the movement was ultimately so powerful that for breaking it the [oil] companies had to intervene directly.[138]

Al-e Ahmad's principal criticism of the Tudeh Party, and the main experience he took away from his term with it, particularly in the course of the Mosaddeq episode, was its inability to translate grandiloquent Marxist ideals into practical local issues, attuned to the specifics of the Iranian political culture. "Because the Tudeh Party could not give itself local and national form, and thus solve people's problems," Al-e Ahmad thought, "it could not but found its roots on waves, not in the social depth."[139] Because the Tudeh Party failed to respond to the most basic concerns of its constituency, it could not but add to the existing problems, "nay it was the source of many problems in the country."[140]

As Al-e Ahmad saw it, particularly towards the end of his life, the clerical organization, as a viable political apparatus, was potentially capable of moving and mobilizing the nation. Among his chief criticisms of the Tudeh Party was its refusal to work in coalition with such socialist movements as the Third Force, which he and Khalil Maleki had founded upon their break with the Party in 1948, or with the National Front, which Al-e Ahmad thought robbed the Tudeh Party of all its potential grassroots constituency and thus public legitimacy, and most of all directly with the clerics:

> Thus while the Tudeh Party was present, no other ideological order could find the necessary persistence and stamina so that when that Party was removed from the scene, there could be a kind of substitute.[141]

To be sure, Al-e Ahmad slightly exaggerates here the lack of an alternative political ideology to mobilize discontent. It is true that the Tudeh Party had monopolized the Iranian political scene for some time. But this monopoly was the result of two things. First, the Tudeh Party offered a new, provocative, and unprecedented mode of political consciousness that appealed to the young and the restless. Second, the Tudeh Party was the most effectively organized political group in modern Iranian history. Through effective strategies—which did not shy away from Machiavellian uses of terror, intimidation, campaigns of lies and libel, fabrication of ethical misconduct, pacification of opponents by gangs of thugs, and even assassination of ideological adversaries—the Tudeh Party had maintained its ideological and organizational supremacy over the Iranian political scene. But all these efforts could not but remain at a superficial level, incapable of substituting

the larger, deeper, and more pervasive common myths of the Shi'i political culture—the clericals its primary custodians.

It is precisely as "a kind of substitute" that Al-e Ahmad perceived the Shi'i clerical organization and its potential political machinery. Whatever the degree of his sincere religiosity and piety, resumed in the latter part of his life, a disposition that cannot be ascertained in any meaningful way, Al-e Ahmad did realize the great political force potentially present in the Shi'i clerical order. His recognition of this revolutionary urge in the political dimension of Shi'ism was a direct response to, or recognition of, the deficiencies in the experience of the Tudeh Party. In one sentence, Al-e Ahmad summarized the success and failure of the Party:

On one hand it criticized the government as the representative of the ruling class (and that was its strength and the cause of its expansion); and on the other hand it criticized every [other] ideological and religious movement (and that was its weakness and the cause of its failure).[142]

The effective alienation of the Tudeh Party from the society it was supposed to lead became particularly evident during the nationalization of oil episode, when Mosaddeq championed this cause and yet the Tudeh Party opposed it and sought to safeguard the Iranian oil fields in the North for their Russian comrades. In a memorable passage in "On the Intellectuals" there is a genuine and heartfelt sense of guilt and shame in Al-e Ahmad when he captures the precise moment of his disenchantment with the Tudeh Party:

There was a time when there was the Tudeh Party. It had something to say for itself. It had launched a revolution. It tackled colonialism. It defended the workers and the peasants. And what great ideals it had! What enthusiasm it generated! We were young and members of the Tudeh Party, not having the slightest idea who was pulling the strings. We were evading our youth and collecting experience. But [the disillusion] started for me the day I was in charge of security and order in one of the Party's demonstrations, on behalf of Kaftardze's mission to secure the North oil. . . . From the entrance of the Tudeh Party headquarters (on Ferdowsi Avenue) to Mokhberoldoleh crossroads: what a fuss I made with the security brassard around my arm. But at the beginning of Shah-ahad [Street] I had a glimpse of the Russian personnel carriers in the street, all in a row, full of soldiers, watching over and protecting our demonstration. All of a sudden I was startled and became so ashamed that I [left the demonstration,] headed into Sayyid Hashim alley, and tossed my brassard [into the air].[143]

Al-e Ahmad saw the defeat of not only the Tudeh Party, with its socialist disposition, but also that of the National Front, with its nationalist posture, as specific symptoms in the "Westoxication" syndrome. In yet another memorable passage in "On the Intellectuals," he gave a full and accurate assessment of why he thought imported ideologies were incapable of moving the Iranian masses for specific revolutionary purposes:

If the Tudeh Party was defeated, and so was the National Front, . . . it is because of this principal reason that all these gentlemen have ventured into the battlefield of politics with imported ideas: Bragging about Communism and Socialism (and even that in secret and not openly), and not even trying to conform those "isms" to the local conditions. [This resulted in] confronting the foundations of people's traditional beliefs. In the general scheme of politics, [they] completely disregarded the clerics. (If the National Front had a larger impact on people in a shorter time [than the Tudeh Party], it was because it relied on the clerics.) In the absence of a massive proletariate, pretending to defend the benefits of a working class, and in the presence of the great majority of the peasants, completely ignoring the problems of peasantry and lands, and other problems that I cannot elaborate [here, contributed to the defeat of the Tudeh Party].[144]

Al-e Ahmad praised the National Front precisely for its having accommodated both religious sentiments and the clerical order:

The National Front . . . was the meeting place of anticolonial parties, and it was the first post-[Constitutional] Revolutionary political organization to have given credit to the clerics, and precisely for this reason it had more grassroots support.[145]

He thus gradually gathered sweeping evidence from the world political scene to support his pointing out the uses of religious language in political mobilization:

If we look at it from a Marxist point of view, it is a time that "religion = opium of the masses" is still a universal truism for Communist parties who wish to substitute [for religion] another sacred tradition. But take a look at Ghandi's strategies. In India he waged a war against colonialism with the aid of religion. Or [consider] what the Vietnamese Buddhists did in helping the Viet Cong; or what is happening in the European confusion with the participation of the left wing of the [Christian] church [in politics] or what went on in Algeria to get rid of the French; or what happened in our own country during the Tobacco Revolt, the Constitutional period, in nationalization [of oil], and in June 1963.[146]

It was precisely in recognition of such great revolutionary potentials in religion that, despite his great admiration for Khalil Maleki, Al-e Ahmad was gradually drifting away from him:

The other [cause of disagreement between Maleki and me] is the importance I have found for the clerics as a subject of study in the political conditions of the society we live in. Maleki tells me, "You have become an Akhond," or else he says, "You have become an anarchist" or things of that sort.[147]

The Intellectuals and the Clerics

Al-e Ahmad further rehistoricized his detection of revolutionary potentials in Shi'ism. In retrospect, he considered two major social forces as instrumental in the course of the Constitutional Revolution: the intellectuals and

the clerics. He also thought the generation of 1920–1940 was chiefly responsible for depleting the revolutionary vigor of these two forces through "Zoroastrianism, Ferdowsiism, Kasraviism, and Bahaiism."[148] These were frivolous, but conspiratorially planned according to Al-e Ahmad, distractions through which the revolutionary power of the alliance between the traditionally sensitive intellectuals and the clerics was uselessly exhausted. Al-e Ahmad's admiration for Mosaddeq, in fact, is precisely in terms that identify him as a politician in touch with realities of his cultural context, which are also the terms in which the Tudeh Party was bound to be defeated. In Al-e Ahmad's view, Mosaddeq was decent enough not to blame his political failure on "the scarcity of instruments, insufficient cadre, and unfavorable conditions for leadership,"[149] an obvious reference to such excuses by the leaders of the Tudeh Party. Consequently, Al-e Ahmad saw Khomeini's June 1963 uprising as further support for his thesis that in order to move the Iranian masses to revolutionary engagement, they ought to be addressed in the religious language most immediate to them: a repoliticized Shi'ism.

Al-e Ahmad's great admiration for Khalil Maleki, of whom he once said, "in social issues he is my master, and that of many other contemporary intellectuals,"[150] was expressed precisely in terms of his having modified socialism to local exegencies. He admired Maleki for having taken "strength from this very soil" and having breathed "in this very climate."[151] He credited Maleki for being a "turning point in [changing] Stalinist communism to democratic socialism."[152] Because of his sensitivities to local factors and his willingness to modify grand theoretical schemes to particular cultural exegencies, Maleki, according to Al-e Ahmad, was able "to break with Stalinism before Tito, say what Khrushchev said before the Twentieth Communist party congress, and foretell the Sino-Soviet conflict long before it happened."[153]

Al-e Ahmad's careful and accurate observation of the Iranian political scene, after almost three decades of being active in it, was that

> you can only be effective in politics, or in the affairs of a society, when you have weighed the degree of receptivity or tolerance of that society vis-à-vis your ideas. And in order to achieve this measure, you will have to have known that society, its traditions, history, the factors instrumental in making its collective belief, forces that mobilize its masses in the streets, and then its silence, its sitting silently at home.[154]

In "On the Intellectuals," Al-e Ahmad would reassert his earlier conviction that the loss of Iranian identity and alienation from the potential revolutionary uses that Islam can be put into was essentially a "Western colonial scheme":

> the onslaught of Colonialism is not merely to plunder the raw mineral material and human powers . . . from the colonies. It also devastates the language, the customs, the music, the ethics, and the religion of the colonized lands.[155]

And then he would sarcastically ask: "But is it fair for the Iranian intellectual to be an accomplice to colonialists instead of confronting them on all fronts?"[156] The Iranian secular intellectuals, in Al-e Ahmad's estimation, concurred with "The Western" colonialists in denying the contemporary relevance and modern applicability of Islam—as either a formative or a transformative political force.

Al-e Ahmad had a particular conception of "the intellectuals" as a social grouping. Although he did not think they shared all the attributes of the group, he still considered the clerics and the military personnel among the intellectuals, wondered why his European sources did not realize this, and thus finally decided that the omission was due to the secular and democratic nature of "The Western" perspectives.[157] The reason he includes these two social groupings among the intellectuals has to do with what he called "social readership"[158] in his definition of "the intellectual." The importance of his inclusion of the clerics in particular among the intellectuals is the expansion of an otherwise exclusively secular intelligentsia to include those who institutionally operate in a religious frame of reference. This would, in turn, open the society at large to the political and ideological implications of the clerical group.

In order to demonstrate the supremacy and higher legitimacy of religious symbols over the secular frames of political reference, Al-e Ahmad pointed out a crucial fact of his immediate history. In his poignant comparisons of the religious and political authority, he observed that while people paid their religious taxes willingly and voluntarily, the governmental taxes still had to be forcefully exacted from them.[159] He also made a crucial distinction between the political authority, embodied in the army, which was totally dependent on the state apparatus, and the religious authority, institutionalized in the clerical order, which was directly connected to the society.[160] This distinction between state and society had scarcely been considered by any contemporary observer of modern Iranian history. With a remarkably clear and precise description, Al-e Ahmad attributed political authority to the clericals without the slightest awareness of the juridical and doctrinal issues involved:

> Because in the context of the Shi'i faith, the clerics claim political authority on behalf of the [Twelfth] Infallible Imam, that is to say, [because] they principally and by way of deputyship constitute a kind of competition for the political authority, we have occasionally witnessed violent oppositions, or even revolts, launched by the clerics against the powers that be.[161]

This assessment of the clericals' political authority was formulated through a specifically historical, as opposed to doctrinal, reading of Shi'ism.

In reading Al-e Ahmad's "On the Intellectuals" we should not be distracted by his occasionally inconsistent logic, where he once considers the clericals and the military officers as intellectuals[162] and then later as two distinct groups different from the intellectuals.[163] What we should pay attention to is his observation that in the post-Constitutional period the role of the military as the legitimating force of the political authority has increased, while at the same time the clericals have lost their propensity to command the ideological obedience of their constituency.[164] Al-e Ahmad's essential problem in his conceptualization of the "intellectuals" was his inability to distinguish between the social functions of a class and the individual capabilities, such as erudition, of its constituent members. Thus he considered the army officers as intellectuals, despite his repeated recognition[165] that they could not but collectively defend the status quo. But despite such inconsistencies, "On the Intellectuals" is Al-e Ahmad's most sweeping condemnation of all sorts of secular ideologies and a simultaneous affirmation of the positive role religion can and should play in politics.

The Legacy of Jalal Al-e Ahmad

Al-e Ahmad's significance in the course and outcome of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 can scarcely be overemphasized. Sayyid Ali Khamenei, the present "leader" of the Islamic Republic, has called Jalal Al-e Ahmad, playing on the meaning of his name, "the majesty of the men of letters" and "the man who . . . stood at the summit of the literature of resistance."[166] Remote as he has been from the actual scene of Iranian intellectual life of the 1950s and 1960s, even Mohamammad Ali Jamalzadeh, the founding father of modern Persian fiction, has pointed out that

> there is no doubt that [Al-e Ahmad] has had a considerable role in preparing the groundwork for the national uprising, and we all have to consider ourselves indebted to his determination, valor, and sufferings.[167]

Al-e Ahmad's disciples are quick to point out, in opposing his Marxist critics, the accuracy of his ideas about the religious texture of the Iranian society. "The victory of the Revolution," one of these disciples attests,

> is a reason for the accuracy and extraordinarily precise coordination of Jalal [Al-e Ahmad]'s theory with the people's class roots, as well as with their aspirations in movements and revolutions.[168]

Al-e Ahmad has been called "the greatest artist of our time" or even "a huge trailer, an eighteen-wheeler Mack."[169] Although it is very difficult to assess the exact number of editions through which Al-e Ahmad's books have been circulated, perhaps one statement by a follower of his is not too unrealistic:

> after so many legal and illegal printings of Jalal [Al-e Ahmad]'s works, still every one of his books is reprinted at least once every year. And this is a testimony to the persistent and ever larger popularity of his writings.[170]

The same follower also points out the innumerable translations, anthologies, and selections of Al-e Ahmad's works that appear every year. There are also books, stories, poems (some posthumously composed for Al-e Ahmad) that appear every year.[171]

Al-e Ahmad was a turning point in the development of modern revolutionary discourse in Iran. He acutely realized the futility of an overtly secular language in reaching a politically significant audience. His years of affinity with the Tudeh Party had convinced him that a more direct, intimate, and indigenous language is needed before a mass audience, capable of moving a revolutionary machinery, is reached. Al-e Ahmad's revolutionary discourse thus emerged from an essentially secular context and gradually plunged deeper into a religious semantics. His affiliations first with the concocted rationalism of Ahmad Kasravi and then with the imported socialism of the Tudeh Party gave him ample opportunity to realize the futility and political inefficiency of secular ideologies. His *Westoxication* was a serious attempt to find a political discourse that relates effectively the stated ideological objectives of a revolutionary movement to the Iranian audience.

Beyond, or perhaps in conjunction with, his indispensable contribution to the making of "the Islamic Ideology," Al-e Ahmad's primary and singular achievement as a writer was to wed politics to literature. He wrote fictions highly sensitive to political issues. He offered guidelines of how literature should "confront" life. But for a political literature to become viable and legitimate, the most crucial factor is securing a sustained audience. Al-e Ahmad thus favored a relocation of artistic patronage from the court to "the people." But at the same time he realized what was inherent in this transition. Whereas in former days all a poet had to do was secure the patronage of a king, nowadays poets were addressing "the people," but without having any institutional recognition from that vast abstraction. The result was a total confusion of what constituted the audience in most of his contemporary poetry. Al-e Ahmad could only leave the paradox at that dead end.

Al-e Ahmad was surprisingly, for his generation of intellectuals, sensitive to common mythologies. Of the suicide of Takhti, a world-champion wrestler who according to public legend was believed to have been killed by the

government or one of the Shah's brothers or SAVAK (there were variations in the urban legend), he observed:

> let's see whether this popular legend making is not a kind of defense mechanism for the ordinary man in the street in order to protect his frightened honor in the face of the dominant tyranny, and thus remain hopeful?[172]

By attending the immediate and far-reaching efficacy of such legend-making proclivities among his contemporaries, Al-e Ahmad inevitably became a legend himself. The cultural hero of a whole generation of political consciousness, Al-e Ahmad became a phenomenon. That is perhaps less the inevitable outcome of who he actually was or what he actually achieved than perhaps, more important, who he was turned into posthumously. If upon his death a man manages to have as many devout diehards—who think he was the greatest thing to have ever happened in the Iranian intellectual history—as staunch enemies—who think he was an absolute nobody—he has undoubtedly secured a niche for himself in the annals of his time. On the fortieth day of Al-e Ahmad's death, there was a religious ceremony in the mosque of Molla Hashem in Mashhad, which both his widow, Simin Daneshvar, and his brother, Shams Al-e Ahmad, attended. That this traditional day of mourning and remembrance was held in a mosque in Mashhad, the religious capital of the Shi'i Iran and that his widow and brother attended this gathering are telling factors of how Jalal Al-e Ahmad's lasting significance must be seen primarily in a religious context. On this occasion, one of Al-e Ahmad's diehards issued a staunch and harsh warning against his Marxist critics: "Against his enemies, we shall defend Jalal with all means, resolutely, and with utmost vigor."[173]

The trajectory of Jalal Al-e Ahmad's biography demonstrates the remarkable passage through which he reached the perhaps inevitable conclusion of a greater affinity for the innate religious traits of his received and contemporary political culture. He began his life in a tightly religious family. He grew up under the compelling spell of a clerical father who, besieged by the universal secular trends of his age, could only demand from his household a more obedient adherence to principles he held sacred. Al-e Ahmad's childhood and early education were thus spent with a deep inculcation of a religiously mandated ethical rectitude that would necessarily put him at odds with an increasing number of his cohorts attracted to the secular lure of the imported alternatives to religious truths and sentiments.

At Dar al-Fonun, Al-e Ahmad received a secular education devised and mandated by the regime of a secular autocrat determined to give a "modern" look to his nation. As he continued to adhere to as much of his religious tenets as his hostile environment would permit, Al-e Ahmad was gradually, but ever so persistently, affected by the new ideals and sentiments to which he was exposed at a nonseminarian learning center. Having

abandoned the course of scholastic learning in Najaf and upon his graduation from high school, he was attracted to the positivistic and severely anticlerical ideas of Ahmad Kasravi. It is rather difficult to imagine how Al-e Ahmad could cope with such harsh anticlericalism given his own immediate background. The fact remains, however, that Kasravi acted as a springboard for Al-e Ahmad to jump right into the Tudeh Party. Kasravi's positivism distanced Al-e Ahmad considerably from his religious upbringing. He could have easily been attracted to Kasravi's brand of propagating a rational society devoid of all sentimentalism and superstition. From that crucial step into Kasravi's concocted social positivism, Al-e Ahmad took the next logical step and adopted the crudely imported socialism of the Tudeh Party.

The Tudeh Party gave Al-e Ahmad ample opportunity to shed all but a semblance of his religiosity. At the same time, his tenure as a member of the Tudeh Party provided him with the most cherished chance to devote himself wholeheartedly to the supreme ideals of a socialist paradise. The early 1940s were years of high hopes and great expectations for the newly secularized intellectuals like Al-e Ahmad who thought themselves on the verge of a cataclysmic entrance into the promised land. With the failure of the Tudeh Party to achieve, in any meaningful degree, its stated and hidden agenda of political acculturation in Iran, Al-e Ahmad was severely disillusioned with his involvement with the Party. The disillusion was not severe enough, however, to disrupt Al-e Ahmad's still committed belief in organized political activity under a patently secular ideology. Thus, upon his resignation from the Tudeh Party, he followed through a number of successive political activities, such as the Third Force, in many of which he was a close associate of Khalil Maleki. The primary character of these post-Tudeh Party activities was a more noticeable distance from ideological dogmatism and a healthier respect for moderate socialist concerns that are more sensitive to specific Iranian exegencies.

But even these diverse and haphazard political activities came to perhaps an inevitable closure. Al-e Ahmad began, in the late 1940s, a long and sustained process of soul searching and a markedly individualistic introspection. His preoccupation with Dostoyevski and Camus, translating them into Persian and being concerned with their ideas, is a suggestive mark of his increasing attention to existentialist individualism, as opposed to the essentialist socialism à la Tudeh Party. But even beyond a therapeutic attention to existentialism, Al-e Ahmad found a number of crucial substitutes, or ideological surrogates, for political activity in literature, in anthropological field trips to remote parts of the country, and in extensive traveling in and out of Iran. These substitutes all functioned to broaden his perception of politics and its innate and substantive relations to the larger context of cultural imperatives.

Three major works came out of this existentialist and individualistic period: *Westoxication*, *Lost in the Crowd*, and "On the Intellectuals." Each of these texts, in its own particular way, represents a specific aspect of Al-e Ahmad as a maverick intellectual who had reached certain conclusions about the nature and function of politics in his received culture. The significant mark of all three works is their going against the main grain of Al-e Ahmad's secular intellectual cohorts. And he could not have achieved this without first having secured a considerable distance and thus independence from the dominant political sentiments and from the overwhelming organizational urges that marked the ideological needs of his generation. Despite his religious background, Al-e Ahmad's home was with the secular intellectuals. From the center of this secular heartland in Tehran, he launched his ideological *coup d'état*, more in the form of a *coup de gifle*, against it.

Westoxication, the textual delivery of that *coup de gifle*, is a perceptive and totally anticlimactic statement. Al-e Ahmad could deliver that statement only in the solitude of his political thought, against the prevalent trend of "Westernization" in the course of which selective and imaginary aspects of European and/or American perceptions were being transplanted to substitute a monolithic and equally imaginative vision of the Iranian "historical" identity. To be sure, Al-e Ahmad himself had a monolithic and mythic view of "The West" that only mirrored the monolithic and mythical view of "The West" propagated by the secular intellectuals at large, a view that Al-e Ahmad had set out to negate. Thus, he totally appropriated and considerably substantiated the monolithic and imaginative view of "The West" that his secular contemporaries had created as an object of veneration. His uniqueness, however, was in negating and opposing this colonialistic and hegemonic grip that "The West" had over the minds and souls of his contemporaries.

Equally negational and anticlimactic was Al-e Ahmad's hajj pilgrimage and the publication of his subsequent travel notes, *Lost in the Crowd*. No secular intellectual contemporary of Al-e Ahmad made a "hajj pilgrimage" or, even more important, made a public confession of it. It was simply too much of an anachronism for a secular intellectual to stand. But in the solitude and certainty of his political, and perhaps even religious, concerns, Al-e Ahmad made the hajj pilgrimage and made a public statement of it just for the record. Al-e Ahmad could not have made that pilgrimage and would not have made a public statement of it had it not been for the gradual accumulation of an intellectual stamina in the course of his post-Tudeh Party experiences. The net result of his hajj pilgrimage and the political impact of *Lost in the Crowd* was an acute recognition of the revolutionary potential at the Muslim disposal, a recognition that neither Al-e Ahmad's former fellow Tudeh comrades could see nor his post-Tudeh secular intellectual cohorts could grasp.

But ultimately, "On the Intellectuals" articulated beyond any level previously attained the perhaps inevitable conclusion that for massive political mobilization the revolutionary ideologues had to appeal, ever so earnestly, to religious symbols. In the course of achieving this political wisdom, Al-e Ahmad had already been much distanced from the majority of his fellow intellectuals, invincibly ignorant of the power of the old myth and elusively having set upon themselves the stupendous task of creating, validating, and operating new ones. The new illusion, awkward and lacking in its partial grip over the Iranian imagination, was no match for the old and engaging enchantment.

By the time Al-e Ahmad had accumulated his wisdom from the Tudeh Party experience and had assumed the arduous task of individually (as opposed to collectively) seeking an existentialist (as opposed to an essentialist) understanding of his political situation, he reached, primarily through *Lost in the Crowd*, as an intermediary between *Westoxication* and "On the Intellectuals," the metaphysical truth of his political culture. At the height of that metaphysical truth stood the time-honored mores and moralities upon which archetypal modes of obedience, political and otherwise, were registered and articulated. By disposition, or perhaps by the sheer exhaustion of his energies, Al-e Ahmad could only point towards the critical path upon which ancient religions meet the exacting demands of contemporary politics. The actual articulation and pronouncement of that critical path remained for others—Shari'ati and Motahhari chief among them—to achieve.

Jalal Al-e Ahmad

What's in a name? Affection. An affection that breeds authority. "Jalal Al-e Ahmad" was a name. But it became a phenomenon that defined, in acceptance or denial, a generation. He was more "Al-e Ahmad" than "Jalal." "Jalal" was more intimate and immediate, fearfully near the center, with no necessary distance. His wife would call him "Jalal." "My husband Jalal" was the title she gave to a personal narrative about him. "Al-e Ahmad," however, was the name by which the rest of the world would know and address him. A ring of affection, masses of inarticulate sentiments, gathered around the name "Al-e Ahmad." "Have you read Al-e Ahmad's letter to Jamalzadeh?" For *Westoxication* you need not have even said "Al-e Ahmad." "Did you know that Americans have translated *Gharbzadegi*, and that they read it in their universities?" The same for *The School Principal*, or any other work of Al-e Ahmad, fiction or otherwise. For others you needed to have said them together, the author and the book: Hedayat's *Buf-e Kur*, Bozorg Alavi's *Chashm-ha-yash*, Sadeq Chubak's *Tangsir*, etc. But not for him. For Al-e Ahmad the mere titles contained all

the necessary references. "SAVAK has confiscated *Zan-e Ziyadi* again." But even in unspoken reference, "Al-e Ahmad" was always there, affectionately, warmly, self-assuredly. You may have a classmate in high school or college who was his nephew or niece or something. "Really?" You became more attentive. Yes. "My father was with him when he went to Mecca. He remembers him lying down on the ground and writing his notes." You would be eternally impressed. There was a (prophetic) ring to the name, an almost contagious sanctity to all the political matters it touched. It stood there, "Al-e Ahmad," somewhere, towering in the collective imagination of your generation, as a flag, a sign, a signal, inviting you to discontent. More than anything else, it was familiar, homely, cozy, endearing. He knew all the right and the "in" things to know: Sartre, French cheese, Existentialism, new poetry, Bordeaux wine, European cinema, remote Iranian villages, obscure East European writers. What he knew was the "in" thing to know. Read your Al-e Ahmad and you were in; you knew the most essential vocabularies of the topnotch political activists on your campus. A generation of political fantasy spoke his words, regurgitated his ideas, quoted his passages, came to intellectual puberty with his essays, travelogues, and short stories. "Al-e Ahmad" provided the comfortable margin—between religion and politics, sanctity and modernity. He was not just a name. It was a state of mind for a generation. When a Marxist critic came out of the closet and criticized Al-e Ahmad openly, in the course of a public lecture, you felt nauseated, a sacred realm of your personal identity violated. If Al-e Ahmad was wrong, what would remain? Who else could you trust? You might as well become an anarchist, a pessimist, a born-again Muslim, or something. "Al-e Ahmad" was not just a man whose books you had read, whose fantasies you had shared, whose enchantments you had cherished. "Al-e Ahmad" was the key symbolic passage through which you had passed on your way from childhood to youth to a false sense of political maturity. He made that passage from childhood to youth brutally short, shallow, and permanently premature, and yet its memory so everlasting, eternally sweet. It was precisely for its shortness, shallowness, and prematurity that the brutal passage kept its sentimental grip on you. Sentimentality saturated the name "Al-e Ahmad" even years after you had graduated from his short, shallow, and premature grip on you. You rarely attained this graduation before your high school diploma. For most younger intellectuals the grip would commence the day after graduation from high school or as late as the following hot and melting summer days. By the time you took your university entrance examination (this is the 1970s generation), you better have had your minimum dosage of "Al-e Ahmad" or else. If you were accepted into a university, a 10 percent chance for this generation of hopeful and nervous applicants, your ID would not have been issued, as it were, or if issued, confiscated, if you had not read, cherished, and been mesmerized by every single word Al-e Ahmad had written. So much the better if you could quote him verbatim, or at least had an uncle who was a classmate of Al-e Ahmad at Dar al-Fonum or a cousin who had his autograph. "Al-e Ahmad" was much more than just a name. It was the dominant insignia on your university matriculation card. Years, decades, after you had been cured of your passage through "Al-e Ahmad" you would still look at the last pages of your personal copies of his books, see your childish signatures and the dates you first finished reading those books, and count the number of ways in which that extremely sincere and extremely narrow and extremely distant text has affected your most lasting patterns of personal and public demeanors. You would look at the date—some April day, 1972, reads one perhaps—and relive the unencumbered affections, the uncontrolled sentimentalities, of a generation of young intellectuals who, in sharing "Al-e Ahmad" as a supreme symbol of collective illusion, quietly and in innocent dreams forecasted the precise and the vague terms of a coming revolution, particulars of a more enduring enchantment.

Full of Convictions

"As for my 'lack of convictions,' " responded Gustave Flaubert to George Sand's letter, "alas! I am only too full of convictions. I burst with suppressed anger and indignation. But my ideal of art demands that the artist show none of this, and that he appears in his work no more than God in nature."[174] Al-e Ahmad was full of convictions—changing but always consummate convictions. He knew not of the truth of Flaubert's dictum of eliminating himself from his art, his convictions from his claims to political truths. His art became altogether secondary, truth merely tangential, when the primary cause of politics presented itself. But the literary appeal of his art, full of convictions and guidelines, expanded the boundaries of his ideological claims deep into the moral and emotional sentiments of his ever-larger constitutency. That gave the would-be "Islamic Ideology" a free highway to the political commitments of otherwise mute atheists. "The suppressed anger and indignation" were meant to be sublimated in Al-e Ahmad the artist; and yet they were crystallized into the premises of "the Islamic Ideology." Al-e Ahmad did not live to see the fruits of the seeds he scattered on the fertile imagination of his revolutionary generation. How the taste of these belated fruits would have appealed to his palate, delicate but with no constant memory, should always remain the subject of idle but illuminative speculation.