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“The West” in the Eyes of the Iranian Intellectuals of the Interwar Years (1919–1939)

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In 1929, after a lecture by Arnold Toynbee (from the notes of Denison Ross, the first director of the School of Oriental and African Studies) on the subject of the modernization of the Middle East, a commentator said,

Persia has not been modernized and has not in reality been Westernized. Look at the map: there is Persia right up against Russia. For the past hundred years, living cheek by jowl with Russia, Persia has maintained her complete independence of Russian thought. Although sixty to seventy percent of her trade for the past hundred years has been with Russia, Persia remains aloof in spirit and in practice. For the past ten years, Persia has been living alongside the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, and has remained free from any impregnation by their basic ideas. Her freedom is due to her cultural independence. For the safety of Persia it is essential, if she is to continue to develop on her own lines, that she should not attempt modernization, and I do not think that the attempt is being made. It is true that the Persians have adopted motor-cars and in small way railways. But let us remember that the Persians have always been in the forefront in anything of that sort. The first Eastern nation to enter the Postal Union and to adopt a system of telegraphs was Persia, which country was also among the first of the Eastern nations to join the League of Nations and to become an active member. The Persians have always been ready to adapt to their own peculiar needs any Western invention that seemed to suit them. But that does not mean that they are being Westernized, with one exception. Westernization is taking place in the sphere of law.¹

In 1936, an unidentified pundit had this to say about Iran in the pages of the *Moslem World*:

It used to be said of olden Persia that in it you could always find three things: princes, camels and fleas. The first have vanished utterly; the second, though still and rightly employed in certain parts, are far fewer than they were before the advent of the motor-car, the aeroplane, and the railway-train; and with the progressive introduction of hygienic ideas the third must be diminished by some millions. On all fronts, indeed, the Shah and his Ministers are waging a successful battle against the dead wood and redundancy of the past. You can no more transform Iran in a night than you can build Rome in a day, but in less than two decades the Shah (may his days be prolonged!) has very creditably revolutionized the face of his land.²

An earlier version of this essay was presented at the Harvard Academy Symposium “Anti-Western Critiques in Turkey, Iran, and Japan: Historical and Comparative Perspectives,” Harvard University, 30 April 2005.

1. Arnold Toynbee and Denison Ross, “The Modernization of the Middle East,” *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 8 (1929): 362.

2. “Westernization in Iran,” *Moslem World* 26 (1936): 87.

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In 1944, another British analyst on Iran wrote,

Persia [had] had to make too rapid a jump into the twentieth century. We more fortunate people in the West went through a slow and gradual process of education in the arts of reading, not least in the direction of intellectual recreation. The novel, the essay, the theater slowly evolved in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The cinema did not burst on us suddenly as it has done on Persia. We had been gently introduced to its compelling charms. From the legitimate stage to the silent film, from the silent film to the "movie," we passed decorously without undue haste. Not so Persia. Within a period of little more than ten years Persia had been brought face to face with the colored film; and not only that but also with the radio, with concert parties and cabarets, with modern furniture, modern buildings, modern fabrics and fashions. Within the same period she has had to cope with the most notable, the most far-reaching social revolution of all—the emancipation of women—without much gradual process of evolution. Small wonder that Persia is a bit out of breath, a bit bewildered and uncertain of her standards.³

In 1952, T. Cuyler Young Jr. of Princeton University had this to say about the attitude of Iranians toward the West:

A more numerous group, but varied in their degree of self-consciousness and understanding, are those in favor of a qualified assimilation of the West in accordance with proved and admitted needs, but in loyalty to their own tested and cherished values. This usually takes the force of forthright acceptance of Western science and techniques, selective adoption and modified adaptation of Western social practices and institutions, and more rarely the integration into their own philosophy of Western beliefs and values. They believe in and strive for drastic reform of their Islamic and Eastern society,

but they remain unconvinced that they need to, or should, abandon its essential principles and institutions.⁴

Finally, in 1957, the British counterpart to Young, Ann K. S. Lambton of University of London, wrote,

Externally Persia today has the appearance of a modern State: the form of government is one familiar to Western Europe; her officials are educated on Western lines and are familiar with Western techniques, but the Persian conception of society has in many respects changed little since the medieval period, and I would suggest that it is the underlying conception rather than the form which determines the way in which institutions work. . . . The adoption of the constitutional government in 1906 implied a revolution in the conception of society and in the relation of the individual to society. In theory the government was accorded certain powers and denied others, but in practice the conception of a contractual basis of society, of a system of mutual duties and rights above and beyond the outward forms of government upon which the system rests in the West, continues to be foreign to Persian thought. All power is still regarded as irresponsible; the new forms of government have failed to provide a framework for a full and fruitful national life, and certain of its organs have usurped control over fields outside their own; the inevitable result of which is tyranny.⁵

The above quotations from a number of perceptive observers of Iran capture some of the triumphs and travails as well as ambivalences, nuances, and contradictions of Iran's encounter with Western modernity. The widening scientific and technological gap between the West and Persia in the nineteenth century—which came about as a result of the inventions of the telegraph, lens, refrigerator, bicycle, dynamite, microphone, phonograph, telephone, electricity, automatic machine gun, internal combustion

3. H. D. Graves Law, "Stray Thoughts about Persia," *Asiatic Review* 40 (1944): 181.

4. T. Cuyler Young, "Nationalism in Iran," in *Nationalism in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 1952), 26. Young (1900–1976) served for many years as a professor of Persian language and history at Princeton University. He had acquired an intimate knowledge of Iran by working there first as a missionary and later as cultural and political attaché at the American Embassy.

5. Ann K. S. Lambton, "The Impact of the West on Persia," *International Affairs* 33 (1957): 12–25; quotations on 12 and 25, respectively. Having studied Persian at the School of Oriental Studies, Lambton first went to Iran in 1934 and later traveled extensively through Iran. During World War II she served as press attaché at the British Embassy in Tehran. In 1945 she was appointed senior lecturer in the School of Oriental and African Studies and then served as the chair of Persian at the University of London from 1953 to 1979.

engine, movie camera, motorcycle, motion picture, and steam turbine boat as well as the development of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, Louis Pasteur's pasteurization method, and the like—convinced many of Iran's enlightened thinkers that they would have to embrace modern technology and ways of life. Thinkers such as Mirza Fath-Ali Akhondzadeh (1812–78) and Mirza Malkam Khan (1833–1908) advocated looking to the West for a model. Malkam Khan, an Iranian Armenian intellectual-reformer who had served as Iran's ambassador to Great Britain and, in 1890, launched a newspaper titled *Qanun* (Law), recommended a simple solution: the acquisition of Western Civilization without any Iranian alterations.⁶

Almost at the same time, another Iranian Christian, Matteos (Khan) Melik Yunes, traveled to Japan and published a book in 1904–5 titled *Mamlekat Shams-e Talea Ya Dowlat-e Japon* (*The Land of the Rising Sun or the State of Japan*). In the introduction the relatively unknown author wrote,

Despite not having much time I went through the trouble of writing down my observations in the hope that my Iranian compatriots will wake up from their slumber and start a movement whereby they imitate their Oriental neighbors, will remember the glory of their predecessors, and aspire to revive the power and prestige of the past by taking charge of the firm handle of science and industry so that they can go forward on the road to civilization and cultivation.⁷

In this interesting book, which was written in the midst of the ongoing Russo-Japanese War and in the last decade of the Meiji Restoration, the reader learns that the perceptive Iranian visitor was impressed not only by the variety and quality of the factories/industries (e.g., shipbuilding) and the infrastructure (the railway system and the paved and clean streets with electrical lights) that he witnessed but also by the following features of Japanese sociopolitical life: that Japan's progress did not come about by resorting to war and the sword (with the exception of the 1894–95 Sino-Japanese War); that the new

emperor had not signed the death warrant of any citizen; that the emperor invited travelers, scientists, poets, government bureaucrats, and political personalities to his court and spoke to them; that Japan's bureaucracy was very efficient; that Japanese citizens were extremely hardworking and nationalistic; that the men did not insult their wives or hit their children; and that, like European and American women, Japanese women were free and respected and fared much better than their East Asian sisters as testified to by the fact that there were women architects, doctors, engineers, and lawyers.

Melik Yunes explains the above transformation by stating that "until a few years ago the Japanese were living in miserable conditions but from the time they came into contact with the Europeans and observed their ways they could no longer tolerate their oppression and abruptly delinked themselves from the superstitions of the past and freed themselves from their condition of servitude and bondage" (12). He then went on to address his Iranian compatriots with these words:

Due to our ignorance the name of our country and people is about to disappear from the annals of history and the people of the Occident will consider us worthy of nothing. Hence we should understand the dignity of man and contemplate on how the Europeans who were more savage and ignorant than us could uplift themselves so quickly so much so that [today] every time one wants to praise a rational deed it suffices to say that this is how the Westerners do it. (120–21)

Despite this and other similar calls to action, the intellectual and scientific chasm between Persia and the West continued to widen as the twentieth century began. The invention of the radio, electric typewriter, airplane, hand grenade, military tank, television, magnetic tape recorder, gas turbine, and high-voltage generator along with the suffragette movement, Einstein's theory of relativity, the development of insulin for the treatment of diabetes, Louis Blériot's flight across the English Channel,

6. See Hamid Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

7. Matteos Khan Melik Yunes, *Mamlekat Shams-e Talea Ya Dowlat-e Japon* (*The Land of the Rising Sun or the Country of Japan*) (Tehran: Farous, 1904–5) (my translation).

Marie Curie’s treatise on radiography, Ernest Rutherford’s atomic model, and Alexander Fleming’s discovery of penicillin chastised many Iranians and smacked them out of their state of self-delusion and sangfroid. Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh (1878–1970) did not mince words in articulating this urge to emulate the West when in an editorial in *Kaveh* he wrote,

We need to recognize that we have fallen behind the Western civilization both spiritually and physically by some hundred thousand *farsangs* [each *farsang* is equivalent to 6.24 kilometers] in knowledge, technology, music, poetry, manners, life, spirit, politics, and industry. We should therefore only strive to retain our *melliyat* (nationality), that is, our racial identity, language, and history, and beyond that seek to pursue the European advancements and civilization without the slightest doubt or hesitation. We must surrender to the Western civilization totally and unconditionally.⁸

Just like the calls of Malkam Khan and Melik Yunes before him, Taqizadeh’s fiery proclamation did not manage to radically alter the attitude of a generation that, by and large, considered its situation hopeless but not urgent or serious. More than thirty years later, Isa Sadiq—generally regarded as the founder of the modern education system in Iran—lamented the unhurried attitude of Iranians toward acquisition of Western science and civilization in a lecture delivered on 5 June 1947 before the Iran Society in London by stating,

We have understood, by the two defeats that we suffered at the beginning of the nineteenth century [at the hands of Russia in 1813 and 1828], that we have to learn new things from Europe. But, due to a great number of causes, we have been very slow in adopting Western culture. Look at a map of Persia and you will see how

many countries lie between our country and the West of Europe; see how difficult are the communications, how long are the distances. If, for instance, you want to send something from here [England] to Egypt or Beirut, you put it on a boat and it arrives in a few days; but if to Persia, it has to go to Lebanon, Syria, Mesopotamia, and then to Persia, going through perhaps two thousand miles of desert and mountainous roads. Well, due to these facts . . . [and] to the obstacles created in our way by Tsarist Russia, and also, perhaps, due to the fanaticism of our religious leaders—we have been very slow in adopting Western civilization. It has taken us a whole century to realize that we must gain the sciences of the West—physics, natural history, chemistry, mathematics, and their application to industry, and the European method; that method which was described in *Novum Organum* by Francis Bacon in the seventeenth century. It has taken us three hundred years to realize that the induction method discovered by that great scholar of this country [England] was the one which would save us if we used it. . . . It is only in the last fifty years that we have understood what La Salle, the French bishop, found three hundred years ago—that in the same way as you educate physicians to deal with medicine, so you have to educate teachers to deal with education.⁹

This is not to suggest that important strides were not made in learning from the West. Large numbers of students were sent to the West and, upon returning to Iran, managed to alter the political, scientific, and intellectual landscape of the country.¹⁰ As a reflection of their growing sense of national consciousness, those students dispatched to the West to study humanities and social sciences showed a particular interest in investigating Iran’s relations with the outside world.¹¹ Many Iranian scholars (e.g., Al-lameh Mohammad Qazvini, Hoseyn Kazemzadeh Iranshahr, Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh, and

8. Editorial, *Kaveh*, no. 1, 1920 (my translation).

9. Isa Sadiq, “Persian Cultural Relations with the West,” *Asiatic Review* 43 (1947): 359–66; quotation on 363–64. Isa Sadiq (1894–1978) was educated first at Cambridge University and later at Columbia University, where in 1931 he completed a dissertation titled “Modern Persia and Her Educational System.” After returning to Iran he served in such capacities as president of the National Teachers’ College, chancellor of Tehran University, cabinet minister, and senator.

10. The generation that was educated in the West between 1912 and 1940 included important personalities such as Yahya Adl, Mahmud Afshar, Ali Amini, Taqi Arani, Yahya Armajani, Mehdi Azar, Mohsen Azizi, Mozafar Baqa’i Kermani, Khanbaba Bayani, Mehdi Bazargan, Mahmud Behazin, Manouchehr Bozorgmehr, Ali-Akbar Davar, Manouchehr Eqbal, Abbas Eqbal-Ashtiyani, Sadeq Hedayat, Ali-Ashgar Hekmat, Mahmud Hesabi, Mohammad Baqer Hoshiyar, Amir-Abbas Hoveyda, Fereydoun Keshavarz, Yahva Mahdavi, Khalil Maleki, Mohammad Masoud, Ahmad Matin-Daftari, Mostafa Mesbahzadeh, Mojtaba Minovi, Mohammad-Ali Mojtahedi, Hasan Moqad-

dam, Mohammad Etemad Moqaddam, Mohammad Mosaddeq, Naseh Nateq, Firuz Mirza Nosratoldoleh, Hoseyn Pirnia, Gholamali Radi-Azarakhshi, Reza Radmanesh, Ali Razmara, Sadeq Rezazadeh-Shafaq, Abbas Riyazi, Isa Sadiq, Gholamhoseyn Sadiqi, Yadollah Sahabi, Jahanshah Saleh, Karim Sanjabi, Isa Sepahbodi, Seyyed Fakhroddin Shadman, Ali Shayegan, Abdullah Sheybani, Ali-Akbar Siyasi, Lof’ali Suratgar, and Alinaqi Vaziri.

11. This tendency is reflected in the titles of the following dissertations: Mahmud Afshar (Afchar), “La Politique Européenne en Perse: Quelques pages de l’histoire diplomatique” (“European Policies in Iran:

Mojtaba Minovi) worked closely with Western scholars such as Edward Brown (1862–1926), E. E. Herzfeld (d. 1947), and Vladimir F. Minorski (1877–1966). The presence of various American, Belgian, French, and Swedish contractors and advisers, hired to help run various governmental bureaucracies, raised the adroitness and dexterity of these institutions to new highs. Finally, Iran’s intellectual ambience improved further in the 1930s and 1940s with the translations of René Descartes’s *Discours de la méthode*, Montesquieu’s *L’esprit des lois*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Contrat social*, Victor Hugo’s *Les misérables*, Herbert Spencer’s *Education*, and parts of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, among others.

While it was easy to be impressed with Western scientific advances, democratic systems of government, military discipline, academic prowess, and provisions of social services, there was also a lot that Iranians found distasteful about the West. A series of events taking place in Europe shocked and disillusioned cultivated Iranians of the interwar period. This was the generation that witnessed enormous historical turbulence and barbarity and saw the world pass through furnaces of unrest such as World War I (1914–18), the Bolshevik revolution and subsequent civil war (1917–21), Joseph Stalin’s collectivization campaign (beginning in 1928), the crash of the U.S. stock market (1929), the ascension to power of fascist movements in Italy and Germany (1920s and 1930s), Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia (1935), the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), World War II (1939–45), the Holocaust, and, finally, the use of the atomic bomb to sub-

due Japan. The Anglo-Russian coercion of Iran before, during, and after World War I and World War II,¹² the use of chemical gas during warfare (first used in 1915), the dismemberment of the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian Empires, the failure of the League of Nations to provide collective security, the enormous human and material cost of the above-mentioned conflicts, and the seething revenge-seeking sentiments they helped to set in motion caused Iran’s interwar generation to experience the full brunt of Western imperium. Many of these intellectuals rightfully concluded that the assault of the West upon the world knew no boundaries. After all, as the British historian Eric Hobsbawm has reminded us, the period from 1918 to 1950 was the heyday of nationalism.¹³

World War I made Persians and people of other Eastern societies better acquainted with the various nations of Europe. The undifferentiated category of *Farangi* (Westerner) gave way to specific references to America, Britain, France, Germany, and the like. The war also helped to awaken many Iranians politically. A host of events beginning with the 1906 constitutional revolution pushed the intellectual classes toward embracing nationalism as the dominant political-social ideology of their era. What came after the defeat of the constitutional revolution was a period of turmoil lasting thirteen long years (from the 1908 bombardment of the parliament to the 1921 coup by Reza Khan). This interval witnessed the destruction of the revolutionary forces; the accession of Ahmad Shah to power at the mere age of eleven (1909); Mohammad Ali

Some Pages from Diplomatic History”) (University of Lausanne, 1921); Ahmad Matin-Daftari, “La suppression des capitulations en Perse: L’ancien régime et le statut des étrangers dans l’Empire du ‘Lion et Soleil’” (“Suppression and Capitulation in Persia: The Old Regime and the Status of Foreigners in the Empire of ‘Lion and Sun’”) (University of Lausanne, 1930); Ali-Akbar Siassi (Siyasi), “La Perse au contact de l’Occident: Étude historique et sociale” (“Persia’s Contact with the West: A Historical and Social Study”) (University of Paris, 1931); Nayereh Samsami, “L’Iran dans la littérature française” (“Iran in French Literature”) (University of Paris, 1936); Khanbaba Bayani, “Les relations de l’Iran avec l’Europe Occidentale à l’époque Safavide (Portugal, Espagne, Angleterre, Hollande, et France)” (“Iran’s Relations with Western Europe during the Safavid Era [Portugal, Spain, England, Netherlands, and France]”) (University of Paris, 1937); Mostafa Mesbahzadeh, “La Politique de l’Iran dans la société des Nations: La conception iranienne

de l’organisation de la Paix” (“Iran’s Policies in the League of Nations: Iranian Conception of the Organization of Peace”) (University of Paris, 1937); Mohsen Azizi, “La domination arabe et l’épanouissement du sentiment national en Iran: Étude politique et sociale sur l’Iran musulman, 650–900” (“Arab Domination and the Blossoming of National Sentiment in Iran: A Political and Social Study of Muslim Iran, 650–900”) (University of Paris, 1938); Gholamhoseyn Sadiqi, “Les mouvements religieux iraniens au IIe et au IIIe siècle de l’hégire” (“Iranian Religious Movements during the Second and Third AH Centuries”) (University of Paris, 1938); Mohammad Etamad Moqaddam (Moghadam), “The Indo-European Origins of the Iranian New Year Festival” (Princeton University, 1938); Lotf’ali Suratgar, “Traces of Persian Influence upon English Literature during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries” (University of London, 1939); and Seyyed Fakhroddin Shadman, “The Relations of Britain and Persia, 1800–1815” (University of London, 1939).

12. Here one can refer to the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement to partition Iran, England and Russia’s joint efforts to force the capable American adviser Morgan Shuster out of Iran (1911), the humiliating Anglo-Persian agreement of 1919 signed by Vosuq od-Dowleh, the Azerbaijan crisis (1945), and Allied occupation of Iranian territory in World Wars I and II.

13. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Random House, 1994).

Shah's attempt to come back to power (1911); the interest of imperialist powers in Iranian oil (discovered in 1908); World War I; Iran's occupation by Russian, British, and German forces (1914); typhus and the death of hundreds of thousands of people from drought and hunger; the access of Kurdish, Turkoman, and Baluchi tribes to European guns; the assassinations of various political personalities; the rebellions of Sheikh Mohammad Khiyabani (1880–1920) and Mirza Kuchak Khan (1880–1921) in the north; the 1919 Anglo-Persian agreement signed under duress; the musical chair nature of cabinet changes (thirty-six different cabinets came to power); the closure of parliament for six years; the huge debts accumulated by the Qajar kings; the ineptitude of the bureaucracy; the nonexistence of a real military force; the nonproductive nature of the economy; and the inability of the state to collect revenues.

In this milieu nationalism appealed to Iranian intellectuals not as a malady but as a melody. Setting Persia free of foreign dominance and influence became a popular rallying cry. Major Iranian intellectual papers of this era such as *Kaveh*, *Tufan*, *Iranshahr*, and *Ayandeh* were overwhelmingly nationalistic in tenor and spirit.¹⁴ The poets of this period also embraced nationalism with a vigor previously unseen. Seyyed Ahmad Adib-e Pishawari (1844–1930), an ardent nationalist poet, wrote numerous poems praising Wilhelm II—kaiser of Germany and king of Prussia (1888–1918)—in the belief that a German victory in World War I would rescue Iran from Anglo-Russian domination.¹⁵ The poet-journalist Seyyed Ashraf al-Din Hoseyni Gilani (1870–1934)—who published the newspaper *Nasime-Shomal* (*Northern Breeze*) from 1904 to

1922—masterfully utilized humorous poetry to champion nationalist causes.¹⁶ Yet another poet-journalist named Seyyed Reza Mirzadah Eshqi (1894–1924), whose manner of death resembled that of the contemporaneous Spanish poet and dramatist Federico García Lorca (1898–1936), exhibited with the following words the depth of his nationalism in an operetta he had composed in 1915–16 upon seeing the ruins of a Sasanian-era palace in Madayen (near Baghdad): “What do the broken doors, the lonely walls and the stately pillars mean? Is this the great place of the historical glory of Iran? Is this the cradle of Sasanian art and civilization? Oh, the tattered palace of Madayen, you remind us of our past glory and put us to shame now. Hold me, my comrades. My heart is failing. My eyes are shedding tears of blood. What a contrast between our past glory and our present degraded condition.”¹⁷ Finally, one should also mention the antiforeigner sentiments of the revolutionary poet Mohammad Farrokhi Yazdi that border on xenophobia.¹⁸

The novelists of this period also articulated nationalist sentiments. In 1921, Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh (Djamalzadeh) (1896–1997) published *Yeki bud Yeki Nabud* (*Once upon a Time*), which, because of its masterful narrative style and use of metaphors, stereotypes, ballads, and anecdotes, immediately established him as the pioneer of modern short story writing in Iran. One of the stories in this book is titled “The Friendship of Auntie Bear,” which is a tongue-in-cheek reference to the “Russian Bear.”¹⁹ Jamalzadeh's depiction of the Russians as a monstrous enemy was very much in line with the nationalistic sentiments and iconography of that era. The next year, a play was pub-

14. *Kaveh* was launched by Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh in Berlin in 1916, *Tufan* was published by Mohammad Farrokhi Yazdi (1889–1939) in Tehran, *Iranshahr* was published by Hoseyn Kazamzadeh Iranshahr in Berlin in 1922, and *Ayandeh* was founded by Mahmud Afshar in Tehran in 1925. See Jamshid Behnam, “Zamīnehay-e Fekri-yr Andishmandan-e Iran dar Berlin” (“The Ideological Origins of Iranian Intellectuals in Berlin”), *Iran Nameh* 16 (1998): 553–78; and Keivandokht Ghahari, “Nationalismus und Modernismus in Iran in der Periode zwischen dem Zerfall der Qāğāren-Dynastie und der Machtfestigung Rezā Schah: Eine Untersuchung über die intellektuellen Kreise um die Zeitschriften Kāweh, Irānshahr, und Āyandeh” (“Nationalism and Modernism in Iran in the Period between the Col-

lapse of the Qajar Dynasty and the Consolidation of Power by Reza Shah: An Examination of the Intellectual Circles Based on the Journals Kaweh, Iranshahr, and Ayandeh”) (PhD diss., University of Berlin, 2001).

15. See Seyyed Ahmad Adib-e Pishawari, *Divan Adib-e Pishawuri*, 2nd ed., ed. Ali Abdolrasouli (Tehran: Chap-e Part, AH 1362/1983).

16. Seyyed Ashraf al-Din Gilani, *Kolliyāt-e Seyyed Ashraf al-Din Gilani “Nasim-e Shomal”* (*The Collected Works of Ashraf al-Din Gilani*), ed. Ahmad Edarehchi Gilani (Tehran: Negah, AH 1375/1996).

17. Quoted in Fareed S. Jafri, “Modern Iran,” *Asiatic Review* 45 (1949): 627–32; quotation on 628. For the

full translation of the operetta, see Seyyed Mirzadah Eshqi, *The Resurrection of the Ancient Sovereigns of Iran in the Ruins of Madayen: A Persian Operetta*, ed. and trans. Dinshaw J. Irani (Bombay: n.p., 1924).

18. For an analysis of Farrokhi Yazdi's poetic and journalistic work, see Ali Gheissari, “The Poetry and Politics of Farrokhi Yazdi,” *Iranian Studies* 26 (1993): 33–50.

19. Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh (Djamalzadeh), “Dousti-ye Khaleh Kherseh” (“The Friendship of Auntie Bear”), in *Yeki bud Yeki Nabud* (*Once upon a Time*) (Tehran: Kanoun Marefat, AH 1355/1976), 62–77.

lished that brilliantly captured the discord between indigenous Iranian values and imported European values. I have written elsewhere the following words about this play:

In 1922, at the unripe age of twenty-seven, a brilliant Iranian writer named Hasan Moqaddam (1895–1925) published a play titled *Ja'far Khan az Farang Amadeh* [*Ja'far Khan Back from Europe*]. The play, mocking a *dépayés* Westernized Iranian named Ja'far Khan, remains popular in Iran to this day. Having returned to his homeland after seeing what gadgetry and material amenities Europe has to offer, Ja'far Khan has become rather contemptuous of his indigenous traditional culture with its stultifying rituals and primordial values. Meanwhile, he considers Europe as the embodiment of prestige, progress, possibility, and privilege. Ja'far Khan both resembles and radically differs from the character Bazarov depicted by Ivan Turgenev in *Fathers and Sons* some sixty years before. Both are members of an up-and-coming generation that is severely judgmental and horridly arrogant. They have poor opinions of their compatriots, oppose adulation of native values, admire the West for its scientific and technological precocity, and disapprove of the ignorance or obdurate hostility of their predecessors toward the West. However, Ja'far Khan is nothing like the autodidact, iconoclastic, and self-assured Bazarov. Instead, he comes across as a superficial *idiot savant* skilled in slavish imitation of Westerners but defective in his knowledge of the West. While the reader can easily identify with the nihilist yet genuine Bazarov, one is hard-pressed to develop any sympathy for the musings of Ja'far Khan.²⁰

One should also keep in mind that, while it is true that the interwar period provided Iran with a respite of some twenty years—mainly due to the fact that the Bolshevik revolution and subsequent civil war temporarily halted the Russian pressure on Iran—this was not a period when Iranian intellectuals could reflect openly and freely on the nature of their political and philosophical interactions with Western

thought. After all, the forced-draft nature of Westernization and modernization under Reza Shah did not necessarily endear these policies to those advocating a more genuine democratization of Iranian politics or those still cherishing their traditionalist worldviews. The latter approach found an articulate spokesman in the conservative intellectual-statesman Mehdi Qoli Hedayat (Mokhber al-Saltaneh), whose life span covered half of the nineteenth century and half of the twentieth century (1863–1955). Mokhber al-Saltaneh was a resolute critic of Western modernity and civilization and lamented developments such as the abolition of private property, the formation of large cities, the modern spatial organization of the household, the rise of the urban proletariat, revolutionary movements, and women's suffrage. The conservative views of this German-educated man of letters and politics—who ironically enough was Reza Shah's longest serving prime minister—bore striking resemblance to the "antimodernist" camp in Germany.²¹ Comparing the present invidiously with the past, he decried modernity's complexities, ethical decay, fragmentation, impersonality, irreverence, materialism, and self-interested individualism. He prescribed moral remedies such as generosity, inner policing, and restraint for solving Iran's abstruse social problems.²² One should bear in mind that Mokhber al-Saltaneh advocated a nostalgic return to a serene yet noble and resplendent past, at the same time that Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno were at work formulating a critique of instrumental reason in the pages of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

If the prime minister of a "modernizing" monarch can be an ardent traditionalist, so can a die-hard revolutionary from Tabriz end up preaching ecumenical brotherhood and world peace from the serene mountains of Switzerland. This second career belongs to Hoseyn Kazemzadeh Iranshahr (1884–1962). He was born

20. Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "The Ambivalent Modernity of Iranian Intellectuals," in *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran: A Critical Survey*, ed. Negin Nabavi (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 11.

21. For views of the antimodernists in Germany, see Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890–1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Uni-

versity Press, 2000). For an explication of Mokhber al-Saltaneh's conservative views, see Ali Barzegar, "Mehdi Qoli Hedayat: A Conservative of the Late Qajar Era," *Iranian Studies* 20 (1987): 55–76.

22. Mokhber al-Saltaneh, *Tuhfeh-e Mukhbiri ya Kar-e bi-Kari (Poetical Works)* (Tehran: Majles, AH 1333/1954).

in Tabriz on 10 January 1884 and completed his secondary education there in a modern school named Madrassa Kamal, which had been set up in 1898–99. Thanks to the curriculum of this school, he became knowledgeable about and rather impressed with Western civilization. After Madrassa Kamal was closed down because of the agitation of conservative clerics, he decided to continue his studies in Europe. In September 1904, at the age of twenty, he left Tabriz and went to the Caucasus before reaching Istanbul in April 1905. From 1906 to 1911, he worked as an employee of the Iranian consulate in Istanbul. The outbreak of the Iranian constitutional revolution dissuaded Kazemzadeh Iranshahr from entering medical school. In April 1911, he went to Belgium and, a year later, earned his bachelor's degree in political and social sciences from the University of Louvain. After graduation, Kazemzadeh Iranshahr went to Paris and started taking classes at the Sorbonne and École des hautes études sociales with professors such as Charles Gide, Isoulet, Gasanova, and Henri Louis Le Chatelier. He formed a society for Iranians living in Paris with the help of Alameh Mohammad Qazvini (1877–1949) and Ebrahim Purdavud (1886–1968).²³ In October 1913, Kazemzadeh Iranshahr went to the University of Cambridge to work as an assistant to Edward Brown, having been recommended for the job by his friend Qazvini. Kazemzadeh Iranshahr mentions that, during his sojourn in England, he was very impressed by the freedom of thought and the ethical integrity of British citizens. In January 1915, he was asked by Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh to go to Berlin and join him and other Iranian revolutionaries who had assembled there. He agreed and cooperated with Taqizadeh in the publication of the newspaper *Kaveh*. However, he soon returned to Iran to fight on the front lines. Kazemzadeh Iranshahr was among a group of nationalist fighters who

had to retreat from Tehran to Kermanshah and ended up spending a few months in a prison in Kermanshah. During this period in his life, he seems to have concluded that, because of the cultural backwardness of his compatriots, political activities were insufficient in producing long-lasting results. Instead, he felt that intellectuals like himself should primarily devote themselves to cultural endeavors. In November 1917, in the midst of World War I, he returned to Berlin and in 1919 set up a bookstore specializing in Oriental books. From June 1922 to 1927, he published a magazine named *Iranshahr*, and it was during this phase that he gravitated more and more toward a theosophical worldview.²⁴ In May 1924, Kazemzadeh Iranshahr wrote,

In my view, Western civilization, despite its scientific progress, is becoming more and more alienated from spirituality, so much so that the status of contemporary human beings resembles that of an infant child separated from his or her mother. In order to forget the absence of the mother, the child has been provided with colorful toys that he or she looks at, plays with, and throws around. Yet the moment the child remembers that the mother is not there, he or she throws everything around and goes back to the crying mood while shouting *Mother, Mother!* The day will come when the spirit of modern man will get bored with watching and playing with all the new toys that modern civilization has provided. He or she feels imprisoned in the midst of the toys and once he or she does not see any sign of the Supreme Being and eternal spirit begins to cry and shout *Mother, Mother!*²⁵

In 1931, the Iranian Ministry of Culture appointed Kazemzadeh Iranshahr as the supervisor of Iranian students studying in Germany and he held that position until 1935. In the meantime, Adolf Hitler became Germany's chancellor (1933) and outlawed all scientific, philosophical, and religious assemblies that did not adhere to his views. In July 1936, Kazemza-

23. Qazvini, who had studied under Adib-e Pishawari and had first gone to Europe in 1904, was a polyglot and was considered the most learned Iranian linguist, philologist, and grammarian of his era. Ebrahim Purdavud was educated in Iran, India, Lebanon, Germany, and France and managed to edit and translate *Gatha* (the Divine Hymns of Zoroaster, which form the earliest part of the Avesta) in 1926. He was for many years a professor of pre-Islamic Persian history and languages at Tehran University.

24. This change is reflected in some of the topics covered in the last year of the journal, among which were the meaning of civility, Western civilization, Eastern civilization, science and ethics, the future of humankind, and theosophy.

25. Hoseyn Kazemzadeh Iranshahr, "Rostam va Sohrab" ("Rostam and Sohrab"), in *5 Asar-e Arzandeh Az Entesharat-e Iranshahr (Five Valuable Works from Iranshahr)* (Tehran: Eqbal, AH 1356/1977), 12–13 (my translation).

deh Iranshahr went to Switzerland and spent the next twenty-six years of his life in that country (in the village of Degersheim). In 1942, in the city of Winterthur, he founded the *École mystiques ésotérique*, which promoted the unity of science, industry, and religion along theosophical lines. He also set up a series of spiritual retreat classes in various parts of Switzerland called *Circle de lumière* and published a monthly newspaper called *Harmonie Monatschrift zur Erleuchtung und Harmonisierung des Lebens* (*Harmony Monthly for the Illumination and Harmonization of Life*). On the subject of the predicament of Western and Oriental societies, Kazemzadeh Iranshahr had this to say:

Since due to destiny and the law of human evolution it is now the turn of Asian and Oriental societies to be awakened, there is no other option facing them but to accept the progress of Western countries and as such one should not be afraid of the widespread flood of technical innovations or try to thwart them. Nor should one close the doors of Western civilization on his or her face. . . . The necessity of reform, progress, modernity, and the acceptance of elements of Western civilization that can help us maintain our independence and existence against the unquenchable ambitions of Western nations is beyond doubt. Any comparative study of Western and Eastern civilizations . . . makes it clear that the necessity of changing the political and cultural life in the East is inevitable and due to God's will. Yet the issue is how to change the status quo and accept modernity so that we can avoid the same mistakes, mischief, corruptions, destructions, and calamities that have caused so much agony in the West. In other words, what should we select and accept from [Western] civilization and how should we use these things so that instead of misery they guarantee our happiness.

He continues,

In the midst of these political and social crises that have caused so much horror among the nations of the East and the West I only see the following solutions for each [group of nations]. For Westerners reaching the ideal stage of salvation

and comfort does not require a return to the primitive age. Instead we should prevent contemporary civilization from misusing its power. The way to do this is to accept and unite Christian ethical virtues, rooted in infinite kindness, with Oriental wisdom. In other words, Westerners should unite the wisdom of the East with the virtues and kindness of Christianity and blend them with scientific techniques and rationality so that the present gloom of Western civilization could be voided. As for the recently awakened people of the East—who have not yet been caught up in the extremes of Western civilization and the raging wars between science and religion, intellect and spirit—there is another path to deliverance. They should look at the conditions of Western countries with discerning eyes and closely follow the political, economic, social, and religious conditions of these people so that they can distinguish between the useful and the poisonous elements of this civilization and thereby accept the former and reject the latter. It helps to keep in mind that all this poverty, hunger, unemployment, oppression, alienation, suicide, rebellions and revolutions present in the midst of Western civilization has a cause. . . . The chief reason for the decadence of Western civilization could be summed up in one word: extremism in using material, emotional and rational faculties.²⁶

Kazemzadeh Iranshahr cannot be summarily dismissed as an atypical Iranian on account of the fact that he spent fifty-eight of his seventy-eight years of existence in Europe. Here is a man who was well versed in Islamic and Western history and thought; who was fluent in Arabic, English, French, German, and Turkish; who had been a revolutionary in his youth; who had witnessed firsthand World Wars I and II; and who was able to reach out to various constituencies. On a larger level, Kazemzadeh Iranshahr's transformation was a response to the intellectual turmoil of the interwar years that were characterized by nationalist obliquity of vision, civilizational anxiety, and cultural relativism.²⁷ After all, this was the era in which intellectual figures such as George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975),

26. Kazem Kazemzadeh-Iranshahr, *Asar va Ahval [Hoseyn] Kazemzadeh-Iranshahr (Works and Biography of Kazemzadeh-Iranshahr)* (Tehran: Eqbal, AH 1350/1972), 358–60 (my translation).

27. Mike Featherstone writes that the period after World War I was "a phase in which there was a marked sense of cultural relativism and crisis, as the

writings of Spengler, Max Scheler, Max Weber, and others demonstrate." See Mike Featherstone, "Introduction: Globalizing Cultural Complexity," in *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism, and Identity*, ed. Featherstone (London: Sage, 1996), 1.

Oswald Spengler (1880–1936),²⁸ Henri Bergson (1859–1941),²⁹ René Guénon (1886–1951),³⁰ Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941),³¹ and Muhammad Iqbal (1876–1938) as well as many others³² were all expressing doubts about the merits and also the future direction of Western civilization.

Yet one should keep in mind that, while the West was being deplored on the one hand for its materialism, decided lack of spirituality, and lack of principles and on the other for its (neo)colonial arrogance, belittlements, denigrations, domination, plunder, and slights, there never developed any systematic anti-Westernism in Iran during the interwar years.³³ Nor were there any serious calls for internationalism,³⁴ pan-movements, or a sense of “Asianness.” Iranian intellectuals might not have been genuine cultural converts, but, as Gavin Hambly has remarked, “the gradual introduction of European ideas into Iran during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [had] enlarged the outlook of this class while the momentous economic and social changes initiated during the reign of Reza Shah (1925–41) demanded the growth of an adaptable middle class possessing techniques and experience of a kind familiar to

nineteenth-century Europe.”³⁵ Hence what prevailed was a sense of ambivalence toward Europe. Again Hambly writes, “In thinking about the United Kingdom, for instance, the Iranian intellectual is torn between two visions: of England as the home of Parliamentary government and personal freedom, and the birthplace of two of his idols, Shakespeare and Dickens; and England the Great Power in Asia who so long presided with Russia over Iranian destinies” (138). Similarly, thanks to the Francophone education that most of the elites had received, Iranian intellectuals viewed France as the “idealized home of European civilization” (139). As for Germany, Reza Shah and many of Iran’s emerging elites who had embraced a nationalistic tunnel vision were naturally attracted to the self-sufficient national state in Germany.³⁶

Yet Iran’s emerging protonationalist identity could not have relied solely on Western thought-forces. Reza Shah realized that instilling patriotism and faith in his political system could be accomplished by utilizing heroic folklore.³⁷ The attempt to foster solidarity of national consciousness and to generate a sense of national pride required “the building of a largely imaginary glorious past under the old Persian kings, who were remote enough to enable the need for

28. Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* generated an unprecedented public response as it sold more than one hundred thousand copies during the first decade of its publication. He criticized the West for its capitalism and submergence in materialism. Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes (The Decline of the West)*, vol. 1 (Vienna: Braumüller, 1918); vol. 2 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1922).

29. H. A. R. Gibb refers to Bergson as “the high priest and prophet of Romantic antirationalism.” See H.A.R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), 110.

30. Guénon, the author of *The Crisis of the Modern World*, also wrote that “the first step towards rousing western intellectuality from its slumber must be the study of the doctrines of the East.” See René Guénon, *East and West*, trans. William Massey (London: Luzac, 1941), 227.

31. The Indian poet and thinker Rabindranath Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, believed that Western materialism and nationalism were destructive and dehumanizing. He frequently talked about a spiritual Asia and a materialistic West. See Stephen N. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

32. Other examples of this genre of books include Albert Demangeon’s *The Decline of Europe* (1920); Julien Benda’s *Treason of the Intellectuals* (1927); Johan Huizinga’s *The Crisis of Civilization* (1928); José Ortega y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930); and Hilaire Belloc’s *The Crisis of Our Civilization* (1937).

33. Indeed, there was a great deal of admiration for Western political and scientific personalities. For example, in 1924 an author identified only as Mohammad from the city of Ahvaz wrote an interesting article about Abraham Lincoln that appeared a year later in the Berlin-based journal *Iranshahr*. In this essay the author wrote, “In 1809 two babies were born who beautified and decorated the entire nineteenth century. The first was Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) who freed millions of slaves and rescued the American republic from gloom and decadence and the second was Charles Darwin (1809–1882) who ripped the bonds of superstition and fallacy and enlightened the world with the radiance of his thought.” See Mohammad, “Ebraham Linkoln” (“Abraham Lincoln”), in *5 Asar-e Arzandeh Az Entesharat-e Iranshahr*, 8–9 (my translation).

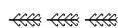
34. In the interwar years a number of Iranian intellectuals were attracted to the gospel of brotherhood of man—socialism—but it had not yet become the powerful social movement that it turned into in the 1940s and 1950s.

35. Gavin Hambly, “Attitudes and Aspirations of the Contemporary Iranian Intellectual,” *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 51, pt. 2 (1964): 128.

36. To borrow the language of James C. Scott, Reza Shah wished to make Iranian society “legible” through a series of reform initiatives. By simplifying and standardizing people and things he helped to have them amassed, recognized, observed, and recorded. Adopting borders, surnames, census, units of measurement, sanitation standards, and educational levels and eliminating honorific titles were all considered prerequisites for creating an efficient state machinery. See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

37. Thomas Carlyle has argued that hero worship remains “an unfailling act of human experience and the basis of social organization.” See Michael K. Goldberg’s introduction to Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), lxi.

historical accuracy to be relaxed."³⁸ Hence Reza Shah and his intellectual entourage paid great homage to kings such as Shah Isma'il (r. 1501–24), Shah Abbas (r. 1587–1629), Nader Shah (r. 1729–47), and Karim Khan Zand (r. 1747–79) and poets such as Ferdowsi (940–1020) and Sa'di (1213–92).



This article has argued that the inner effects of the impact of Western ideas on Iranian intellectuals were both actual and potential during the interwar years. The intellectual classes became more acclimated with ideas, concepts, and words that had originated in the West.³⁹ But while their quest to modernize their society was triggered by a growing awareness of Iran's backwardness vis-à-vis the West, the predominant attitude toward the West remained one of ambivalent engagement even though secular nationalist themes dominated the intellectual landscape.⁴⁰ If in Turkey the talk was one of Europeanization, in Iran it was all about selective acquisition of modernity's components.⁴¹ In other words, Iran never became a "positivistic mausoleum" like its next-door neighbor.

While this hesitant approach to the West could have been partly influenced by the self-doubts of leading Western thinkers, I have not yet been able to find much evidence to support this assertion. Indeed, there seems to be very little indication that Iranian intellectuals of the

interwar years had any awareness of contemporary works such as Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901) or *Cartesian Meditations* (1931); Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1907) or *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932); Bertrand Russell's *Problems of Philosophy* (1912) or *Religion and Science* (1935); Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927); or the ideas emanating out of the Vienna Circle (from 1922 to 1938) or the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, which was founded in 1923. Nor can one find many references to the works of earlier thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55), Ernest Mach (1838–1916), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), or Émile Durkheim (1858–1917).⁴² Besides unawareness, another factor that can explain the lack of attention paid to these thinkers might have to do with the cultural predispositions of Iranian intellectuals during this era. After all, as the noted historian H. A. R. Gibb has put it, "it seems to be a general rule of history that, when two civilizations come into contact and a transmission of ideas is effected, the recipients are attracted to those elements in the other civilization which are most congenial to their own habits of thought and, on the whole, neglect or reject the other elements which they find more difficult to assimilate."⁴³ S

38. Lambton, "The Impact of the West on Persia," 23.

39. For example, Mohammad-Ali Zoka' al-Molk Foroughi provides the following partial list of French and English words that had entered the lexicon of the Iranian public by the late 1910s: acid, address, automobile, *billet*, blouse, *bottine* (boot), bottle, *cha-peau*, cigar, cinema, class, constitution, cycle, *dictée*, diploma, *esprit*, *faux-col*, gas, glass, *humanités*, kettle, lamp, lemonade, *maison*, *marche*, *merci*, *mode*, *numéro*, park, piano, program, salon, sardine, soup, siphon, telegraph, telephone, theater, and wagon. See Mohammad-Ali Zoka' al-Molk Foroughi, *Maqalat-e Foroughi*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Tous, AH 1354/1975), 1:84–85.

40. One reason why in this period there was not much rabid anti-Westernism in Iran has to do with the fact that Iranian secular nationalists had identified the Arabs and Islam as their favorite targets of criticism. The works of Zabih Behruz, Ebrahim Purdavud, Sadeq Hedayat, Ahmad Kasravi, and many others were emblematic of this sentiment.

41. Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda, Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh, Seyyed Fakhroddin Shadman, Mohammad-Ali Zoka' al-Molk Foroughi, and many others articulated this sentiment. For example, in 1927 Foroughi wrote, "Acquisition of knowledge and particularly the sciences of the Western world is both good and necessary yet we should not be so infatuated with European industry that we completely forget our own national arts and crafts." See Foroughi, *Maqalat-e Foroughi*, 23.

42. The Western thinkers with whom Iranian intellectuals seem to be most familiar are figures such as René Descartes (1596–1650), Auguste Comte (1798–1857), Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931), and Anatole France (1844–1924).

43. H. A. R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), 110.