

THE INFLUENCE OF EUROPEAN INTELLECTUAL IDEAS UPON IRANIAN PROSE AND NON-FICTION IN THE 60S AND 70S

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Abstract

Following the coup d'état of 1953 and the trauma caused by it gradually in the 60s and 70s in Iran a new subjectivity, a new vision for the Iranian subject of modernity emerged. Iranians were called by their intellectuals to overcome the trauma, which was called "occidentosis", a state in which everything that they try to create and produce is "stilborn". They were asked to no longer accept predestination and quietism, developing courage instead, becoming militant and finding their own, authentic way of encountering technologies and the West. This paper systematically demonstrates that the new subjectivity, which can be seen in the Iranian prose and non-fiction in the 60s and 70s is heavily influenced by European intellectual ideas.

Keywords: European intellectual ideas, subjectivity, prose, non-fiction, Iran.

INTRODUCTION

The Iranian pre-revolutionary literary, philosophical and sociological works have played an important part in the process of redefinition of the country's tradition, of the search for a new way to encounter modernity and technology and have motivated the mobilization which led to the series of protests that culminated in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. As part of the Western security system in the region during the monarchical period, Iran and its intellectual elites have been exposed to the intellectual influences that come from Europe and the West. This is why understanding these influences and their impact on Iranian social and political thought could be helpful in understanding

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the processes of transformation in the Iranian society under the Shah which eventually led to the cataclysm of the Islamic Revolution.

This publication argues that a number of European and Western intellectual schools, philosophical tendencies and authors have influenced some of the most important writers and thinkers of the pre-revolutionary years - people such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Ali Shariati, Simin Daneshvar, Sadegh Chubak and others. In this article I will demonstrate how existentialism, the School of Frankfurt, Gramscian and Fanonian concepts of the intellectual, the literary theory of engaged literature and other European and international intellectual tendencies have spurred a process of redefinition of the Iranian tradition. This has eventually allowed for the Iranian to move from a quietist, obedient and resigned attitude of a consumer of Western goods and technologies towards a proactive, engaged and militant way of encountering modernity and technology. In other words, in the times of monarchical Iran a social transformation takes place, which eventually leads to the appearance of a new subjectivity, which is the result of the impregnation of local tradition with modern European ideas.

The novelty of my work resides in the scale in which I observe European intellectual influence on Iranian engaged writers and intellectuals. I find out that the European intellectual influence has been more vast than usually believed, with a lot of concrete examples and links between Iranian and Western culture. If proven, my thesis could lead to redefinition of the understanding for Iran - a nation, that among its contradictions undeniably has a European cultural layer. Such a publication could be a contribution to a large body of work, which problematizes relations between center and periphery of knowledge, as we see that Iranian culture and intellectual thought has a tendency to grow European ideas on the soil of a land of the Global South.

Literature Review

The social and cultural context of the period 1953-1979 is well presented by Kamran Talattof in his seminal book "The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature". He speaks about a literary and cultural episode which starts with the American-British coup d'état in 1953, following prime minister Mosaddegh's effort to nationalize the oil industry (which has traumatised the nation, both by way of foreign intervention into its affairs and by way of the persecution of the pro-Mossadegh nationalist and communist Iranians in the next years) and ends with the Islamic Revolution:

"In this episode, literary activists believed that there were two kinds of literature: one that defended the people and was committed to their cause, and another that disregarded serious social and political issues and remained pure literature. They supported the former and engaged in Committed Literature (Adabiyat-e Moteahed) that derived its principles from Marxism or, more precisely, from what they perceived was Marxism. The themes of this literature revolved around equality, justice, and freedom. The figurative expression of these issues and the glorification of heroism and martyrdom were the constitutive elements of the language system in most fiction and poetry. The strident antagonism to religion that had characterized the writings of Persianism disappeared. Writers of Committed Literature, in fact, became somewhat supportive of Islam."

What Talattof writes about is clearly seen not only in the non-fiction works of Al-e Ahmad (e.g. his paramount essay *Occidentosis* or his essay on the role of intellectuals *On the Service and Treason of Intellectuals*), where he gradually start seeing Islam as a potential source of resistance and authenticity in a society going through uprootedness and alienation as its population moves to big cities and people change their way of life. In her novel *Savushun* Al-e Ahmad's wife Simin Daneshvar (the first woman author of an Iranian novel) uses a lot of references to both Islamic and pre-Islamic traditions of the Iranian, as she mixes them with ideas from the second wave of feminism, in order to demonstrate the Iranian cultural face of resistance to British occupation of Southern Iran during World War Two.

According to Ali Mirsepassi in his book *Intellectual Discourse and Politics of Modernization* the works of Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati demonstrate "a discourse of authenticity", which is "an effort to articulate a local, Islamic modernity as a blueprint for revolutionary social change"¹. Mirsepassi further claims that: "through these readings, the discourse of authenticity emerges as a dialogic mode of reconciling local cultures with modernity, rather than stubborn determination to avoid modernity at all costs. Their calls for a revitalized and politicized Islam represent attempts to negotiate with the universalizing tendencies of modernity, rather than the gathering storm clouds of a clash of civilizations".

Mirsepassi reminds us that both authors have been very familiar with the Western and European ideas of their time as their biographies suggest. Al-e Ahmad had translated into Persian works by Albert Camus, Sartre, Ionesco,

¹ Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: negotiating modernity in Iran*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 96.

while Shariati is claimed to have translated Franz Fanon. Al-e Ahmad had traveled to a number of countries of the world, among which he has a visit to the USA on the invitation of Henry Kissinger, while Shariati has graduated from the Sorbonne and has been deeply influenced by leading Marxian thinkers, sociologists, etc.

Even though both intellectuals are well exposed to Western ideas, according to Mirsepassi, both Al-e Ahmad and Shariati act “in the context of disillusionment with the so-called universalist alternatives in Iran (Marxism and liberalism)”.² Both of them look at encouraging mass grassroots movements which counter “the universalizing and homogenizing tendencies of “Western” modernity”, but their appeal to something, which is “authentically local” continues to have “a distinctly universal character”.³ Mirsepassi observes that the mass movements based on a discourse of authenticity in the 20th century have been a reaction to a top-down rapid modernization, urbanization and destruction of traditional modes of life or “domination of foreign interests”. They have been looking for a cultural resistance and the international public should see them as much more than “resurgence of ancient impulses” or “religious fanaticism”.⁴

Mirsepassi mostly analyses the ideas of Al-e Ahmad and Shariati within the Iranian social and cultural context of the period between 1953 (when the American-British coup against the democratically elected prime minister takes place - a traumatic act for the Iranian society until today) and 1979 (the year of the Islamic Revolution). He points out various European authors and events that have been influential on both authors, but he mostly sees the connection of the German romantic philosophical tradition that includes authors such as Heidegger, Junger and Nietzsche upon the Iranian intellectuals. As I will try to illustrate, the influences are much larger, they include the Frankfurt School, the existentialism-inspired “engaged literature” tendency, Gramscian sociological terms, etc.

Another author - Dustin J. Byrd - focuses on parallels between the Frankfurt School critical theory of religion and Ali Shariati’s redefinition of Shiism. The author claims that Shariati wants to “resurrect the prophetic, emancipatory and liberational core that once animated Islam of the 7th and 8th century”, which by 20th century has become uninspiring, static, non-dialectical

² Ibid, p. 127.

³ Ibid, p. 127.

⁴ Ibid, p. 128.

and even oppressive thus making it incapable of fulfilling its original mission to create conditions for the blossoming of humanity and mankind.⁵ Byrd explains that the Frankfurt School does not abstractly negate religion, but preserves, elevates and fulfills elements from it in its own secular philosophy thus giving them a progressive function. By dividing Shiism into “Black Shiism” (religion of power and status quo) and “Red Shiism” - religion of resistance, mobilization and renewal, Shariati does the same for Shia religious thought. He creates from Shiism an ideology for mobilization of masses, which dialectically counters the quietist, withdrawn and subordinate aspects of Shia Islam. Shariati makes Islam a militant tendency.

Byrd’s analysis rightfully sees the common aspects of both Frankfurt School and Shariati: e.g. their understanding that religion should serve social change. But the analysis should go further in a few directions. On the one hand, there is an engaged attitude which is inevitable for anyone willing to promote change in his society - and it arises from social, historical and psychological conditions which Bird tends to overlook. On the other hand, the joint process of search for authenticity and redefinition of religion as a tool for mobilization and change has to be put in the larger context of the birth of human subjectivity in the 20th century, following proclamation by Nietzsche that “God is dead”, i.e. the absolute systems of knowledge are getting overcome and man starts living in world of insecurity and anxiety where he constantly is faced with his finite existence.

In the period 1953-1979 there were many different ideological currents that express resistance to the authorities and to the dominant cultural norms in Iran, seen as “weststruck” (Gharbzadeh). But importantly, Islam appears to be a territory possibly less subordinate to this tendency of westoxication, while also being the carrier of tradition, which Iranians have had in their cultural genes.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

What I will try to do in the argumentation part of this publication is to use the methods of desk research and close reading in order to analyse various literary, non-fiction and philosophical texts and prove the intellectual dominance of European thought currents over the authors which have prepared the grounds for the Islamic Revolution. I will borrow notions from Gramsci, Fanon,

⁵ Dustin J. Byrd, “Ali Shariati and Critical Theory: From Black Affirmation to Red Negation” in Dustin J. Byrd and Seyed Javad Miri (ed.), *Ali Shariati and the Future of Social Theory. Religion, Revolution and the Role of the Intellectual*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2017, p. 101.

Western Marxism and engaged literature writing to illustrate how a discourse of resistance was formed in Iran in the 60s and 70s. It challenges the hegemonic cultural norms in society which are based on blind imitation of the West, of transposition of Western lifestyle without having the Western social and historical conditions in the peripheral territory which Iran represented. And gradually the discourse of authenticity and resistance becomes dominant thus culminating in the Islamic Revolution.

I will examine primary sources such as the non-fiction essays of Al-e Ahmad and Shariati, at some literary works such as those of Simin Daneshvar, Sadegh Chubak and Gholam-Hossein Sa'edi, as well as a number of canonical texts for the Western European intellectual currents. I will also provide the perspective of critics and experts on European or Iranian social life and intellectual ideas. The way I have analyzed those data is related to the search for a dynamic relationship, in which the Iranian authors accomplish a synthesis of the European modern and the Iranian traditional ideas, thus allowing for renewal and modernization of the Iranian society and social thought. Dialectics, the ideas for negation, unity and mutual contestation within contradictions, cultural hegemony, are part of the tools I apply in order to understand how the Iranian society evolves towards a new subjectivity. I also try to understand better the European subjectivity of the times as it has been the source of inspiration for Iranians.

ARGUMENTATION

Engaged intellectuals

As in any other societies undergoing modernization and departing from its traditional lifeforms, the Iranian society of the 20th century creates a special class of people - the intellectuals (*roushanfekran*), who start serving as promoters of Europe-inspired enlightenment. The first generation of contemporary writers, among whom the most notable figure is Sadegh Hedayat, fight strongly against superstition, against resignation before destiny, subordination to non-modern authorities (such as clerics) and in general against non-thought, against blind subordination. Over time, however, the intellectual project evolved - the intelligentsia started writing in the language of the common people, went to the villages and did anthropological and folklore research, learned about traditions, looked for ways to engage the crowd and make them part of a wide project for further modernization of society.

"The chief characteristic of the intelligentsia as it developed in Iran was its conscious and stated antagonism to its own class interest. Almost without exception, the majority of poets, writers, artists of the last hundred years have come from the middle and upper-middle classes, and in some cases even from the aristocracy. Although the range of their political and ideological affiliations extends from Marxism to Fascism, the intelligentsia as a social category is unified by one common denominator: the mystical glorification of the masses.

Such ideological euphemisms as tudeh [the masses], khalq [the people], mellat [the nation], ranfbaran or zahmatkeshan [the toilers] were fictional abstractions, imagined to advance specific ideological purposes.

*A preliminary education in modern European ideological literature was the most essential prerequisite for membership in the intelligentsia and, paradoxically, identification down with the masses. Through a metamorphosis of social identity, the intelligentsia saw itself as the seer/knower/redeemer, destined to deliver the masses from the bonds of poverty, ignorance, and tyranny."*⁶

Hamid Dabashi's judgement is suggestive of the engaged attitude of committed Iranian authors of the times between the two revolutions - the Constitutional (1905-1911) and the Islamic (1979). According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica engaged literature is based on *"a basic existentialist tenet: that a person defines himself by consciously engaging in willed action"*. Furthermore, engagement is understood *"as an individual moral challenge that involved the responsibility of adapting freely made choices to socially useful ends, rather than as "taking a position" on particular political or other issues."*

In other words, Iranian intellectuals of the times use literature to establish connection with their people, with the masses, and to guide them towards positive social goals such modernization, emancipation, liberation from economic and cultural oppression, justice, dignity, etc. That is obviously derived from Sartre's view of engaged literature which he outlines in his series of essays, published in English under the title *"Existentialism and Literature"*. Sartre's claim is simple *"word is action"*:

"We are within language as within our body. We feel it spontaneously while going beyond it toward other ends, as we feel our hands and our feet; we perceive it when it is the other who is using it, as we perceive the limbs of others. There is the word which is lived and the word which is met. But in both cases it is in the course of an undertaking,

⁶ Hamid Dabashi, *"The poetics of politics: commitment in modern Persian literature"*, *Iranian Studies*, 18:2-4, 147-188, 1985, p. 155

either of me acting upon others, or the other upon me. The word is a certain particular moment of action and has no meaning outside of it. In certain cases of aphasia the possibilities of acting, of understanding situations, and of having normal relations with the other sex, are lost."

Iranian writers act through reaching out by way of their writing and by way of their existential choices and life to the reader to the common Iranian.

Occidentosis

But whom or what do the Iranian committed writers engage in order to spur change in society? The privileged, Westernized classes of the Shah regime are content with the status quo, which puts them in a dominant position in a society which in the 50s and 60s modernises but according to Al-e Ahmad's account in *Occidentosis* is unable to become a producer of technology and cultural resilience. He sees everything Iranians try to create as "stillborn" as having "no gradient of transformation" and calls that state "occidentosis" - a kind of disease.

If we define occidentosis as the aggregate of events in the life, culture, civilization, and mode of thought of a people having no supporting tradition, no historical continuity, no gradient of transformation, but having only what the machine brings them, it is clear that we are such a people.⁷ (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 34)

It is the result of decades of forced top-down modernization of Iranian society, which has brought in among other things direct import of English and French words and phrases into Persian⁸ – a sign of the strong occidentalist current during monarchy. Therefore, what needs to be engaged is the static aspect of the Iranian society, the one that is stillborn for a number of reasons - inability to connect with spirit of times, lack of knowledge and experience, non-thought, immersion in a stagnant tradition, etc. The key for seizing the spirit of times lies in catching up with technology.

On the other hand, Al-e Ahmad sees the Iranians as occidentotic because of their lack of knowledge and control of "the machine", of the force that divides the world into developed industrial nations and exploited periphery. Iranians

⁷ Jalal Al-e Ahmad - *Occidentosis*, 1984, p. 34

⁸ Sirma Kostadinova - "Own and Foreign in Contemporary Iranian Journalism". In ed. by Prof. Dr. Prof. Madlen Danova, *Compilation of the Fourteenth Conference of Non-Habilitated Lecturers and PhD students of the Faculty of Classical and New Philologies*, University Publishing House "Sv. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, pp. 208-213.

consider the machine as something supernatural, and that is the clearest form of colonization - they lack the engineering and the technological knowledge to be part of the world economy and the movement of the world spirit. They connect with the machine merely as consumers of its gifts:

"To achieve control of the machine, one must build it", says Al-e Ahmad and adds immediately:

The machine is a talisman to us occidentotics, who shelter ourselves under its protective shadow and there look upon ourselves as immune to the vicissitudes of the age. We fail to note that this is a talisman that others have hung about our necks, so as to intimidate and exploit us. Let us be curious; let us grow up a little; and, finally, let us open this talisman and get hold of its secret.⁹

In the article **"Al-e Ahmad's Occidentosis as a project for the modernization of Iran"**¹⁰ (Manas 2020), I recreate Al-e Ahmad's description of these occidentotic, weststruck Iranians, who are an obstacle to the development of the country:

As Al-e Ahmad points out, the Third world and Iran's drama is not only that they are in a subordinated economic condition. Iran's spiritual wealth loses its viability. Iranians have lost their subjectivity vis-a-vis the West. In the words of Al-e Ahmad himself today the Iranians "resemble an alien people, with unfamiliar customs, a culture with no roots in our land and no chance of blossoming here" and all they have "is stillborn", in politics, culture, and daily life¹¹. He believes that the Iranian cities and urbanization are an example of people's uprootedness. But the same can be said about the educational system. It produces occidentotic Iranians, people, who are "jack-of-all-trades and master of none", because even when they have a specialization they cannot support their life needs through it. These occidentotic people "have no character", neither do they have "authenticity"¹². They have "no security"¹³. "It is not that [the occidentotic] is cosmopolitan, that the world is his home. He is at home nowhere rather than everywhere", adds Al-e Ahmad. In his view the basic property of these people is to be in fear — "fear of tomorrow, fear of dismissal, fear of anonymity, fear of discovery that the warehouse he has weighing down his head and tries to foist off as a brain is empty"¹⁴.

⁹ Ibid, p. 80.

¹⁰ Vladimir Mitev, *Al-e Ahmad's fight against occidentosis as a modernisation project of Iran*, Manas, Sofia, 2020.

¹¹ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 1984, p. 64.

¹² Ibid, p. 95.

¹³ Ibid, p. 95.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 95.

Curiously, Al-e Ahmad's plea for Iranians "to open the talisman" of the machine and "get hold of its secret", almost directly reproduces an understanding which can be found in the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* - the seminal work by Theodor Adorno and Mark Horkheimer - which deals in its first part with criticism of technology, capitalism and mythological thinking.

*"Myth becomes enlightenment and nature mere objectivity. Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted. Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things to the extent that he can make them"*¹⁵

The quote suggests that the ability to transform nature is related to the level of knowing it, of possessing technology to manipulate it. And what is nature for the Iranians? Apparently the tangible thing to which Iranians can refer to as experience is their tradition, their cultural code, to a large extent related to Islam.

Redefinition of Iranian tradition in the context of Western thought

As Al-e Ahmad suggests occidentotic Iranians become neither complete Westerners, because of the different, peripheral social conditions in which these westernized Iranians are formed, nor are truly loyal to their traditions, from which ongoing modernization alienates them. Therefore, a redefinition of the Iranian tradition, its impregnation with the intellectual spirit of times, appears to be a major philosophical project of the intellectuals of the 60s and 70s. As Talattof suggested in these times the attitudes towards Islam evolved positively. Both Al-e Ahmad and Shariati show that, although they are knowledgeable of Western thought, they realise that secular ideologies can't penetrate deeply in the social fabric in Iran. But at the same time they are aware that an obstacle for the spread of the Enlightenment idea of freedom, free thought, and modernity is religion. Both authors embark on the search of a third way or middle ground between opposing and undesired extremities.

Al-e Ahmad criticizes the Shi'a idea for expectation of justice through the return of the last Imam as one based on "ignoring the present reality and living only by hope of the [promised] Day or relegating the solution of all problems of

¹⁵ Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of enlightenment: philosophical fragments*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2002, p. 6.

that [promised] Advent"¹⁶. The rejection of predestination and quietism is also characteristic for Shariati, who turns Islam into a religion for mobilization, an ideology of change. Both Al-e Ahmad and Shariati advance the idea of "a return to self" or a "return to the roots" on the basis of an authentic Iranian state, which recovers its real existence from the state of Occidentosis and alienation. In this process the existentialist ideas, especially the ones of Martin Heidegger provide notions for understanding of the process.

*"If the return to the self means a return to who we are, to our existing national culture and religion, we are much better off to become western from head to toe."*¹⁷, says Shariati in a key phrase for understanding his intellectual project for redefinition of the Iranian self. Shariati searches not for a return to the past, but a return to a desired present condition.¹⁸

*"When we say return to one's roots", we are really saying return to one's cultural roots... Some of you may conclude that we Iranians must return to our racial (Aryan) roots. I categorically reject this conclusion. I oppose racism, fascism, and reactionary returns. What is more, Islamic civilization has acted like scissors and has cut us off completely from our pre-Islamic pasts... Consequently, for us to return to our roots means not a rediscovery of pre-Islamic Iran, but a return to our Islamic roots."*¹⁹

It is also interesting how Shariati makes this redefinition of the Iranian self in accordance with a renewed and militant Iranian Shi'a tradition. Having participated in protests of the people of the Third World in Paris during his student years, being aware of the theology of liberation - "a socially engaged" brand of Catholicism, Shariati believes that Iran needs its Luther and Calvin, who are to unleash an Islamic Reformation: *"The Islamic intellectual must first embrace the Islamic Protestantism just as it happened with Christianity in the Middle Ages, to destroy all the degenerating factors, which have been an obstacle in the name of Islam to the process of thinking."*

¹⁶ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, "Dar Khedmat va Khianat Roshanfekran (On the Services and Treasons of Intellectuals)", Tehran: Ravaq, 1980, p. 271 in Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectuals Encounter with Modernity*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002, p. 119.

¹⁷ Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi – *Islam and Dissent in Post-Revolutionary Iran: Abdolkarim Soroush, Religious Politics and Democratic Reform*, London-New York: I.B.Taurus, 2008, p. 183.

¹⁸ Mehrzad Boroujerdi – *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The tormented Triumph of Nativism*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996, p. 113.

¹⁹ Ervand Abrahamian – *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin*. London: I.B.Tauris, 1989, p. 116 in Mehrzad Boroujerdi – *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The tormented Triumph of Nativism*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996, p. 113.

Shariati's distinction between red, authentic, pro-change Shiism and black, inauthentic, pro-status-quo Shiism was already discussed in the literature review. Shariati's concept of the self is interesting because, in its essence, it is a synthesis of two principles - earthly and divine, Western and Islamic. On one hand, according to the thinker, man "possesses His character and shares His spirit... he is responsible for his time, society, faith, culture, history and future". Such views show a modern theory for subjectivity in the Western sense. But on the other hand, in Shariati's view man is a process (set in motion) – from matter to God's spirit. Man has God's attributes as potentiality, but after the Fall he has forgotten his "primal self-divinity" and dwells in the "desolate abode" of nature, alienated from his true "self". This alienation doesn't allow the people to feel at home in nature and turns their bodies into "prisons". In Shariati's view the road to real subjectivity passes through transcending the body, matter and earthly world, of "pollution of existence" and reaching to God.²⁰

Shariati speaks about "the complete man" (*ensan-e kamel*) as one who has passed this theomorphic road and thus makes a connection to Islamic mystical tendencies that have dealt specifically with this notion. But the idea of a primordial truth about man, fallenness and the effort for cleansing of the earthly accumulations of power over being is also Heideggerian. So is the philosophical conceptualisation related to authenticity.

Heidegger believes human beings are "thrown into existence" and in a state of alienation from the truth about themselves because they are living inauthentically and they are subordinated to the norm of a common, anonymous, mediocre subject of being, called *das Mann*. That is a condition which may as well be seen as occidentotic. It is the condition of a man, who is unaware of the divine, higher order rules, of the knowledge that props up real human existence in the contemporary world. It is that state in which many Iranians could have been as they leave their old, traditional way of life and start living in new material conditions which demand of them a new way of life and experience.

Again, according to Heidegger a condition for achieving authenticity is passing through a complex process in which "a call of consciousness" asks us to abandon our state of alienation and to set forth on a journey for discovering and achieving our authentic self. As man becomes aware of his finite existence, of

²⁰ Shariati, Ali – Kavir (*The Desert*), [Collected Works, nr. 13], Tehran: Chapakhsh, 1983, p. 555-556, 560, 566, quoted in Farzin Vahdat – *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectuals Encounter with Modernity*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002.

death, as he faces anxiety and tests, he passes through transformation and becomes aware of his own nature, he is authentic for himself. However, that is not sufficient, or may not be. We are authentic not only because we define ourselves alone, but to the extent that our authenticity is recognised by others. That is called intersubjectivity.

Therefore, the project for re-definition of the Iranian tradition and subjectivity by Al-e Ahmad and Shariati is an open-ended project. If we assume that "the call of consciousness" which these authors have felt as they sensed the presumed state of alienation and fallenness of the Iranians of their times, could theoretically lead to "the primordial" truth (aletheia) about the Iranian self, in the best case the reinvigorated Iranian self will still have to strive for earthly goals and play the game of intersubjectivity, respectively dirtying itself with existence and having a grade of inauthenticity. It will just be doing it from a new position. And even though it might look like it is God and truth that is key to "the return to the self", in fact the main driver for those ideas is the challenge created for Iranian society after the 1953 American-British coup.

As Iranians battle with trauma of the interruption of their natural development and repression, the social contradictions in society strengthen significantly, the dissident classes grow in number, urban guerrilla movements appear and much of the 70s passes in the conditions of social unrest. This spirit of rebellion - passive, quietist or outspoken and militant, can be seen in a number of the literary works of that time. And the ideas in these works make a lot of sense when read through European intellectual prism. Just as is the case with existentialism in Western Europe the birth of a new human subjectivity and the dismantling of old traditional, absolutist systems of making sense is related with an intense contradiction between individual man and society.

In his literary work "Cow" by Gholam-Hossein Sa'edi, which is later turned into an important movie, a farmer's cow dies. Unable to cope with grief he starts behaving as a cow, eating grass and mooing. His fellow villagers can't convince him he is not a cow.

A fan of theater of the absurd, Sa'edi recreates in Iranian context an idea, used by Eugen Ionescu in his play *Rhinoceros*, where all the people in a community grow a rhino and start mocking as weird the only man who has remained without a rhino, the only one who is "really normal". The farmer rebels against injustice in a self-depreciating way - left without what defines him as a farmer, he also abandons human society.

In the novel "Tangsir" by Sadegh Chubak, an honest worker from the tribe of Tangsirs is robbed of his savings by the usurers in the city and they also humiliate him verbally. Having nothing left but his harmed dignity he rebels. He leaves his community, starts a life of crime and kills each and everyone of the usurers. The exploited masses who have suffered for decades under the plight of the murdered social parasites turn the rebel into their hero and call him Shir Mohammad (Mohammad the Lion).

His act of rebellion and breaking of law elevates him above the masses as some kind of Nietzsche's superman. Shir Mohammad, a member of the tribe of the Tangsirs, who asks for and receives blessing for his rebellion by a mollah before starting it, is an Iranian traditional man, who is also acting with a modern sense of human subjectivity. He is also a classical case of the rebel in Camus' sense.

"The very moment the slave refuses to obey the humiliating orders of his master, he simultaneously rejects the condition of slavery. The act of rebellion carries him far beyond the point he had reached by simply refusing. He exceeds the bounds that he fixed for his antagonist, and now demands to be treated as an equal. What was at first the man's obstinate resistance now becomes the whole man, who is identified with and summed up in this resistance. The part of himself that he wanted to be respected he proceeds to place above everything else and proclaims it preferable to everything, even to life itself. It becomes for him the supreme good. Having up to now been willing to compromise, the slave suddenly adopts ("because this is how it must be . . .") an attitude of All or Nothing. With rebellion, awareness is born.

But we can see that the knowledge gained is, at the same time, of an "all" that is still rather obscure and of a "nothing" that proclaims the possibility of sacrificing the rebel to this "All." The rebel himself wants to be "all" — to identify himself completely with this good of which he has suddenly become aware and by which he wants to be personally recognized and acknowledged — or "nothing"; in other words, to be completely destroyed by the force that dominates him. As a last resort, he is willing to accept the final defeat, which is death, rather than be deprived of the personal sacrament that he would call, for example, freedom. Better to die on one's feet than to live on one's knees."²¹

In Simin Daneshvar's novel "Savushun" the ideas of the second wave of feminism are interwoven deeply with the Iranian Islamic and pre-Islamic tradition. The novel is set to take place in the beginning of the 40s when Southern Iran is occupied by the British army, but it is often considered an allusion to the

²¹ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Vintage International, 1992, p. 11

1953 coup which creates both trauma and a feeling of betrayal in Iranians with regards to the British. In the novel, it is clearly seen that the references to the martyrdom of Imam Hossein or Siavush - as people who have unjustly lost their life, and have fought for justice, are called to denote the Iranian cultural resistance against strong foreign interference in its affairs and life.

In these three literary examples we see how the ideas for the individual rejection of peer/social pressure, of the rebel and the martyr, are somehow called out to suggest a wakening of human subjectivity, a feeling of negation, a feeling of loss of something precious, but possibly a search for an accommodation and possibly sometimes change. Iranian intellectuals play a key role in the formulation and sharing of common experience and solutions. That specific role of Iranian intellectuals - the so-called *roushanfekran* - remains of a large importance throughout the 20th century. Intellectuals are the agents of modernization and the ideological workers, who allow their fellow countrymen to lead important discussions about the constantly evolving essence of the Iranian self.

Iranian pre-revolutionary concepts for the intellectual put in Western context

In this context parallels between the Gramscian concept of the so-called "organic intellectual", the Sartrean idea for "an engaged writer/intellectual" and the Fanonian concept of a militant intellectual seem to be suggestive of the type of transformation that take place in the Iranian intellectual circles. Gramsci distinguishes between traditional intellectuals, who tend to isolate themselves from the social masses, and the "organic intellectual", who has a dynamic relationship with the proletarian milieu, with the lower classes, and transcends the gap between the "intellectual and popular realms" and linking "theory and practice, the organized and the spontaneous, the political and the social"²²

A participant in the Algerian independence war, Fanon theorises about three types of intellectuals. The first one is "occidentotic", meaning that he has detached from his home society and has internalised the thought of the colonizers. The second one is a former first-type intellectual, who has had his convictions shaken by life and who is looking for reconnection with his country's tradition and social base. The third grade intellectual is the real organic one. He has reconnected with the peasants, with the lower classes and no longer

²² Sohrab Shiravand, *Fanon and Al-e Ahmd Edited*, Academia.edu

perceives them “as backward” or as having static identity/tradition²³. He writes “combat literature”, which becomes “a galvanizer of the people”²⁴

Al-e Ahmad makes a critique of occidentotic intellectuals and their grades of evolution, which is summed up by Sohrab Shiravand:

“First, the intellectuals become orientalized from within when they internalize the West’s view of the East’s “inferiority.” In this enervated condition, the intellectuals become “the pawns, if not the direct agents, of cultural imperialism”²⁵. Second, the self-orientalized intellectuals forget their national identity as Iranians and try to identify themselves as “Westerners.” Al-e Ahmad (1984) explains that “All [the Iranian intellectual’s] preoccupations and Western products are more essential to him than a school, mosque, hospital, or factory. It is for his sake that we have an architecture with no roots in our culture” (p. 96). Third, the Iranian intellectual has become rootless because he has either denied or failed to recognise the importance of cultural differences. This denial or failure occurs because he “has severed his ties with the depths of society, culture, and tradition. He [has] no link between antiquity and modernity, not even a dividing line between old and new”²⁶. Thus, he colludes with Westerners to turn himself into “a thing with notice to the past and no perception of the future” (p. 92).

Al-e Ahmad doesn’t provide an alternative project for the Iranian intellectual and social developments but he touches upon the contours of a possible path forward, which is seen in this quote:

One can be effective in politics, or in the affairs of a society, when you have weighed the degree of acceptability or resistance of that society vis-à-vis your ideas. And in order to achieve this measure, you should have known that society, its traditions, its history, and those factors that are essential in shaping its collective belief, forces that mobilize its masses in the streets, and then its silence and its sitting quietly at home.²⁷

Therefore, for an organic intellectual to spur change in Iran, he must be rooted or embedded in the Iranian culture. It is Shariati who comes closest the Fanonian concept of organic, militant intellectual, as it is Shariati who turns Shia Islam into a militant ideology for social renewal and change. As we mentioned

²³ Franz Fanon., *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 2004, p. 13.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 159.

²⁵ Farzin Vahdat, “Return to which Self? Jalal Al-e Ahmad and the Discourse of Modernity”. *Journal of Iranian research and Analysis*, 16, 2000, p. 66.

²⁶ Jalal Al-e Ahmad - *Occidentosis*, 1984, p. 92.

²⁷ Mostafa Zammani - *Farhang-e Jalal Al-e Ahmad*, *The Encyclopaedia of Jalal Al-e Ahmad*, Pasargad Publisher, Tehran, 1984, p. 173.

he defines authentic, Red Shiism as anti-status-quo, militant, as serving social justice, while the inauthentic Black Shiism. What is often not mentioned about Shariati is that the various militant groups that were mixing Marxist and Islamist ideology in the 70s saw him as an intellectual authority. And they were applying in practice the Fanonian idea of liberation from colonialism through revolutionary violence although they were putting it in Islamic terms, by drawing comparison to martyrdom of Imam Hossein, who is martyred in the sacred city Karbala.

Here is how the Iranian philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo presents the spread of the culture of martyrdom in the 70s:

"In his self-defense broadcast on national television in January 1974, Khosrow Golesorkhi, a Marxist poet, likened himself with Imām Ḥosayn, claimed:

"The life of Mawlā Ḥosein is an example of our present days when, risking our life for the dispossessed of our country, we are tried in this court. He [Ḥosein] was in a minority, whereas Yazid had the royal court, the armies, authority, and power. [Ḥosein] resisted and was martyred. Yazid may have occupied a corner of history, but that which was emulated in history was the way of Mawlā Ḥosein and his resistance, not the rule of Yazid. The [path] that nations have followed and continue to follow is the way of Mawlā Ḥosein. It is in this way that in a Marxist society, real Islam can be justified as a superstructure, and we, too, approve of such an Islam, the Islam of Ḥosein and Mawlā 'Ali..."²⁸

...Shariati set the standards of revolutionary praxis within the metaphor of martyrdom where "only blood could distinguish the boundary between truth and falsehood." As such, "Whenever and wherever a liberated person has refused to submit to despotism and its attempts for distorting supreme values, and has preferred death to a dehumanized purposeless existence under a monstrous regime and inhuman social system, it is a response to Hussein's call. Wherever there is a struggle for liberation, Hussein is present on the battlefield."²⁹

CONCLUSIONS

What we see throughout the period 1953-1979 is the evolution of Iranian intellectual thought which recovers from the trauma of West's political and military intervention in Iran and of economic imperialism and cultural

²⁸ Quoted in Negin Nabavi, "The discourse of "authentic culture" in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s" in *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran: A critical survey*, edited by Negin Nabavi, 2003, p. 91-108

²⁹ Ramin Jahanbegloo, "Intellectuals and Society in Iran since 1953" in *Beyond the Islamic Republic*, Degruyter.com, 2017. p. 21.

subordination, including the inability to catch up with the social and technological development of the developed industrial countries. The Iranian intellectuals of that time made a redefinition of the tradition, as they attempted to engage the masses and mobilize them so as to overcome stagnancy and crisis. As resistance rises, as discourse of authenticity and nativism gets formulated and becomes popular, gradually an evolution in Iranian subjectivity takes place. Iranians develop a culture of resistance and martyrdom, become militant, but also put conscious effort in developing the knowledge which is necessary to produce modern technologies, overcome historical traumas and become subjects of world history. Even though this process leads to a continuous discourse of anti-Westernism, it is motivated by plenty of European and Western intellectual ideas. Further research into the relations between center and periphery of knowledge could show how much of a success this redefinition of tradition and new subjectivity is in spurring modernization and change.

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