Sovereignty without Nationalism, Islam without God

A Critical Study of the Works of Jalal Al-e Ahmad

by

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Abstract

Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969) is widely perceived, particularly in Iran, as the leading social critic in Iran's post-Mosaddeq, pre Khomayni era (1953-1978) and also as an inspirational figure for Iran's 1978-1979 revolution. His concept of "occidentosis" (*Gharbzadeghi* in Persian*)*, or "Westernization," as the main or even the only cause of Iran's political, economic, and social problems, seemed to many Iranians to accurately diagnose their country's ills. More importantly, his "cure" for the "disease" of occidentosis was his ringing call for Iranians to return to their authentic (Perso-Islamic) "self" and to use a rejuvenated Islam as a defense against Western imperialism. This call galvanized many Iranians, particularly among the Leftist intellectuals and Muslim clerics, and made Al-e Ahmad a revered figure following Iran's successful revolution.

This thesis argues that a close reading of a selection of Al-e Ahmad's fiction, *Occidentosis* (1961), and autobiographical writing does not support the popular perception of him. The thesis's title -- "Sovereignty without Nationalism, Islam without God" -- refers to the double paradox at the heart of his writing and thought: he called for Iran's sovereignty in the face of Western imperialism, but felt no sense of community with his fellow Iranians, and he called for a "return to Islam," but had no personal faith in either this or any other religion.

In this thesis, some of the principles of the New Critics' close reading and of Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism are used to analyze Al-e Ahmad's texts and uncover their many internal contradictions. The analysis of five of his short stories and his two best-known novels, *The School Principle* (1958) and *By the Pen* (1961), reveals that he was relentlessly critical of Iranian society, felt no sense of empathy for or affinity with Iran's oppressed classes, and believed that revolutions merely replace one form of tyranny with another. The analysis of *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad's most famous and most important work, reveals that his argument against the 'West' is riddled by inconsistencies, contradictions, and historical inaccuracies. Following this analysis, a comparison of the view of the intellectual in *Occidentosis* and that in Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1969) is used to expose Al-e Ahmad's limitations as a political thinker and cultural critic. Finally, the concluding chapters on two of Al-e

Ahmad's autobiographical works, *Lost in the Crowd* (1964) and *A Stone on a Grave*(2008), show that, contrary to the popular belief that Al-e Ahmad "rediscovered Islam" during the last years of his life, he actually rejected Islam and Perso-Islamic traditions and embraced and celebrated his own nihilism.

Preface

My motivation for studying Al-e Ahmad's work comes from my personal interest in his writing in the contexts of the "nationality question" and identity-based oppression as well as gender identities and sexual inequalities in Iran. Essentially, Iran's "nationality question" involves the issue of to what extent Iran's Persian majority and central government accommodate the needs and dreams (e.g., democratic equality and self-determination) of the non-Persian minorities. Similarly, the issues of gender identities and sexual inequalities involve the extent to which Iran's patriarchal and Islamic political society recognizes and protects the democratic rights of women (in particular, the poor and marginalized women of different minorities) and homosexuals. Thus, I am investigating a number of important questions in this thesis: how Al-e Ahmad's (1984) utopian "third way" (his alternative to either accepting Westernization or "remain[ing] fanatically in the bonds of tradition and return[ing] to the primeval means of production" (p. 78)) addresses the aspirations of Iran's minorities; how his discourse on cultural authenticity and its emphasis on the "Islamic totality" (p. 52) might undermine mass participation in politics, free discussion, and acceptance of difference; how Al-e Ahmad's discourse of occidentosis and anti-imperialism contributed to the emergence of Islamism and anti-imperialism and might have helped to suppress the movement for self-determination and social justice in Iran; in what ways Al-e Ahmad's (1978 a, b; 1984) historiography, or his construction of historical events -- filtered through the dominant power relations and the dominant patriarchal conception of history -- may have helped to re-imagine

and re-define a collective historical memory that tends to erase the struggle of the oppressed minorities for autonomy in Iran; and, finally, how engaging with and deconstructing Al-e Ahmad's works could contribute to an alternative reading of Iranian history that incorporates the political memory of Iran's oppressed minorities.

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Contents

Photograph (1969)

Al-e Ahmad on the left and Mostafa Shoaiyan (a writer-activist)

(Source: Salehi, 2010)

Introduction

When Jalal Al-e Ahmad died at the age of 46 from a heart attack in September 1969, he had published around 30 volumes of fiction and non-fiction, including short stories, novels, monographs and articles, memoirs, translations, and ethnographic studies (Hillmann, 1982). As well, he had already established himself as not only one of Iran's pre-eminent writers of fiction, but also as "the leading social critic in Iran during the post-Mosaddeq, pre-Khomayni era [1953-1978]" (Hillmann, 1988, p. ix). Since his death, Al-e Ahmad's reputation in Iran has continued to grow. For example, the writer and literary critic Reza Baraheni argues that Al-e Ahmad's *Occidentosis* (1984), a caustic analysis of the 'Westernization' of Iran during the post-war historical era, "has the same significance in determining the duty of colonized nations vis-a-vis colonialist nations that the *Manifesto* of Marx and Engels had in defining the responsibility of the proletariat vis-a-vis capitalism, and that Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* had in defining the role of African nations vis-a-vis foreign colonialists" (as cited in Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 67). For Al-e Ahmad's supporters, no praise of him is considered hyperbolic, and no claims on his behalf can be challenged.

In studies of Al-e Ahmad and his role as an inspirational figure for Iran's 1978-1979 revolution, these claims include the assertions that he was a sovereignist who advocated that Iran should control its own political, social, economic and cultural affairs; a nationalist who

promoted the return to ''traditional'' Iranian values or defended local or popular cultures; and also a former Marxist who ultimately "rediscovered Islam as a matter of personal spirituality" (Preface, 2004). Even a cursory reading of *Occidentosis* provides strong evidence for the first of these claims, for this polemic was truly "an intellectual bombshell" (Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 67) that alerted Iranians to the dangers of passively accepting Western imperialist dominance, values, and culture. In contrast, however, the second and third of these claims are much more dubious. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to offer the counter-argument that Al-e Ahmad was never a "nationalist" in the sense of an individual who perceives and describes 'his' *mellat* ("nation") as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991) and also that he was never a devote Muslim who accepted the tenets and teachings of ''Islam'' (Al-e Ahmad, 1978a, pp. 180-81).

This thesis will argue that, on the contrary, the exclusionary tendencies and misanthropic undercurrents in Al-e Ahmad's writings prohibit any expression of a sense of identity with an Iranian national imagined community, and also that, as Talattof (2000) points out, "No historical material suggests that Al-e Ahmad observed any tenet of [Islam]" (p. 83). Furthermore, this thesis will explore Al-e Ahmad's discussion of occidentosis and cultural authenticity, arguing that his failure to clearly define his key concepts -- "machine," "tradition," and "authenticity," -- and his frequent self-contradictions prevent him from convincingly supporting his imagined "third way" (*rah-e-sevvom*) as a socially and politically relevant alternative. These problems mean that although Al-e Ahmad's main focus, goals (redeeming Iran, for example), and disdain for the imperialist West are all clear, he is seldom able to discuss them coherently. Indeed, Al-e

Ahmad leaves his concepts frustratingly vague and he contradicts himself repeatedly, not only in different chapters, but even within the same chapter. In other words, Al-e Ahmad is unable to provide a coherent discussion in his main books because not only do his claims often contradict each other and cancel out his previous discourses and statements, but also they are based on binary oppositions and a simplistic picture of the world that largely ignores the concrete social forces, the historical events, and the fundamental changes that have occurred since the Safavids' time. In addition, this thesis will demonstrate that Al-e Ahmad is a profoundly contradictory cultural critic, an inconsistent and careless thinker, and even a self-described atheist (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 58) and a nihilist who looks forward to spending an "eternity in nothingness" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 95) after his death. In order to historicize this reading of Al-e Ahmad's works, I want to explain that I am among those scholars (e.g., Talattof, 2000) who have revisited his writing from a much different perspective than his: he was a mid-20th-century Iranian cultural critic and political thinker living under Mohammad Reza Shah's authoritarian regime, whereas I am an early-21-century Iranian Canadian living in a liberal-democratic state. This temporal/historical difference allows one to fully grasp Al-e Ahmad's socio-political conditions, his method of inquiry, and his categories of analysis and to account for the profoundly contradictory socio-political changes that have taken place in Iran and in international relations since his death in 1969.

My motivation for studying Al-e Ahmad's work comes from my personal interest in his writing in the contexts of the so-called "nationality question" and identity-based oppression as

well as gender identities and sexual inequalities in Iran. Although today many Iranians and non-Iranians refer to Iran as Persia, “ethnic Persians” actually account for only a little more than half of the Iranian population (Malm & Esmailian, 2007). The other groups, or “nationalities,” include Azeris, Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Lurs, and Baluchis. Each of these groups has a different social weight and very different situations in Iranian political economy and in the central government’s strategies and discourses of power; for example, the Azeris, who live in Iran’s densely populated industrial north, “have long been an integral part of the Iranian elite,” whereas the Baluchis, who are sparsely scattered over the barren landscapes in Iran’s south, live in “extreme privation” and are almost cut off from the Iranian political economy and the central government in Tehran (Malm & Esmailian, 2007, p. 98). Essentially, Iran’s “nationality question” involves the issue of to what extent Iran’s Persian majority and central government accommodate the needs and dreams (e.g., democratic equality and self-determination) of the non-Persian minorities. Similarly, the issues of gender identities and sexual inequalities involve the extent to which Iran’s patriarchal and Islamic political society recognizes and protects the democratic rights of women (in particular, the poor and marginalized women of different minorities) and homosexuals.

My goal in my research was to study the relationship between Iran’s minorities and nationalism (national identity), and the question of democracy, a problematic issue that is explicit in Al-e Ahmad’s work, but that has been largely ignored in the studies of his writing. Thus, I am investigating a number of important questions in this thesis: how Al-e Ahmad’s

(1984) utopian "third way" (his alternative to either accepting Westernization or "remain[ing] fanatically in the bonds of tradition and return[ing] to the primeval means of production" (p. 78)) addresses the aspirations of Iran's minorities; how his discourse on cultural authenticity and its emphasis on the "Islamic totality" (p. 52) might undermine mass participation in politics, free discussion, and acceptance of difference; how Al-e Ahmad's discourse of occidentosis and anti-imperialism contributed to the emergence of Islamism and anti-imperialism and might have helped to suppress the movement for self-determination and social justice in Iran; in what ways Al-e Ahmad's (1978 a, b; 1984) historiography, or his construction of historical events -- filtered through the dominant power relations and the dominant patriarchal conception of history -- may have helped to re-imagine and re-define a collective historical memory that tends to erase the struggle of the oppressed minorities for autonomy in Iran; and, finally, how engaging with and deconstructing Al-e Ahmad's works could contribute to an alternative reading of Iranian history that incorporates the political memory of Iran's oppressed minorities.

To provide a background for this thesis's argument, the remainder of this introduction is divided into the following sections: (1) Al-e Ahmad: the man and the myth, (2) justification for the study, (3) significance of the study, and (4) organization of the study.

Al-e Ahmad: The Man and the Myth

With characteristic sarcasm, Al-e Ahmad (1982) stated, "My glorious arrival into this zoo of a world took place in 1923" (p. 12). He was born into a family with a strong religious

background: it “traced its descent back to Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, fifth Imam of the shi’a, by way of thirty intermediaries,” and his father was an *alim* and prayer leader at a mosque in south Tehran (Algar, 1984, p. 9). Al-e Ahmad (1982) considered that his childhood “was spent in a sort of aristocratic religious influence” (p. 14). In 1932, however, his family’s prosperity ended when Iran’s minister of justice deprived the established *ulama* (the clergy) of its notarial work/legal power and the income earned from it (Algar, 1982, p. 9). When Al-e Ahmad’s father resisted these changes, he lost his “official” religious position and decided that Al-e Ahmad would have to work instead of going to high school (Mirsepassi, 2000, p. 99). Much later, Al-e Ahmad (1982) interpreted this decision as an attempt not to supplement the family income, but to shape his identity: “[My father] told me to go to work in the bazaar so that he could make me what he was” (p. 14). Al-e Ahmad went to the bazaar, where he repaired watches and electrical connections (Mirsepassi, 2000), but he also secretly attended night classes until he obtained his high school diploma in 1943 (Algar, 1984).

One year later, Al-e Ahmad made a complete break with his father - - and also with ‘religion’ - - by joining the Tudeh Party, “the most powerful Marxist party in Iran” (Algar, 1984, p. 15). He seems to have enthusiastically embraced the Tudeh party’s political project and its Leninism (including its positivistic materialism), for he rose quickly within its ranks, becoming, within four years, a prolific writer for party publications, the editor of a new monthly, the director of the party’s publishing house, a member of the central committee, and a delegate to the party’s national congress (Algar, 1984). During this same historical time period, Al-e Ahmad

used the party's press to publish his first book, *Our Suffering* (1947), a collection of short stories that he described as "stories of defeat in [the Tudeh Party's] political battles told in socialist realist style" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 16).

While serving in the Tudeh Party and writing short stories, Al-e Ahmad (1982) also completed the program of studies at the Teacher Training College and then became a teacher in 1947. During the 1955-1956 school year, Al-e Ahmad was the principal of an elementary school in northern Iran (Hillmann, 1988). Later, he used this experience to write *The School Principal* (1958). Hillmann (1982) considers this autobiographical novel presenting a scathing criticism of Iran's educational institutions and pedagogy to be "Al-e Ahmad's most popular work of fiction and the first important novel in post-Mosaddeq Iran" (p. 80).

In 1947, the year when Al-e Ahmad became a teacher, he also made a sharp break with the Tudeh Party, just as he had previously made a complete break with his family and 'Islam' (Al-e Ahmad, 1982). These actions reflect what Algar (1984) describes as Al-e Ahmad's "deeply felt need for constant and abrupt change of direction" (p. 11), a need that his widow called *hadisaju'i* ("a search for happenings or events") (as cited in Algar, 1984, p. 11). For about the next five years, or until he returned to political activities during Mohammad Mosaddegh's campaign to nationalize Iran's oil industry, Al-e Ahmad (1982) lived in a self-described "period of silence" (p. 16), when he translated European writers including Gide, Camus, and lonesco into Persian, published an "antireligious" collection of short stories (Algar, 1984, p. 11); and married (in 1950) Simin Daneshvar (1921-2011), whose distinguished career included her

activities as a Fulbright scholar at Stanford University and the writing of her popular novel *Savushun* (1969), the first novel ever published by an Iranian woman (Ghanoonparvar, 2008). During the rise of Mosaddegh, Al-e Ahmad returned to political activities. He helped to organize and then soon quit the pro-Mosaddegh Toilers Party; then joined a new and similar party, the Third Force, and then quit it in 1953, just before the American-royalist coup that overthrew Mosaddegh and returned the Shah to state power (Algar, 1984). For Al-e Ahmad (1982), "a second enforced silence [1953-1962]" (p. 17) followed. During this period, he wrote more fiction and, much more importantly for his intellectual development, wrote and published three ethnographic studies. In order to research these works, Al-e Ahmad travelled to his ancestral village of Aurazan, a group of villages near Takistan in north-west Iran, and the island of Kharg in the Persian Gulf, and recorded his observations of the local population and their customs (Algar, 1984).After publishing his findings, Al-e Ahmad (1982) felt that they would be made " a commodity . . . for European consumption" and decided that he " wasn't cut out for that sort of thing" (p. 17). This decision ended his anthropological activities, which have since been used as evidence for his discovery of "a lost yet superior world" (Mirsepassi, 2000, p. 104) and, in the long-term, also for his "ultimate return to Islam" (Algar, 1984, p. 12).

At some point either during or following his anthropological work, Al-e Ahmad (1982) began formulating his ideas for *Occidentosis* , which he later accurately described as "a sort of turning point in [his] literary career"(p. 11). Using literary techniques such as figurative language, maxims, and hyperbole, he forcefully and vividly provided a discourse that

constructed “the West” in a way that suggests Said’s (1994) concept of “orientalism” in reverse and, arguably, that also made possible the development of a certain form of Islamism and a distinctive form of Islamic ideology (Poulson, 2005). This book’s initial publication in 1962 was immediately suppressed, but when Al-e Ahmad managed to publish a second edition in 1968, it had an immediate, galvanizing effect among its readers, who included a wide cross-section of the Iranian population (Poulson, 2005). Although *Occidentosis* is riddled with historical inaccuracies and logical inconsistencies, its construction of the “West” and “Westernization” as a disease plaguing Iran and its geo-body had a huge popular appeal for not only other ‘secular’ intellectuals, but also for Iranian Leninists and religious forces ,including a sector of clerics and students of Islamic theology. Even before the second edition appeared, the title (*gharbzadegi* in Persian) became “part of the popular lexicon in Iranian society” (Poulson, 2005, p. 189).

During the time of “gloom and distress” (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 18) that followed the initial censorship of *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad travelled to Western Europe, Russia, and America and also continued to write prolifically. In the years before his death (1961-1969), his work included *By the Pen* (1961), his allegorical novel about the failures of previous Iranian revolutionary movements; *Lost in the Crowd* (1966), his account of his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964; an early version of *A Stone on a Grave* (2008), his bleak reflection on his and his wife’s inability to have children; and, most important, the first two chapters of *On the Service and Treason of Intellectuals,* which was not published in its complete form until 1978. This last work is a monumental critique of Iran`s cultural workers or the so-called ‘intellectuals’ as agents of

colonial imperialism, savaging them for their complicity with colonial imperialism and for rejecting the Iranian local cultures and authentic values and beliefs (Al-e Ahmad, 1978a,b) (which Al-e Ahmad himself had harshly criticized in many of his previous writings) and also urging the intellectuals to ally themselves in with the clerics (the same social force that he criticized in this book (1978a, p. 180; 1978b, pp. 66, 73) and in *Occidentosis* for withdrawing "into [its] cocoons of fanaticism and paralysis" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 117)).

When Al-e-Ahmad died in 1969, he looked much older than a man only 46 years old, as if his body had been worn down by his "years of constant strain" (Algar, 1984, p. 4) and restless activity. In a photograph taken of him during the last years of his life, he could easily pass for a man in his seventies. He looks alarmingly thin, frail, and sick; his left forearm is heavily bandaged; his hair and beard are almost completely white; and he is leaning on a cane (see Salehi, 2010). Although his weak condition probably made his early death inevitable, it still generated rumours that SAVAK, the Shah's secret police, had murdered him (Preface, 2004). Ten years later, his younger brother Shamsoddin Al-e Ahmad fueled the flames of these rumours by claiming in a magazine cover story and interview on Al-e Ahmad that he had been "martyred" by SAVAK in "a quite tragic accident in the style of the Mafia" (Al-e Ahmad, S., 1982, p. 143). In both *Occidentosis* and his novel *By the Pen,* Al-e Ahmad had praised martyrdom, asserting, for example, that "justice can only be kept alive through the memory of martyrs" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 114). In the years following his death, he was increasingly portrayed as a

martyr by his admirers, who helped to secure “his place as a venerated opponent of the Pahlavi regime” (Preface, 2004).

Although Al-e Ahmad’s widow always insisted that her husband had died of natural causes, she also contributed to his mythic aura by extravagantly eulogizing him after his death. Her most famous tribute to him is available in Persian, as a section of *Ghurub-i Jalal* (1982), Daneshvar’s book-length biography of her husband; and in different English translations, as “Loss of Jalal” in *Daneshvar’s Playhouse* (2008 a), a collection of her short stories; and also as a section of Al-e-Ahmad’s memoir *A Stone on a Grave*. In this third version, Daneshvar (2008b) describes her husband as “the proud son of a mullah” and also declares:

> Jalal was on a path and he was travelling it with love . . . . If he took up religion, it was through knowledge and insight, because he had already tried Marxism, socialism, and to a certain extent, existentialism. Thus, his partial return to religion and to the Hidden Imam was a path towards freedom from the evil of imperialism and towards gaining a national identity - - a path to nobleness, humanity, compassion, justice, logic, and virtue. It was for such a religion that Jalal yearned (pp. 99-100).

In fact, Al-e Ahmad became completely estranged from his mullah father during the 1940s (Al-e Ahmad, 1982). Given that in *A Stone on a Grave*, Al-e Ahmad (2008) refers to his deceased father as “no more than a bag of bones” (p. 87), the father and son appear not to have ever reconciled with each other. Moreover, in *Ghurub-i Jalal*, Daneshvar speaks in two voices, one voice “constantly [reminding] herself of her love for [her husband],” and the second voice “[revealing] the unpleasant conditions that [her first voice] is trying to cover up” (Talattof, 2000, p. 160). Thus, her rhapsodic elegy for Al-e Ahmad is juxtaposed with grim descriptions of

her actual relationship with him. For example, after calling him “a bundle of contradictions” and “a bully” who would “rant and rave and utter such words that when you hear them you grow horns,” she reports, “He may . . . lecture in favour of free love and reject family life, or, on the contrary, speak approvingly of polygamy and talk about the paradise described for the Muslim man, his concubines, his permanent wives, his houris of paradise, and his excitements” (as cited in Talattof, 2000, p. 160). Similarly in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad (1984) asserts that the more influential religion becomes, “the deeper grows the dungeon of nations and peoples,” and yet *also* criticizes Iranian social life or ‘’society’’ because its “religious centers [are] crumbling” (pp. 75, 105).

In her two autobiographical novels and also in “a number of interview,” Daneshvar “reconsiders” her earlier remarks about her husband and presents “new revelations” about her feelings for him (K. Sheibani, personal communication, May, 19, 2015). However, these revelations have not been widely cited and have not changed the popular view of Al-e Ahmad, which continues to be based on Daneshvar’s famous tribute to him in *Ghurub-i Jalal*.

Generally, Al-e Ahmad’s early admirers ignored all the contradictions in his writing, while his later ones have continued to follow their predecessors’ lead and also to remain oblivious to the problematic aspects of his wife’s writings about him. In the early 1980s, the Islamic regime under Khomeini named a highway and a school in Al-e-Ahmad’s North Tehran neighbourhood after him (Hillmann, 1988) and also issued a postage stamp in his honor (Abrahamian, 1993). These actions signalled his admission into the pantheon of Iran’s revolutionary heroes, but it

was an article in the October 1982 issue of the Tehran magazine *E'tesam* that announced his apotheosis:

> He was a Marxist, then [he found] socialism in the National Front organization, but eventually he realized that his lost soul belonged to righteous Islam, period. He tried to become alienated from himself and drown himself in the abyss of intellectualism. Motivated by confrontation with his pure Islamic mentality and his authentic Islamic nature, he returned to his true self (as cited in Mirsepassi, 2000, p. 114).

The author of this passage does not explain when or where Al-e-Ahmad had this "realization" or where, in his writing, he expressed "his pure Islamic mentality." Nevertheless, Mirsepassi (2000) quotes the passage, without comment or qualification, as his final "support" for Al-e-Ahmad's "return to Islam" (p. 101).

Moreover, in order to provide evidence of Al-e-Ahmad's alleged "return" or conversion to Islam, Algar (1984), Hillmann (1988), and Mirsepassi(2000) all quote from the same elegy by Daneshvar that was previously cited in this introduction. Algar quotes from the *Ghurub-i Jalal* version, Hillmann from the "Loss of Jalal" version, and Mirsepassi cites the quotation in Hillmann. In both Hillmann's and Mirsepassi's discussions, Daneshvar's elegy is the first work mentioned -- the primary evidence presented -- after the author first introduces the topic of Al-e Ahmad's alleged embracing of Islam. Finally, in order to support his conclusion that for Al-e Ahmad, "Mecca symbolized the possibility of Muslim renewal in the modern world, the final commitment of Al-e Ahmad's unsettled life," Mirsepassi (2000) directs the reader to a "very informative" article by Al-e Ahmad's brother Shams (pp. 114, 208). Thus, Al-e Ahmad provided his followers the raw materials for his own myth; his brother, wife, and the Iranian authorities

initiated and embellished it; and many scholars have subsequently reinforced and promoted it. Through this process, Al-e Ahmad became popularly known not only as an important influence on Iran's 1978 revolution, but also as a martyr who ultimately found his lost soul in "righteous Islam."

The Justification for this Study

During his brief life, Al-e Ahmad earned a well-deserved reputation "as the most dauntless and effective rabble-rouser of his time" (Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 66). Moreover, he achieved this status while treading a tightrope in a repressive regime, stating what he thought was the 'truth' and risking censorship, arrest, and imprisonment (Hillmann, 1974). Although he was never a theoretically sophisticated and historically informed social critic and thinker, his passion for his cause, the energy in his writing, and his concept of occidentosis gained him a wide following after his death, to the extent that his writing provided "a primary diagnostic frame" (Poulson, 2005, p. 190) for a significant sector of both 'secular' and 'religious' Iranian cultural workers, cultural and political activists, and other social critics in their analyses of Iran's problems, particularly those resulting from its conflicts with Western imperialism. Clearly, the writings of Al-e Ahmad deserve the careful attention of scholars.

Despite his importance in recent Iranian history, however, most of the studies of his work that have been published in English have been disappointing. First, no book-length English study of his writing has been published. Instead, scholars writing in English have restricted

themselves mainly to prefaces and introductions to particular works, and to articles analyzing *Occidentosis* and/or *On the Service and Treason of Intellectuals*. Second, with one exception, no author writing in English has attempted to consider a representative selection of works from Al-e Ahmad's 24-year writing career.

This exception is Mirsepassi (2000). In an 18-page discussion of Al-e Ahmad's works, Mirsepassi discusses three books, *Occidentosis*, *On the Service and the Treason of Intellectuals*, and *Lost in the Crowd*. Mirsepassi provides helpful biographical and background information about Al-e Ahmad and these works, but his overall analysis is inconsistent. On the one hand, he argues that for Al-e Ahmad, "the critique of [occidentosis] was an answer to a yearning for an 'authentic' (Islamic) identity" and also that he was seeking "true Islam" as opposed to a "rootless, nihilistic Islam" (pp. 105, 107). Moreover, by concluding his discussion of Al-e Ahmad with the claim that "the possibility of Muslim renewal" was Al-e Ahmad's "final commitment" and then quoting *E'tesam* magazine's tribute to him, Mirsepassi definitely creates the impression that Al-e Ahmad did, indeed, become a "true" Muslim. On the other hand, Mirsepassi also concludes that *Lost in the Crowd* suggests that Al-e Ahmad went to Mecca "for the sake of mankind rather than God" and that his diary of his visit to Israel "shows in a revealing way that his 'authentic' theory of an Islamic law is very similar to a secularized Jewish society"(pp. 112, 113). (Mirsepassi also could have pointed out that in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad (1984) asks, "In the final analysis, do we not turn to the West in turning to Islam?"(p. 41).). At this level of Al-e Ahmad studies, therefore, a book-length study in English of Al-e Ahmad's work

that presents a consistent view of a representative selection of both his fiction and non-fiction is still lacking. This present study is intended to address this need.

Third, most scholars writing in English have accepted Hillmann's (1982) comment that Al-e Ahmad provided "unequivocal positions on foreign affairs, modernization and Westernization, the American presence in Iran, the Iranian education system, agriculture and land reform, the importance of religion in society, Iranian nationalism, and the like" (p. vii). However, as even an admirer such as Mirsepassi (2000) has conceded, Al-e Ahmad was never "a sophisticated scholar or deliberate thinker" (p. 98). Therefore, his work as a whole rarely provides "unequivocal positions" on major subjects. Indeed, he has great difficulty in constructing a consistent straightforward argument, not only from one work to the next, but also within the same text. For example, in *Occidentosis* , he uses all his rhetorical skills to incite his readers against "Westernized" Iranians yet *also* reveals that he himself was not "immune to Western influences" (Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 69). Similarly, in *On the Service and Treason of* I*ntellectuals*, Al-e Ahmad promotes the "third way"(*rah-e-sevvom*), or self-reliance and autarkic development; idealizes the pre-Safavid Perso-Islamic past; and recommends the preservation of "authentic" traditions or values as well as the revival of the memories, heroic acts, and identities of the (male) indigeneous *(khodi*) Iranian intellectuals as the most effective cure for the "disease" of Westernization, and the clergy (in holy alliance with the ''engaged intellectuals'') as the most effective socio-political force for administering the treatment for the "disease" of occidentosis. As Algar (1984) points out, however, in this same text Al-e Ahmad *also* "castigates [the clergy]

for attachment to religious tradition [*sunnat*], which he seems to associate in an exclusive and debilitating sense with the past" (p. 20). Al-e Ahmad never explains how Iranians can "revive" an "authentic" Perso-Islamic past while simultaneously ending their attachment to religious traditions.

The two arguments in the critical discourse on Al-e Ahmad that are most in need of re-evaluation involve his positions on nationalism and the return to Islam. The popular image and view of him is that, because his work "produced the basic vocabulary of the Islamic ideology" (Mirsepassi, 2000, p. 98), Al-e Ahmad must have been, therefore, a fervent nationalist who unequivocally advocated a return to Iran's national traditions and Shi'a Islam. Thus, Boroujerdi (1996), for example, describes *Occidentosis* as "a passionate eulogy for a passing era and its customs" (p. 68). However, although his writing undoubtedly inspired Iranian nationalists and Islamic forces, his own commitments to nationalism and Islam were highly ambivalent.

As Anderson (1991) comments in his seminal *Imagined Communities*, "Nation, nationality, nationalism - - all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyze" (p. 3). Although certain individual members of what some scholars and politicians call ''nations'' have organized themselves into "nationalist" alignments, their form has depended upon the concrete social-historical context and the local and global contending political forces. Consequently, "nationalism" is "not a coherent doctrine but a political practice" (Sullivan, n. d.), or, more precisely, an ideology, which like all ideologies, as Bloch (1995) pointed out, contains emancipatory promises or projects a utopian image of autonomy, but simultaneously maintains

the existing relations of domination or power (Kellner, 1996, p. 109), by (for instance) wiping "from memory whatever is distressing to national feeling" (Freud, quoted in Difazio, 2006, p. 156).

Similarly, the very concept of ''nation'' should be subjected to critical reading, because, as Hobsbawm (1997) has argued, there is a "divergence between definition and reality," and thereby, practice and theory are at odds with each other (pp. 135-36). Along this line of argument, a few comments should be registered here. First, although "nation" has been constructed by nationalists (e.g., Ali, 2004) and humanists to be an autonomous, conscious subject (a Cartesian *cogito*) that can stand outside of specific forms of social relations and strategies of power and reason independently, it is, like "state" and "capital," a phantom subject that can never be autonomous or sovereign because it is a product of political struggles and the effect of power relations and an ideology that depicts and sanctions it as a single whole, a unitary identity, a united body or "geo-body,'' and "the bearer of historical progress"(Morris-Suzuki, 1998, pp. 33, 10). In other words, "nation" is neither some identifiable entity nor a "representation" of the thing called "the real" because "there is nothing in the real to which the image *corresponds*" (Sayer, 2004, p. 153). It is, rather, an abstraction whose emergence and constant redefinition/transformation -- in Iran, for example -- have been shaped by "an apparatus of cultural fictions" (Brennan, 1990, p. 49) and by *difference*, i.e., by political struggles against imperialist powers and authoritarian state-forms (Banani, 1961; Vaziri, 1993). Consequently, nation, as Brantlinger (1996) has rightly reminded us, "does not

‘really’ exist,” even though the appropriation of this abstraction (the concept of nation) has profound effects and “consequences” (pp. 11-12) in the sense that ‘it’ incites a radical imaginary, inspires particular political effects, and might be put to use as a weapon in colonial and postcolonial contexts against imperialism and for social justice, dignity, and autonomy (Jenkins and Minnerup, 1984, pp. 47-52; Mentinis, 2006, pp. 123-132).

Second, the very concept of nation can become reified when it is conceived as a timeless, transhistorical category (e.g., Poulantzas, 2000, p. 94) that has existed since time immemorial. In this sense, as Hobsbawm (1997) pointed out:

> [A]part from a few relatively permanent political entities such as China, Korea, Vietnam, and perhaps Iran and Egypt . . . the territorial units for which so-called national movements sought to win independence, were overwhelmingly the actual creations of imperial conquest, often no older than a few decades . . . (p. 137).

Third, Partha Chatterjee’s (1993) crucial point about the creation and construction of ‘nation’ is relevant here. More specifically, in a Gramsci-inspired reading of subaltern nationalism, Chatterjee (1993) criticizes Anderson’s inadequate theoretical framework and his failure to account theoretically for the historical difference and the specific form that nationalism and imaginings of community have assumed in Asia and Africa. He contends that the anti-colonial nationalism and “the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a *difference* with the “modular” forms of the national society propagated by the modern West” (p. 5). Elaborating further on this historical review, Chatterjee (1993) raises the crucial point that anti-colonial nationalism divided “the world of social institutions and practices into two domains — the material and the spiritual” (p. 6). Whereas

the material domain was influenced and invaded by the colonial regime, colonial ideology, and imperialist colonial powers, the spiritual domain or the 'inner domain of cultural identity' remained a sovereign domain within which "nation" as an imagined community became possible and brought into existence, and was guarded from the onslaught, invasion, and encroachment of the colonial culture and colonial imperialism (Chatterjee, 1993).

Furthermore, although the imaginings of a community as a homogeneous entity have provided the framework for "the lofty political imaginary of popular sovereignty" and "equal citizenship," this work of abstraction has simultaneously concealed the "mundane administrative reality of governmentality" (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 36), which helps to create a distinction between citizens as rights-bearing subjects, and populations as the targets and objects of policy that must be controlled and governed (Chatterjee, 2004). Thus, as Chatterjee (2004) points out, the practices of governmentality, discussed by Foucault (and with a quite different history in Europe and Asia and Africa), have created the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the "heterogeneous construct of the social" as the antinomy of the "homogeneous construct of the nation" (p. 36).

In addition, the imaginings of nation and the forms of state should not be examined (as Anderson did) in abstraction from local popular struggles and the local ideology of namus-e-melli (national honor/chastity) which is entirely relevant to Al-e Ahmad's (1984, 1978a, 1978b) image of sovereignty and "authentic" self or identity, that is, the purity of Iran. This ideology provide a model for a particular moral code and proper behavior; it tends to stabilize social

hierarchy, ''a hierarchy of ideal meaning'' (Ryan and Kellner, 1990, p. 15), which sanctifies the relations of inequality and abstract identity, establishes boundaries (the public/private dichotomy), and promotes a ''manly ideal of politics'' (Hoganson, 1998, pp. 15-42). These abstractions and rhetorical and representational forms, one may suggest, were forces at work in the historical processes of state-building, identity formation, and anti-imperialist nationalism in Iran.

Not surprisingly, it was in this context that the belief that the female body (defined as the geo-body and national honor) had to be protected and remain free from the "taint" of Western sexual morality, and that the disease of occidentosis played a major political role in the emergence of Iranian nationalism, in the project of state formation (Najmabadi, 2005), and in the anti-imperialist politics in Iran. In this connection, Najmabadi (1996) points out that

> Concepts central to imagining and constructing modern Iran were envisaged in terms related to concepts of femininity and masculinity. Nation/*millat*, for instance, was largely conceptualized as a brotherhood - - at least until the first decade of the twentieth century when women began to claim their space as sisters-in-the-nation. The modern notion of *vatan* (homeland), on the other hand, was envisaged as female - - a beloved or mother. Closely linked to the maleness of *millat* and femaleness of *vatan* was the multiple load of the concept of *namus* (honor) in this period. The idea shifted between the purity (*ismat*) of women and the integrity of the nation, and both were constituted as subjects of male responsibility and protection; sexual and national honor constantly slipped back and forth in the literature of this time (p. 108).

This said, and despite all its theoretical shortcomings, Anderson's (1991) concept of a "nation" as an "imagined *community"* (p. 7, emphasis added) still provides a useful means for analyzing Al-e Ahmad's ambivalent form of nationalism. Anderson (1991) argues that the

“nation” is imagined as “limited,” “sovereign,” and “as a community” (p. 7). The nation is limited because it has “finite, if elastic boundaries”; it is “sovereign” because it is “the gage and emblem” of a people’s desire for freedom (p. 7); and it is a “community” because “it is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (p. 7). Eagleton (1990) supports this view of the ‘nation’ as a community, arguing, “The metaphysics of nationalism speak of the entry into full self-realization of a unitary subject known as the people” (p. 28).

When Anderson’s (1991) three criteria are applied to Al-e Ahmad, his “nationalism” becomes problematic. To be sure, his view of Iran as a “nation” is “limited”: he does not imagine it as “coterminous with mankind” (Anderson, 1991, p. 7). His view of Iran is also “sovereign”: he like, Khalil Maleki, a prominent Iranian social critic, fiercely insists upon the *rah-e-sevvom* (the third path/way), i.e., a specifically Iranian path of autarkic development and ‘authentic’ or ‘genuine’ independence/sovereignty (Katouzian, 2009, 172; Al-e Ahmad, 1978b, p. 214). In other words, he wants Iran to become a self-sufficient and self-reliant political, economic, and cultural formation entirely free of Western imperialist domination and of the former Soviet Union’s form of ‘socialism.’ However, whether Al-e Ahmad expresses any sense of identity with Iran as a national imagined community is much less certain.

As many authors have noted, the nationalist project, or the process of constructing a national imagined community, involves both the resurrecting of an idealized national past and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the present. Castro-Klaren (2003) describes the resurrection activity as “the operation of mapping a narrative (history) onto a territory

(fatherland)" (p. 170). In *Occidentosis,* Al-e Ahmad (1984) engages in this kind of operation when he returns in his imagination to Iran's pre-Safavid past (pre-1500 A.D.), which he uses to construct what Castro-Klaren (2008) would describe as a "narrative anchored in concepts of origin, agency, population self-identity, and memory of dead ancestors and heroes" (p. 170). Enraptured by this construct, which he himself has created out of "a 'past' that has never been present, and which never will be" (Derrida, as cited in Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, p. 86), Al-e Ahmad goes on to use his imagined Persian past not only as his benchmark for evaluating Iran's present, but also as his blueprint for determining Iran's future. As Ismail (2000) explains, the activity of constructing an imaginary past is very much "about reconstituting lost community or redeeming loss" (p. 279). In this project, in other words, "the past is a destiny and a destination, the past is the horizon of the future" (p. 279).

Typically, nationalists use the narrative of an idealized past as their foundational text in the development of national identity. Just as this narrative is constructed by including only some aspects of the past and excluding all others, so, too, a national community "with supposedly shared values is constructed which leaves out other values" (Larrain, 2000, p. 35). For this reason, "national identity" is defined as against the identity of those other groups who share these excluded values and whose values, ideas, and ways of life "are presented as outside the national community" (Larrain, 2000, p. 35). Thus, the construction of national identity always involves an "us" (the included ones) and a "them" (the excluded ones). Finally, as Larrain (2000) emphasizes, "[National] identity is constructed not solely by discourse but also by the

solidified practices of a people" (p. 37). Together, a shared discourse and shared practices are included in the construct of the imagined community of the "nation."

Ismail (2000) argues that a crucial aspect of this construction process is the attempt to use the resurrected past to foster, renew, and regenerate the nation for the sake of young people and future generations. However, Al-e Ahmad's attempt to recreate and rejuvenate Persia's imagined glorious past in Iran's present is almost entirely exclusionary: in his work as whole, he makes clear that both the values and the practices of the oppressed classes, marginal populations, and minorities such as Arabs, Lurs, Baluchis, and Kurds are not included in his Iranian imagined national community. Moreover, women are included in this community only if they focus their lives on what Al-e Ahmad (1984) calls their proper "work, duty, social responsibility, and character" (p. 70). Other Iranian women, who in his words constitute only "an army of consumers of powder and lipstick (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 70), are excluded from his imagined Iran. Who *is* included, one might well ask? Basically, the only group that appears to meet Al-e Ahmad's (1984) criteria for inclusion consists of the "outstanding personalities," or the "self-sacrificing, self-surpassing, and principled people," who have not been "corrupted and stupified by corporeal pleasures" (pp. 131, 132, 133) -- or the individuals who match his perception of himself.

Al-e Ahmad's attempt to reconstruct an Iranian national imagined community is exclusionary and elitist: his politics of remembrance glorifies and includes mainly or even only the "outstanding personalities" in his political society and excludes almost everyone else. Thus,

he cannot be a “nationalist” in the usual understanding of this term, because he includes very few Iranians in his construction of Iran’s national imagined community. In his perception of “the idea of ‘us’ as opposed to ‘them’” (Larrain, 2000, p. 35), almost all Iranians fall into the latter group.

Thus, in Al-e Ahmad’s fiction, his protagonists are outsiders like the principal in *The School Principle* (1958), who is the only member of the one-person group of “us” and feels an intense sense of estrangement from everyone else in the much larger group of “them.” His alienation can be partly attributed to the tendency of the so-called “intellectual” to take on the public role of “outsider” and “disturber of the status quo” (Said, 1996, p. x), but it also expresses and reflects the undercurrent of misanthropy that runs throughout Al-e Ahmad’s work.

In his non-fiction, Al-e Ahmad particularly despises Iran’s allegedly “Westernized intellectuals,” holding them “solely accountable for all the anguish and misery of their society” (Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 74). As well, in *On the Service and the Treason of Intellectuals*, he labels Ismailis as ‘’a sort of fifth column’’ (Al-e Ahmad, 1978a, p. 212), makes stereotypical references to Azerbaijanis and Jews as penny pinchers (Al-e Ahmad, 1978b, p. 142) and degrades and castigates the Azerbaijani diasporas and communities of immigrants as ‘’effete, occidentotic, *lamazhab* [irreligious, impious or ungodly] and *bi band-o-bar*[loose or sexually immoral]’’(p. 144). Moreover, he has nothing positive to say about any of Iran’s exploited and oppressed social classes. For example, unlike Fanon (2004) in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Al-e Ahmad

never recognizes the revolutionary potential of the oppressed, their critical perspective, and their self-activity or ''self-creative activity'' (Petrovic, 1967, p. 79). Rather, he dismisses and excludes them for being a "superstitious, prejudiced folk" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 69), incapable of reason (*aghl*), and ''uncultured'' or politically ''dormant'' (Al-e Ahmad, 1978a, pp. 30-31, 139, 156). Moreover, he is certain that without strong leadership from the top to lead and guide them, they will remain in their present state as docile and manipulable dupes incapable of political and cultural transformative activities. Al-e Ahmad (1984) expresses a sense of identity and inclusion only when he is discussing Iran's cultural elite and the Iranians (Persians) of the pre-Safavid era, which he constructs nostalgically and romantically as having a "pure," (pre-Safavid) Islamic essence, or an "Islamic totality, formal and real"(p. 33).

Al-e Ahmad's exclusionary political imaginary and his ambivalent attitude towards the Ideology of nationalism can be clarified by comparing him to Mohammad Mosaddegh (1882-1967). This Iranian author and parliamentarian was the democratically elected prime minister of Iran from 1951-1953, before the British Secret Intelligence Service and the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) led a coup d'etat that overthrew him and restored the fugitive Shah back to the throne (Abrahamian, 2013; Parsa, 1989; Kinzer, 2003). Mossadegh was also a popular Iranian nationalist who rejected Western domination of Iran's political economy and, both before and during his brief rule, called for sociopolitical reforms, political pluralism, as well as democratic nationalization and national self-determination (Abrahamian, 2008, 2013; Marshall, 1988; Parsa, 1989). Among Mossadegh's most politically significant activities was his

campaign for the nationalization of Iran's oil industry, which the British Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had controlled since 1913 (Kinzer, 2003). When Mossadegh started calling for nationalization, Al-e Ahmad was focusing on literary work, after having quit Iran's Tudeh (communist) party. The beginning of Mosaddegh's campaign coincided with Al-e Ahmad's return to political activity. Later, in *Occidentosis*, he expressed his admiration for Mosaddegh and also supported the nationalization of Iran's oil industry (Al-e Ahmad, 1984).

In October, 1951, Mossadegh delivered a speech to the Security Council of the United Nations, presenting his case for nationalization:

> My countrymen lack the bare necessities of existence. Their standard of living is probably one of the lowest in the world. Our greatest asset is oil . . . . As now organized, however, the petroleum industry has contributed practically nothing to the well-being of the people or to the technical progress or development of my country (as cited in Kinzer, 2003, p. 123).

Here, in terms of the Iranian population, Mosaddegh's diction signifies the politics of inclusion: his expressions "my countrymen" and "my country" imply that *all* Iranians are his "countrymen," or "people" and that he strongly identifies himself with the Iranian national imagined community.

Moreover, whereas Al-e Ahmad excluded all "Westernized" Iranian women from his imagined nation, Mosaddegh included all Iranian women in his imagined Iran. When Mosaddegh was campaigning for political office, Iran's religious authorities were opposing the education of women, closing down schools for girls, and, generally, attempting to keep Iranian

women in their homes (Nashat, 1983). The Society for Democratic Women, formed in 1949, offered strong resistance to these oppressive activities, calling for the extension of suffrage to women, equal pay for equal work, and the expansion of public education for girls (Nashat, 1983). After Mosaddegh became prime minister, he accepted a constitutional amendment that addressed the Society's concerns (Nashat, 1983). Thus, whereas Al-e Ahmad (1984) feared that many Iranian women were no longer "the preservers of tradition, family, and future generations," but were somehow being "forced" every day "to freshen up and try on a new style and wander around" (p. 70), Mosaddegh welcomed all Iranian women into his Iranian national imaginary community. His support of women's suffrage, for example, greatly contrasts with Al-e Ahmad's (1984) view of this issue: reflecting not only his misogyny, but also his politics of exclusion and his limited form of nationalism, Al-e Ahmad believed that "the whole idea" of giving women the right to vote was "idiotic" (p. 70).

The claims made about Al-e Ahmad's alleged return to an "authentic" Islam are even more dubious than those concerning his nationalism. In the preface to his study "The Joyous Celebration," the anonymous writer provides a typical statement of these claims, observing that "[i]n the 1960s, [Al-e Ahmad] seems to have rediscovered Islam as a matter of personal spirituality but also a revolutionary ideology . . ." (Preface, 2004). Usually, Al-e Ahmad's 1964 pilgrimage to Mecca and his written account of it in *Lost in the Crowd* (1966) are cited as the main "evidence" for his "return" to Islam. However, as Hillmann points out, in this memoir "Al-e Ahmad hardly contemplates or mentions Allah, sin, heaven, human soul, or the like" (as cited in

Mirsepassi, 2000, p. 111). Ironically, he condemned the 'Westernized' Iranian for being "a thing without authenticity" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 95), but did not recognize the inauthenticity of his personal and unorthodox version of Islam.

Furthermore, in *On the Service and Betrayal of Intellectuals*, Al-e Ahmad (1978) offers what any "authentic" Muslim would perceive as a most unorthodox comparative ontology of some of the world's main religious discourses. He argues that in Islam, the relationship between God and humans is that between "master and slave"; in Judaism, between two rivals (e.g., Jehovah and Jacob); in Christianity, between father and son; and in Buddhism, between a unified creator and created. Al-e Ahmad (1978) concludes his ontology by criticizing only the relationship between master and slave, commenting that it is one of the causes of the lack of "enlightenment" (*roshanfekri*) in the Islamic world (Al-e-Ahmad, 1978a, p. 33). Al-e-Ahmad's ambivalence towards Islam supports Said's (1994) conclusion that "There are no rules by which intellectuals can know what to say or do; nor for the true secular intellectual are there any gods to be worshipped and looked to for unwavering guidance" (p. xiv). Certainly, nothing in the 30 published volumes of Al-e Ahmad's work suggests that he ever practiced Islam for such a purpose.

Despite the many discrepancies between the popular image and view of Al-e-Ahmad and his work, few scholars except for Vahdat (2000), have discussed at length the inconsistencies, paradoxes, and contradictions in Al-e-Ahmad's discourse. Therefore, this present study, the first book-length study in English of his fiction and non-fiction, seeks to address this gap.

Significance of the Study

As Boroujerdi (1996) comments, “After [Al-e Ahmad], it has been impossible for Iranian intellectuals to speak of their cultural conflict with contemporary Western civilization without paying homage in some way to his theory of gharbzadegi” (p. 74). Moreover, Al-e Ahmad’s appeal extended beyond Iran’s community of the so-called ‘secular’ intellectuals: he was the only contemporary Iranian writer to receive praise from Khomeini (Abrahamian, 1993), and the perception that he unambiguously supported the return to an “authentic” Islam in order to oppose Westernization created a large and interested audience in Iran’s Islamic forces, including a sector of the clergy and the students of Islamic theology.

Given Al-e Ahmad’s importance in and contribution to Iran’s recent history, literary movement, and critical thought, this present study is significant for three main reasons. First, it provides a necessary alternative to the popular view of Al-e Ahmad and his work by carrying out a close reading of a selection of his fiction and non-fiction. This deconstructive reading may encourage future researchers to also consider the problematic aspects of Al-e Ahmad’s discourse, political thought and imaginary universe. Second, this present study also has significance for future studies of Islamism (as a form of nationalism), Islamic political activism or Islamic ideology. As Al-e Ahmad was one of its foundational theorists, the same kinds of contradictions and vacillations that characterize his own work should also be present in Islamism and Islamic revolutionary discourse in general. Without considering Al-e Ahmad, Harman (1994), Marshall (1995), and Poya (1999) provided a pioneering discussion of the

contradictions of Islamism. Subsequently, Vahdat (1999) found similar problems in Islamism and Islamic discourse with regard to modernization. This present study both builds on the foundation of these past studies and identifies some previously unrecognized issues with implications for our understanding of Al-e Ahmad's work in particular and for Islamism in general.

Third, this thesis is also significant because it combines the strengths of sociological analysis and literary criticism, usefully crossing their (alleged) disciplinary boundaries in its social theorizing and close textual analysis. Although the study of society and the study of literature might appear to imply different methods and orientations, sociology and literature are actually quite similar at the basic level of content. Swingewood (1972), for example, noted that just as sociology is essentially the "study of [people] in society [and] the study of social institutions and social processes," literature also "is pre-eminently concerned with . . . the social world" (pp. 11, 12). Although the novel, as "the major literary genre of industrial society," (Swingewood, 1972, p. 12) might appear to be much more concerned than poetry is with the "social-historical world," Swingewood (1987), in a later study, argues forcefully for need for a "sociological poetics" that will "grasp both immanent poetic form and its organic relation with society, history, and human purposes without dissolving one into the other" (p. 7). Many other critics, perhaps most famously, Eagleton (1976), have insisted on the relationships between literature and society, and literature and ideology, and written at length of the implications for Marxist literary criticism.

Historically, sociologists have taken three broad approaches to sociology of literature. Some have focused on "organizational and institutional analysis of the agencies involved in artistic and cultural production and their relations with audiences" (Jary & Jary, 2000, p. 585), or on what Eagleton (1976) calls a concern "with how novels get published" (p. 3). A second, much smaller group of sociologists has attempted to determine how a work of literature is received by a society during a specific historical period (Swingewood, 1972). A third group has studied "the documentary aspect of literature, arguing that it provides a mirror to the age" (Swingewood, 1972, p. 13). Among this third group, "Marxists are today at the forefront of an emphasis on the importance of analysis of internal features of . . . the text" (Jary & Jary, 2000, p. 585). With its focus on a text's "internal features", this emphasis has close affinities with the "close reading" approach used in this present study. Each of these three sociological perspectives on the study of literature supports the other two in terms of increasing our total understanding of a literary text (Swingewood, 1972) and has enabled sociology to play an important role in the study of literature. However, as Jary and Jary (2000) argue, "[I]t must also be recognized that much seminal work in the sociology of art [i.e., the visual arts, music, theatre, cinema, and literature] has been interdisciplinary rather than narrowly sociological" (p. 585). This present thesis is such an interdisciplinary study, borrowing freely from both sociology and literary criticism in order to analyze Al-e Ahmad's texts.

The Organization of This Study

This thesis covers a wide range of Al-e Ahmad's writing, discussing representative works from his 24-year writing career. The remainder of this study is organized as follows.

Chapter One explains the method of analysis used in this thesis to discuss Al-e Ahmad's texts. The influences of the New Criticism and the close reading, challenges to Barthes' theory of the "death of the author," and Derrida and deconstruction are all explained. It is argued that the close reading, combined with a consideration of biographical and socio-cultural factors and the use of deconstructive principles and practices, provides the most appropriate method for carefully scrutinizing Al-e Ahmad's texts and uncovering their inconsistencies and self-contradictions.

Chapter Two deals with Al-e Ahmad's fiction by analyzing five of his short stories and two of his four novels: "The Pilgrimage" (1945), "Seh'tar" (1949), "The Untimely Breaking of the Fast" (1946), and "My Sister and the Spider" (1971); *The School Principal* (1958), the first of his major works to appear in English and generally described as his most popular novel (Hillmann, 1988); and *By the Pen* (1961), considered by Ghanoonparvar (1988) to be Al-e Ahmad's "most mature work of fiction"(p. vii).Together, the five stories and *The School Principal* present an overwhelmingly negative criticism of Iranian social life and cultural forms and practices, including its national and religious values and customs and traditions, and emphasize the need for martyrdom as the only effective response to oppression.

Chapter Three analyzes *Occidentosis* (1961), which gave Al-e Ahmad his reputation as the leading Iranian social critic of his generation. In this chapter, it is argued that despite the undeniable appeal of this text's construction of the "West" for a significant sector of Iranian political activists and social critics, Al-e Ahmad's argument is based more on ahistorical abstractions, Manichaean/dualist assumptions, sexual anxieties (anxieties about honor and manhood), and a nostalgia for a Golden Age prior to the Safavid era than a empirically and historically informed analysis and collapses under its own weight during a close reading and deconstructive critique.

Chapter Four compares *Occidentosis* with Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), focusing on each author's analysis of the role of the intellectual in anti-colonial struggles. Here, Gramsci's (1971/2005) theory of intellectuals is used to argue that Al-e Ahmad's limitations as a thinker result in a simplistic analysis that compares unfavourably with Fanon's more nuanced discussion of the intellectual or cultural worker as part of an organic community and a mass movement engaged in popular revolutionary struggles to contest colonial ideology and relations of imperialism - - and to fight for dignity and autonomy.

Chapter Five discusses *Lost in the Crowd* (1966), Al-e Ahmad's account of his 1964 pilgrimage to Mecca. Although this memoir is often cited as the main evidence of Al-e Ahmad's alleged return to an "authentic" Islam, the actual text reveals that, for Al-e Ahmad, the pilgrimage to Islam's holiest shrine never became a religious experience. On the contrary, his dominant impression is that the *Hajj* is a form of "mechanized' primitivity" and that "the

Muslim people of today don't have to accept pre-Islamic Arab life or Arab ignorance in order to partake of such primitiveness" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 85).

Chapter Six discusses *A Stone on a Grave*, written in 1963 but not published until 1981 (Vahdat, 2000). This reflection on the infertility of Al-e Ahmad and his wife should be required reading for all those who continue to insist that he was a champion for Iranian and Islamic values and traditions. In fact, this text's view of tradition was such a challenge to the myth of Al-e Ahmad that in 1987, an interviewer felt compelled to inform Al-e Ahmad's wife, "Regarding Jalal, our opinion is that the publication [of *A Stone on a Grave*] -- especially after his death -- was a conspiracy to distort his noble and rebellious image" (as cited in Ghanoonparvar, 2008, p. ix).

Finally, the last section of this thesis presents a summary, main findings, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 1

Method of Analysis

In his discussion of discourse analysis, Thompson (1984) comments that "the analysis of discourse can never be merely an analysis: it must also be a synthetic construction, a creative projection, of a possible meaning" (p. 133). Accordingly, the analytic approach used in this study is synthetic and is guided by, but not limited to, some of the principles of the so-called "New Criticism," whose distinctive procedure is "explication," or "close reading" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 182); challenges to the notion of the "death of the author" (Barthes, 1968); and Derrida's (1976) practice of "deconstruction," which "sets out to show that conflicting forces within the text serve to dissipate the seeming definateness of its structure and meanings into an indefinate array of incompatible and undecidable possibilities" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 56), and is the most appropriate analytic method for studying Al-e Ahmad's self-contradictory and aporia-ridden texts. In the remainder of this chapter, the discussion of method is divided into the following sections: (1) the New Criticism and close reading, (2) Barthes and the "death of the author," (3) Derrida and deconstruction, and (4) conclusion.

New Criticism and Close Reading

The expression "New Criticism," first introduced in John Crowe Ransom's 1941 text *The New Criticism,* was later used to refer to an analytic theory and practice that dominated American literary criticism until the late 1960's (Abrams & Harpham, 2005). This movement was

inspired by I. A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929), as well as the critical essays of T. S. Eliot (Abrams & Harpham, 2005). In *Practical Criticism,* Richards (1929) quotes William Blake's maxim "Virtue resides only in minute particulars" and then comments, "Virtue in poetry turns nearly always upon differences and connections too minute and unobtrusive to be directly perceived" (p. 284). Based on this assumption, Richards (1929) insists that the "understanding" of poetry depends upon what the New Critics later called a "close reading," or "the detailed analysis of the verbal and figurative components within a work "(Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p.189). Using a simple vocabulary of terms such as "ambiguity," "paradox," and "irony," the New Critics, unlike the structuralists and deconstructionists, who followed them, had no elaborate or systematic theory to support their perception of poetic "truth," and, consequently, they were "invulnerable to assault" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 44). For them, the proper and only concern of literary criticism was "a detailed consideration of the work itself as an independent entity" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 188). In practice, this concern meant that the New Critics ignored the biographies of authors, the socio-historical context of literature, and literary history, and focused on only the actual words of a text, investing "the privileged autonomy of poetic form" with a kind of quasi-religious value as "truth" (Norris, 1982, p. 14).

Subsequent critics have pointed out the disadvantages of the New Critics' close reading. First, as Eagleton (1983) comments, it "implies a limiting as well as a focusing of concern," and, by doing so, it encourages "the illusion that any piece of language, 'literary' or not, can be

adequately studied or even understood in isolation" (p. 44). If a text is turned into an entity in itself, it becomes fetishized and must be severed from not only the author and his or her context, but also from the reader and his or her role in the construction of meaning. Second, at its most extreme, the close reading results in a "lemon-squeezing style of analysis" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 51) derived not only from Richards (1929), but also from William Empson (1930). In his *Seven Types of Ambiguity,* he identifies seven types of ambiguity that an author may create either deliberately or unconsciously, and then proceeds to demonstrate "breathtaking off-hand ingenuity" as he "unravels ever finer nuances of literary meaning "(Eagleton, 1983, p. 51). Third, the close reading ignores the distinctions among literary genres (Abrams & Harpham, 2005) even though the way in which generic conventions are included, inflected, or omitted in a text can significantly affect its meaning.

Despite these limitations, the theory and practice of the close reading have "left a deep and enduring mark on the criticism and teaching of literature" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 190), as well on the approaches now used to analyze non-literary texts. As Eagleton (1983) comments, the New Critics "were properly unafraid to take [a] text apart" (p.46), and as Thompson (1984) points out, an analysis "*within* a text that is treated as a self-enclosed entity may yield valuable insights concerning the constitution of a text" (p. 196) and its interplay of verbal and figurative elements. Thus, many prominent literary critics, social critics, and philosophers have recognized the merits or the close reading and applied it in their work. For example, Barthes' (1974) "astonishing study" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 137) of Balzac's story

“Sarrasine” is, essentially, a close reading carried to extremes, and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, Derrida (1976) uses an “exemplary close-reading style” (Norris, 1985, p. 226) in his deconstructions of various kinds of texts. Moreover, Spivak (1993), provides a close reading of Rusdie’s *The Satanic Verses,* explaining that before she discusses “the cultural politics” influencing the response to it, she “will attempt the impossible: a reading of *The Satanic Verses* as if nothing has happened since late 1988 [the year before Rusdie’s novel was first published]” (p. 219). Spivak (1993) suggests that a close reading is the essential first step to “understanding” a text. If used cautiously and critically, the close reading approach still has its place in textual analysis, particularly for texts that have never been subjected to a close scrutiny at the level of their language.

Al-e Ahmad’s works are such texts. General readers and critics alike have understood the central idea of *Occidentosis,* for example, which is based on a simple metaphor equating Westernization with disease, and have ignored the contradictory discourse that attempts to support this metaphor - - a discourse that becomes clear during a close reading. This present study will not follow the New Critics in rejecting the importance of such externalities as the author’s biography and socio-historical context, and a work’s genre, but will draw upon them, as well as upon a variety of theoretical critical resources and critical theorists who, despite their important differences, pay close attention to cultural forms and also emphasize how a text’s internal inconsistencies work against its “declared intention” (Derrida, 1976, p. 243). This approach and a deconstructive analysis will uncover contradictions, forms, patterns, and motifs

in Al-e Ahmad's writing - - such as the pervasive use of degrading animal imagery in his novel *The School Principal* - - which complicate the popular image and view of him as a staunch nationalist who "romanticized" Iranian and Islamic values, customs, and traditions (Mirsepassi, 2000, pp. 76-79).

Barthes and the "Death of the Author"

The New Critics gave subsequent textual critics not only the close reading as an analytical method, but also the "intentional fallacy" as a key critical concept. This expression was first proposed by W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsly in "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946), where they declared that a poem does not belong to its author but "is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it"; as a result, the poem "belongs to the public" (as cited in Adair, 2011). Essentially, the New Critics' "intentional fallacy" refers to what is asserted to be the error of any attempt to interpret and evaluate a text by using evidence, from outside the text itself, for its author's intention, design, or purpose (Abrams & Harpham, 2005).

The concept of the "intentional fallacy" fully anticipates Bathes (1968) much more dramatic version of it in his essay "The Death of the Author" (Adair, 2011). Here, Barthes (1968) mocks the belief that a text consists "of a line of words, releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God); rather, a text is "a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original; the text is a tissue of

citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture" (p. 4). Because the author is "dead," "it is the language which speaks, not the author," and "language alone acts, 'performs,' and not 'oneself'" (Barthes, 1968, p. 3). For Barthes (1968), "the author is never anything more than the man who writes" - - a mere scribe (a "scriptor"), rather than the creator of meaning (pp. 3, 4). Finally, in the absence of an "author," any "claim to decipher a text becomes quite useless" because a text can have no "final signification" (Barthes, 1968, p. 5). Thus, textual criticism becomes "an ironic, uneasy business," a journey into an undecipherable text that "lays bare the illusoriness of meaning, the impossibility of truth and the deceitful guiles of all discourse" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 147).

Barthes' belief in the "death of the author" did not prevent him from drawing attention to his own subjectivity and identity as an author by writing his autobiography. In this playful, fragmentary, self-reflexive work, he rationalizes his decision to write about himself, asking, "[W]hy should I not speak of 'myself' since this 'my' is no longer 'the self'?" and then explaining, "I would be nothing [i.e., dead] if I didn't write" (Barthes, 1977, pp. 168, 169).

As Barthes' apparent need to justify his writing of his autobiography suggests, Eagleton's (1983) claim that "the 'death of the author' is a slogan that modern criticism is now confidently able to proclaim" (p. 138) is an overstatement. In fact, this concept, even in its less extreme version as the "intentional fallacy," has always been hotly debated (Abrams & Harpham, 2005). A "slogan" is a short, dramatic phrase much valued by advertisers and politicians for its memorability rather than its accuracy. Thus, as Spivak (1993) comments, "Foucault's question

‘What is an author?”’ [in Foucault, 1977] has been construed by most readers as a rhetorical question to be answered in the negative” (p. 218). Nevertheless, Spivak (1993) strongly suggests that Barthes’ slogan requires qualification: “Barthes is writing . . . not of the death of the writer . . . or of the subject, or yet of the agent, but of the *author*” (p. 217). Moreover, Spivak (1993) continues, Barthes is criticizing a particular conception of the author - - the perception that views him or her as “the authority for the meaning of a text” (p. 217). The “writer” as the “agent” who produces a text survives, even if the “author” as the authority for a text’s meaning has “died.”

Both Swingewood (1987) and Thompson (1981, 1984) elaborate on the issue of agency raised by Spivak. Swingewood (1987) argues that

> without author/subject [or agent], there is no art, no production, no autonomy. To resurrect the author is not to resurrect a God-like creative subject, but rather to situate individuality (and thus voluntarism, choice, action), in its necessary biographical conjunction with collective social-historical forces. Individuality is enriched through its dialogic relation with objective structures; and conversely, structures develop autonomy through individual action (p. 117).

To illustrate this argument, Swingewood (1987) compares authors to revolutionaries: “Revolutionaries and authors are not passive mediums of broad cultural and historical forces but through their own activity shape such movements” (p. 117). In his own analysis of the “death” of the author/subject, Thompson (1984) does not contest Barthes’ displacement of the primacy of the author/subject, but he does challenge any view in which his displacement “assumes the form of a dissolution of the agent” (p. 251). In an argument with echoes of

Swingewood's (1987) analogy comparing revolutionaries and authors, Thompson (1984) contends that, without the agency of the subject (or of the author), "no room would be left for the emergence of resistance and revolt, for the revolutionary *creativity* which is an irrepressible feature of the historical process" (p. 252). Therefore, our goal should not be to "kill" the author (if by "author," we also mean "subject" or "agent") or even to completely discount authorial intentions, but as we will see in Derrida's deconstructions of texts, to develop "a different, much more nuanced understanding of what it is for text to *mean what it says* or - - conversely - - to say something other than its specified intent" (Norris, 1987, p. 112).

Consequently, in this thesis, the analyses of Al-e-Ahmad's texts are introduced by sections providing background information, including information about the author and, when available, his intentions when writing. This approach does not mean that the analyses will be guilty of what Eagleton (1983) calls "the 'humanist' fallacy - - the naive notion that a . . . text is just a kind of transcript of the living voice of a real man or woman addressing us" (p. 120). Certainly, the author's intentions are not decisive for determining the meaning of a text: the author may intend something completely different from what he or she actually does or also may be unclear about his or her intentions for writing. (Thompson (1981) makes this point about "agents" and their "actions" in general (pp. 142-144).) Nevertheless, the performance of any action - - including the action of writing a text - - "presupposes a subject, as the agent who utters the expression or executes the act" (Thompson, 1987, p. 142) - - or who writes the text. Moreover, as Norris (1987) points out, "we do require at least some *presumed* general grasp of

an author's purpose in order to read any text whatsoever" (p. 180). Accordingly, in the following chapters, "the subject [the author Al-e Ahmad] is not naively enthroned, but rather, systematically and critically unveiled" (Thompson, 1981, p. 143).

Derrida and Deconstruction

The major influence on this thesis's method of discourse analysis was Derrida's theory and practice of deconstruction. Derrida (1976) introduced deconstruction in his book *Of Grammatology,* first published in French in 1967 and later translated into English by Spivak and then published in this language in 1976. Although "grammatology means "the science of writing, especially of systems of graphic representation of language" (Holman & Harmon, 1992, p. 218), Derrida actually challenges the popular perception of "science" as the gateway to objective truth, and gives grammatology "a philosophical depth and complexity" beyond relatively simple considerations of graphic representation (Holman & Harmon, 1993, p. 218). In Derrida's work, "deconstruction" is "a theory and practice ["activity"] of reading which questions and claims to 'subvert' or 'undermine' the assumption that the system of language provides grounds that are adequate to establish the boundaries, the coherence or unity, and the determinate meaning of a . . . text" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 56). Moreover, unlike the New Critics, who are resolutely unpolitical, Derrida perceives textual analysis "as an ultimately *political* practice, an attempt to dismantle the logic by which a particular system of thought [particularly that of Western philosophy], and behind that, a whole system of political structures and social institutions, maintains its force" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 148). Thus, in *Of*

Grammatology, Derrida (1976) defines as "metaphysics" any system of thought focused on "the logos" (the "word", the "rational",) as the guarantor of "truth" (p. 22) and then sets out to create a space for a new way of reading that challenges this pattern of thinking. For this reason, Spivak (1993) concludes that "deconstruction has always been about the limits of epistemology" (p. 125).

Those readers who turn to Derrida's works for a simple, straightforward explanation of deconstruction will be disappointed for "his texts are not a store of ready-made 'concepts' but an activity resistant to any such reductive ploy" (Norris, 1982, p. 24). Moreover, as even Glendinning (2011), who generally offers only his unqualified praise for everything "Derridian," admits, Derrida has "a vertiginous prose style, spinning itself out in multiple directions and at different speeds in ways that challenge even the most generous and well-prepared readers" (p. 8). Here is Derrida, for example, discussing one of the seemingly most self-explanatory forms of writing - - the shopping list:

> *At the very moment* 'I' make a shopping list, I know (I use 'knowing' here as a convenient term to designate the relations that I necessarily entertain with the object being constructed) that it will be a list only if it implies my absence, if it already detaches itself from me in order to function beyond my 'present' act and if it is utilizable at another time, in the absence of my-being-present now (as cited in Glendinning, 2011, p. 72).

Although the casual reader might reject this passage as analytical overkill, Derrida's view of a shopping list actually provides a convenient way of approaching two of his main "concepts": "presence" and the "metaphysics of presence." By "presence," he means two things: the writer's presence at the time of writing, a presence which almost always becomes an absence

at the time of reading, and also the presence of some kind of "ultimate referent," or "transcendental signified" (Derrida, 1976, p. 20), which exists outside a text and serves to provide a single determinable meaning. As Derrida explains, his "axial proposition" behind his deconstruction theory and practice is "there is nothing outside the text" (Derrida, 1976, p. 165), or nothing outside the text's signifiers to create "meaning." Finally, by "metaphysics of presence" (Derrida, 1976, p. 50), he means any belief-system that offers any kind of "transcendental signified" (for example, God or a Platonic form as the "true" reference of a general term) to guarantee a signifier's meaning (Abrams & Harpham, 2005).

Derrida's alternative to the metaphysics of presence is his belief, that the "play" of signifiers is "undecidable." (For him, the absence of a transcendental signifier makes possible the "limitlessness of play" (Derrida, 1976, p. 20) among the signifiers in a text. Derrida found the source of this idea in his reading of Saussure's linguistic theory and then later elaborated it (Eagleton, 1983). Saussure argues that in a sign system, the "signifiers" (the material elements of a language) and the "signifieds" (the signifiers' conceptual meanings) have meaning not because of their own inherent features, but because of their "differences" from other signifiers or significations (Abrams & Harpham, 2005). ("'Cat' is 'cat' because it is not 'cap' or 'hat'" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 127).) For Derrida (1976), this theory means that the signified meaning of either a spoken or written utterance is never completely "present" in the utterance because language is a network of infinite differences. ("'Cat' is also what it is because it is not 'cad' or 'mat,' and 'mat' is what it is because it is not 'map' or 'hat'" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 127).) However,

the apparent meaning of an utterance is also not completely absent, because the meaning always leaves a "trace" of itself (Derrida, 1976, p. 50), consisting of "all the non-present differences from other elements in the language system that invest the utterance with its 'effect' of having a meaning in its own right" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 57). Thus, for Derrida, language is inherently unstable because it can never have "a demonstratably fixed and decidable present meaning" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 57).

Derrida (1976) uses his ideas of "differance" (with an a) and "dissemination" to try to clarify his view that an utterance's meaning is unfixed and undecidable. His coined word "differance" combines the two sense of the French verb "differer": "to be different" and "to defer" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, P. 58). The meaning of "differance" cannot be reduced to that of either sense, but Derrida's general idea is that "differ" shades into "defer" because "meaning is always *deferred . . .* by the play of signification" (Norris. 1982, p. 32). Thus, Derrida (1976) explains that he has "strategically nicknamed" what he perceives to be "the endless movement of difference [with an e] itself" by coining his term "differance" (with an a) (p. 61). Because meaning is endlessly deferred, Derrida states that it is also "disseminated." Derrida is frustratingly vague about this process, stating, "*Dissemination* ultimately has no meaning, and cannot be channeled into a definition" (as cited in Spivak, 1976, p. lxxi), but it can be understood to refer to the process of "dispersing meaning among innumberable alternatives and negating any specific meaning" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 58). Thus any text provides "a continual, flickering, spilling, and defusing of meaning" and displays "a 'surplus' over exact

meaning"; consequently a text "is always threatening to outrun and escape the sense which contains it"(Eagleton, 1983, p. 134), and a text always means something different than its author intended it to mean.

Under these conditions, Derrida's analytic method becomes "a textual activity aware of its own shifting and provisional status" (Norris, 1982, p. 26). His usual way of working is not to systematically explain deconstructive principles, but to allow them to emerge in his close readings of texts (Abrams & Harpham, 2005). Usually, he selects a small fragment from a work and then presents one of his characteristically "labyrinthine and painstaking" (Spivak, 2003, p. 27) close readings of it: "Reading Foucault, [Derrida] concentrates on three pages out of 673. Reading Rousseau, he chooses a text that is far from 'central.' Reading Heidegger, he proceeds to write a note on a note to *Sein und Zeit"* (Spivak, 1976, p. lxxvi). Derrida (1976) describes his method as a "doubling commentary" (p. 158). His first reading, which, he explains, recognizes, respects and requires "all the instruments of traditional criticism" (Derrida, 2005, p. 158), is intended to uncover the text's apparently determinate meanings and is similar to the New Critics' close readings. Derrida's second, "deconstructive" reading, however, is aimed at revealing the text's contradictory meanings, "which are 'undecidable,' in that we lack any sufficient ground for choosing among them" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 59). Derrida (1976) explains that his second type of reading "must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses" (p. 158). The goal is not to locate merely the kind of moment of

ambiguity or irony that the New Critics looked for and that “is ultimately incorporated into the text’s system of unified meaning,” but, rather, to locate “a moment that genuinely threatens to collapse that system “(Spivak, 1976, p. lxxv).

The role of the author in Derrida’s own critical philosophy remains controversial. On the one hand, he is probably most famous for declaring that “il n’y a pas de hors-texte” (Derrida, 1976, p. 158), which Spivak renders as both ”There is nothing outside of the text” and also “there is no outside text” (p. 158). Derrida (1976) makes this comment during his explanation of why, when reading Rousseau, “the real life of [the] existences of flesh and bone, beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau’s text” (p. 159) should not concern us as readers. Therefore, he insists, “our reading must be intrinsic and remain within the text” (p. 159). The New Critics, who completely severed biographical considerations from their textual analyses, would have happily endorsed this principle. However, it seems to point to what Derrida (1981) himself called “a new self-interiority, a new idealism of the text” (as cited in Norris, 1987, p. 143) and also to an ignoring of socio-cultural factors during textual analysis.

On the other hand, Derrida often deplores what he considers to be the common misunderstanding that reads his work as “a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language . . . and other stupidities of that sort” (as cited in Norris, 1987, p. 144). Moreover, Derrida (1988a) claims that his assertion, “which for some has become a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction . . . means nothing else: there is nothing outside context. In this form, which says exactly the same thing, the formula

would doubtless have been less shocking" (p. 136). These disclaimers seem disingenuous for two reasons. First, in *Of Grammatology,* Derrida (1976) repeats his assertion that "there is nothing outside of the text" twice (pp. 158, 163), as if wanting to give it particular emphasis, and he introduces its second appearance by describing it as "the axial proposition of this essay" (p. 163). Second, the French word for "context" is not "hors-texte" -- the word he actually uses -- but "le contexte" *(Larousse's French-English English French Dictionary, 1954),* and someone as sensitive to the nuances of language as Derrida was would have been aware of this difference.

Two additional factors, however, complicate our understanding of Derrida's view of the role of the author. First, unlike the New Criticism, his textual analyses do not actually reveal an interest in only the text. As Spivak (1993) remarks, "For [Derrida], the author is present in excess," so that one cannot fail to notice "the excessive presence of the author in [his] reading habits" (pp. 218, 219). Indeed, in his deconstruction of a text by Rousseau, for example, Derrida explains how its language "in fact comments on Rousseau's declared intention" and frequently makes assertions such as "Rousseau wants us to think of this movement [from oral to written speech] as an accident" and "Rousseau would like to separate originarity from supplementarity" (Derrida, 1976, pp. 219, 218, 219). Such assertions violate his own principle that "our reading must be intrinsic and remain within the text" (Derrida, 1976, p. 159). In fact, Derrida does not, like the New Critics, demonstrate "a complete disregard for questions of authorial intention" (Norris, 1987, p. 112). Rather, he foregrounds them while *also* challenging the belief that "texts must always point back to their source [their authors] in a moment of

pure, self-authorized meaning" (Norris, 1987, p. 113). Thus, contrary to the implications of his claim that "there is nothing outside the text," Derrida never celebrates the so-called "death of the author."

Second, Derrida often presents deconstruction as a political, socio-cultural activity (Glendinning, 2011). In his preface to *Of Grammatology,* he explains that his three introductory citations are "intended not only to focus attention on the *ethnocentrism,* which, everywhere and always, [has] controlled the concept of writing," but also to introduce his argument that his "most original and powerful ethnocentrism" has limited our understanding of writing, metaphysics, and science (Derrida, 1976, p. 3). Although his citations either may or may not achieve his intentions, they do suggest that his understanding of deconstruction was "already [in 1967] deeply ethical and political" (Glendinning, 2011, p. 83). As well, his "political" Interests become increasingly evident in his later (post-1990) works, whose titles include "Force of Law: the 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" (1992), *Specters of Marx* (1993), and *The Politics of Friendship* (1994). With his deconstructive practices, Derrida was well-prepared for his later explorations of ethical and political issues and for highlighting "the dissimulating function of ideology by mapping out the contradictions and inconsistencies, the silences and *lapsus* ["slips," "errors"] which characterize the textures of a discourse" (Thompson, 1984, p. 137).

The above discussion suggests why Derrida's deconstructive theory and practices provide the most appropriate analytical method for studying Al-e Ahmad's texts. First, although Derrida adapts the close reading from The New Critics, his aim is very different from theirs: the New

Critics want to demonstrate that despite the potentially paradoxical meanings of a text, it is still a bounded entity whose meanings can be multiple but are still limited and determinate, whereas Derrida wants to show that the contradictions in a text prevent it from being a unified entity and disseminate it into "an indefinite range of self-conflicting significations" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 59). Moreover, whereas the New Critics isolate textual analysis from political and socio-cultural concerns, Derrida uses it as an activity for critiquing them and their sustaining ideologies. Thus, Derrida is able to show how, in a work by Rousseau, for example, a "whole strange thematic . . . runs through the detail of Rousseau's argument like a guilty obsession and twists his implications against their avowed intent" (Norris, 1982, p. 33). As a result, Rousseau's argument is shown to disintegrate from within because of its own instabilities and inconsistencies. Derrida's methods will have similar effects in exposing the self-contradictions in Al-e Ahmad's arguments in both his work as a whole and, particularly, in his most famous text: *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West.* Here, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Three of this thesis, Al-e Ahmad begins by setting up a simplistic Manichaean opposition between a demonized "West" and an idealized "East" but then cannot prevent his hierarchy of binaries from collapsing under its own weight of self-contradictions.

Conclusion

Derrida's deconstructive practices will guide this thesis's analysis of Al-e Ahmad's texts. These practices provide the advantages of a close reading, but without the disadvantages of assigning a determinate meaning to a text, or completely dethroning its author, or ignoring its

socio-cultural context. With his rejection of secure meanings, Derrida creates “an attractively truant world” of “authority being defied” (Spivak, 1975, p. lxxii). With his interest in the author, he allows his analyses, despite his disclaimers, to include biographical considerations, or what he calls “the real life . . . of flesh and bone” (Derrida, 1976, p. 159). Finally, with his political, socio-cultural and ethical concerns, Derrida turns deconstruction into a useful analytical tool for showing how texts, including ideological texts, “come to embarrass their own ruling systems of logic” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 135). Overall, deconstruction will bring these advantages to the following analyses of Al-e Ahmad’s texts.

Chapter 2

Al-e Ahmad's Fiction

Although Al-e Ahmad is best known today as the author of *Occidentosis* (1984) and other works of non-fiction, he also distinguished himself in Iran as a writer of short stories and novels. His first and best known collection of stories*, The Exchange of Visits*, was published in 1946, when he was just 23 years old. It was followed by four more story collections published from 1947-1971, with the last of these appearing posthumously (Hillmann, 1988). About "a dozen or more" of Al-e Ahmad's nearly 50 published stories have appeared in English translations (Hillmann, 1988, p. x). In addition, Al-e Ahmad also wrote four short novels of around 125 pages each: *The Tale of the Beehives* (1955), *The School Principal* (1958), *By the Pen* (1961), and *The Cursing of the Land* (1968). Currently, none of Al-e Ahmad's story collections or novels is in print in an English translation. For English readers, the best and most easily available sample of Al-e Ahmad fiction is his anthology entitled *Iranian Society* (1982). This text was compiled and edited by Hillmann (1982), "the leading American authority on Persian literature of the post-World War II period" (*Iranian Society*, "About the Editor"), who published extensively on Al-e-Ahmad and other Iranian writers. For this posthumous anthology, Hillmann (1982) selected 17 "representative stories and essays" (p. vii) by Al-e Ahmad. Hillmann (1982) believes that,

together, these 17 works provide “an indication of the breadth of [Al-e Ahmad] interests and concerns as well as an unambiguous glimpse at his perspective and views” (p. ix).

Five stories from this anthology and two of Al-e Ahmad’s novels were chosen for analysis in this chapter. ‘’The Pilgrimage” (1945), Al-e Ahmad’s first published story, is “presumably autobiographical”(Hillmann, 1982, p. 34) and presents the narrator’s feelings during his pilgrimage to the shrine of the Shi’i third *imam* Hosain at Karbala, Iraq. “The China Flowerpot” (1946) and “Seh’tar” (1949) “depict the plight of lower middle-class Iranians in their unsuccessful attempts to find meaning or joy in life” (Hillmann, 1988, p. x). The remaining chosen stories, “The Untimely Breaking of the Fast” (1948) and “My Sister and the Spider” (1971), illustrate Al-e Ahmad’s belief in the dangers of unquestioningly accepting Islamic and Iranian local (‘traditional’) customs, beliefs and practices. Finally, the two novels selected for analysis are *The School Principal*, which has been described as “surely Al-e Ahmad’s most widely admired work” (‘’Al-e Ahmad, Jalal”, 2012), and *By the Pen*, which Ghanoonparvar (1988), its English translator, considers to be Al-e Ahmad’s “most mature work of fiction, the one most likely to withstand the test of time’’(p. vii).The first of these novels portrays a principal’s one-year employment at an elementary school surrounded by a “limitless, waterless, and desolate” desert in rural Iran (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 37), while the second novel presents an allegory set in an imaginary time and city and depicting the reason for Iran’s failed revolution during the reign of Safavid Shah ‘Abbas the Great (ruled 1587-1629) and also for the rise and fall of Mohammad Mosaddegh, Iran’s prime minister from 1951-1953 (Hillmann, 1988).

All of these works were written before Al-e Ahmad supposedly "took up religion'' (Daneshvar, 2008, p. 99) during the last years of his life. Nothing in them suggests that he either had any faith in Islam or would eventually "return" to it. On the contrary, the five stories and *The School Principal* suggest that ''he was preoccupied with the ignorance and defenselessness perpetuated by religion upon the common people'' (Mirseppasi, 2000, p. 10), while *By the Pen* refers to Islamic clerics as "the cabbage heads" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 7) and portrays Mizanoshshari'eh, the congregational prayer leader and religious magistrate of the city, as self-centered and corrupt. As well, almost nothing in these works of fiction supports the popular view that Al-e-Ahmad was a "romantic" nationalist who "idealized" the "local folk tradition"(Gellner, as cited in Mirseppasi, 2000, p. 77). In fact, in his fiction, Al-e Ahmad (1982) consistently criticizes this so-called 'local folk tradition,' or Iran's popular cultural forms and has the protagonist of "The China Flowerpot" conclude that Iran is "a nation worth nothing" (p. 46).

"Nothing", or more precisely "nothingness," is a crucial concept in this context. In his preface to *Occidentosis* (1984), Al-e Ahmad mentions that he translated Ernst Junger's "work on nihilism" from German into English (p. 25); he concludes *A Stone on a Grave* (2008) by asserting ''how happy'' he is to be looking forward to spending ''eternity in nothingness'' (p. 95) after he dies; and, as Hillmann (1974) remarks about *The School Principal*, ''the picture of life'' in Al-e Ahmad's fiction in general is "comprehensively negative"(p. 24). The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections: (a) Five Stories, (b) *The School Principal,* (c) *By the Pen*, and (d) Conclusions. The goal of this chapter is to provide a close reading of Al-e Ahmad's fiction in

order to reveal “the pessimism and cynicism that are reflected in much of [his] writing”(Hillmann, 1974, p. 28).

Five Stories

Genre

In the context of analyzing Nietzsche’s autobiography, *Ecce Homo* (1908), Derrida (1988 b) emphasizes the importance of including considerations of genre in his analysis: “One must allow for the ‘genre’ whose code is constantly re-marked, for narrative and fictional form and the ‘indirect style.’ In short, one must allow for all the ways intent ironizes or demarcates itself, demarcating the text by leaving on it the mark of genre” (p. 25). As these remarks suggest, a work’s genre sets it apart from works in different genres and associates it with other works in the same genre by using this genre’s “code,” or “constitutive conventions” (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 116). These conventions can change from age to age but, in any given age, are “shared by an implicit contract between reader and writer” (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 116) and, thereby, help to make a generic work intelligible. Moreover, if, as MacDonald (1988) argues, genres are both literary and also social forms, then they “demonstrate in a particular way what constitutes the society to which they belong [and] it follows that a given society chooses and codifies those acts that correspond to its dominant ideology” (p. 46). Thus, how a writer works both with and against the current conventions of a particular genre not only will

affect how the reader understands and reacts to a work, but will also suggest how much the writer either values or rejects the dominant values and codes of his or her society.

All seven of the stories published in *Iranian Society* are examples of literary realism, or fiction "written to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 269). In his stories, Al-e Ahmad portrays the social life in different sectors of Iran's general population by presenting straightforward sketches of events experienced by characters involved in everyday activities. To help clarify the significance of these events, the stories are laced with obvious symbols that, in effect, shout out their meaning. As well, like other writers of realism, Al-e Ahmad achieves the intended effects of verisimilitude by preferring "the commonplace and the everyday represented in minute detail, over rarer aspects of existence" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 269). Indeed, Al-e Ahmad is particularly skilled at providing small details to create a sense of realistic texture, of the so-called 'real' world, as his characters perceive and experience it. For example, in the following passage from "The Untimely Breaking of the Fast," the third-person narrator describes the bedding on the rooftops in South Tehran during a typical summer's night:

> The walls surrounding the rooftops, high in places, low in others, afforded one a view of everything going on around him. Now, in the dim light from the street lamp and the mute, colorless light of the new moon could be seen the mats and bedding freshly laid out on the neighboring rooftops, mats and old comforters with worn spots where the cotton stuffing showed through. The rooftops were still empty. (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 49)

A description such as this does not advance the plot, which, in keeping with the convention of realism, is minimal and focuses on everyday incidents, but these details do create a strong sense of the protagonist's drab, impoverished world. Except for the single world "freshly," which stands out in this passage, all its key images contribute to this disheartening effort: "dim light," "mute, colorless light," "old, torn curtains," "thin mattresses," "old comforters," and "worn spots". Moreover, as the above passage suggests, Al-e-Ahmad's stories "are the products of observation and reflection, rather than of a particularly vivid imagination'' (Hillmann, 1988, p. x). To write his stories, Al-e Ahmad investigated and examined closely the texture of everyday life in the world around him, and then reconstructed it in the carefully selected details of his short fictions.

When Al-e Ahmad began writing short fiction, he was still a member of Iran's Tudeh Communist Party. In "An Autobiography of Sorts," he describes the fictions included in his second volume of short stories as "stories of defeat in [his] political battles told in socialist realist style" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 15). However, the five stories discussed in this chapter cannot be accurately categorized as examples of "socialist realism." On the one hand, Al-e Ahmad's plain, unadorned style does reflect the conventional Marxist literary criticism, which "deemphasized form, as opposed to content, arguing that the latter has a larger capacity to serve the people'' (Talattof, 2000, p. 70). On the other hand, unlike doctrinaire Marxist authors in general, Al-e Ahmad shows no interest in the five stories discussed here in portraying heroes "striv[ing] to change society into an ideal form" (Talattof, 2000, p. 76). Furthermore, unlike

Iranian Leninist-Marxist writers in particular, Al-e Ahmad appears to have had no interest in using his stories to teach his readers "the responsive and 'responsible' social roles that they should play in the struggle against the 'cruel political system' of the Shah'' (Talattof, 2000, p. 71). Rather, "[i]rony abounds in [his] mostly simple stories" (Hillmann, 1988, p. x) of Iranians victimized by each other and/or their own local customs ('traditions') and ways of life.

"The Pilgrimage"

"The Pilgrimage," Al-e Ahmad's first published story, initially appeared in the March 1945 issue of the literary magazine *Sokhan* and then was reprinted in his first short story collection, *An Exchange of Visits* (1946) (Hillmann, 1982).This story, which, like many of Al-e Ahmad's stories, appears to be autobiographical (Hillmann, 1988), portrays the first-person narrator's pilgrimage to a sacred Muslim shrine and also anticipates Al-e Ahmad 's much later *Lost in the Crowd* (1985), his non-fictional account of his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964.

The narrator's irreverent attitude towards his experience immediately suggests why the literary critic Massud Farzan concludes that Al-e Ahmad is "not a chauvinist or a traditionalist," but "an iconoclast who defies well-established beliefs without reservation" (as cited in Hillmann, 1974, pp. 25, 26). Al-e Ahmad's narrator is a young Iranian man living in a 'middle-class' neighborhood. His family members weep with joy because he is representing them on his pilgrimage, and implore him "from the depths of their hearts to pray for them" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 35). He, in contrast, can "think of nothing but the soup which [will] be prepared at

home after [he has] gone" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 36). To reach "the holiest of places on earth" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 36), he travels on a rickety old bus with holes in the floor. Unlike the other passengers, who can barely contain their excitement because they will soon experience the "Great Presence" at the shrine, the narrator thinks of "nothing" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 39) during the journey. At the shrine, his heart is briefly "stirred and boiled," but he is soon nauseated by the "peculiar and noxious odor" of the thousands of perspiring pilgrims' bodies (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 40). At the end of the story, his only revelation is about himself. He realizes, "Everyone [is] in a special state, and no one there [is] a spectator but me''(Al-e Ahmad ,1988, p. 41). Finally, he wishes he could be one of the dead individuals whom the pilgrims are praying to and realizes that he has not yet bought his burial garments or made a will. As Hillmann (1974) comments, the "themes" of Al-e Ahmad's stories can be elusive: he is a "narrative artist for whom social issues and problems lurk partly delineated or merely hinted at amid the single incident or tissue of events that is his focus" (p. 12). Talattof (2000) suggests that "The Pilgrimage" expresses Al-e-Ahmad's "ambivalence" toward Islam (p. 83), but "complete indifference" seems more accurate. The narrator takes the "little trouble" involved in going on the pilgrimage only because he does not want to "break the hearts of these faithful servants of God" (his relatives) (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 35). He uses his description of his journey mainly to contrast himself with his devout fellow passengers, including the one who asks, ''Do you see what the Lord has done?" and then continues, "It is surely his power alone which has made this *hautobomile* [the bus] understand that it is carrying us into His presence" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 38). On the bus, the narrator is soon "exhausted" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 39) by

such pious chatter. At the shrine, he can sense that the pilgrims' words from the Koran charge "the whole place with holiness" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 41), but while the others weep and pray, he merely watches.

Although the narrator cannot identify himself with the other pilgrims or respond emotionally to the shrine's powerful appeal, he does make one comment that stands out as the only expression of "nationalism" in the five stories and two novels discussed in this chapter. After the narrator thinks of the soup that he will miss by going on the pilgrimage and also of the prayers that will be said for his safe return, he falls into a kind of reverie and exclaims:

> Well, that is Iran. And those are her customs. The vegetable pilaw with fish on New Year's Eve, the New Year's display of seven things that begin with the letter "s." [. . .] and a thousand other things like that. Customs that at first might seem silly, useless, trivial; but which in reality are created by and conform to the pattern of that special Iranian life . . . Oh Iran, Iran! (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 36).

The narrator, however, cannot sustain this brief moment of nostalgia. He quickly becomes overwhelmed by "an aspect of monotony which is typical of everything to be found in the vast desert that is called 'Iran"'(Al-e Ahmad, 1988). The "vast desert that is called 'Iran"' - - this description closely fits in with the other descriptions of Iran in the works collected in *Iranian Society* , where either Al-e Ahmad or a character speaks of "this zoo of a world," "a nation [Iran] worth nothing," and the "stinking bitch of our time"(Al-e Ahmad, 1983, pp. 14, 46, 108). *These* expressions, and not the narrator's brief rhapsody in "The Pilgrimage," are typical of Al-e Ahmad's writing.

''The China Flowerpot'' and ''Seh'tar''

"The China Flowerpot" and "Seh'tar" are similar stories in which an ignorant Iranian destroys an obvious symbol of Beauty and Joy. Hillmann (1974) uses "The China Flowerpot" as a "representative" example of Al-e Ahmad's early short fiction (p. 8). The protagonist of this story is "a man of forty or more, wearing a stylish overcoat and a smart, new hat" and "new leather gloves" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, pp. 43, 44). He boards a bus, carefully carrying "a valuable, antique, china flowerpot" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 43) - - the story's symbol of Beauty and also, perhaps, of everything that is delicate and in need of protection in human life. When a scruffy-looking passenger described as "a devil-may-care sort" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 44) asks to see the vase, its owner cautiously hands it over to him. Almost immediately, the passenger drops it, shattering it into three pieces. ''It's all right," he comments nonchalantly, "Nothing really happened" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 45). When another passenger remarks *c'est la vie*" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 46), the owner becomes enraged, but of course, he can do nothing, either to restore his precious vase or to punish the culprit. The story ends with all the passengers laughing at the devastated owner.

"Seh'tar" has a very similar plot. The story's protagonist is a sensitive young man whose music is his only source of joy and success in life. After dropping out of school and scrimping and saving for three years, he was finally able to buy his own "*seh'tar*," "a four-stringed, small-bowled instrument" (Hillmann, 1988, p. x) and the symbolic equivalent of the china flowerpot. The young musician is feverish with joy and excitement, for he believes that he will be able to

“play so well that he [will] break down and cry” (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 59). However, on the same day when he buys the *Seh’ta*r, he absent-mindedly steps onto the smooth stone of a mosque’s threshold. Immediately, a religious zealot fingering his *tasbih* beads leaps at the young man, shouting, ‘’Atheist! With this instrument of infidels inside a mosque ? Inside the House of God!?” (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 61). In the ensuing struggle, the precious *seh’tar* is smashed into three pieces. The zealot, “certain that he [has] righteously carried out his religious duty,” returns to fingering his *tasbih* beads and begins reciting his *zekr* prayers. Meanwhile, the young musician is devastated by grief: ‘’The cup of his hope, just like the body of his new *seh’tar*, had shattered into three pieces, and the pieces seemed to be cutting into his heart” (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 63).

The fact that Al-e Ahmad felt compelled to write and publish two such similar stories suggests that he believed very strongly that Iranian life and socio-cultural forms and practices conspired to thwart all attempts to find and sustain beauty and joy in life. In “The China Flowerpot,” the details that Al-e Ahmad lavishes on the flowerpot invest it with an almost mystical quality similar to that of the nightingale and Grecian urn in John Keats’ famous odes: “It was so fine and delicate that it transmitted the light coming through the bus window and gleaming on it, and cast a pulsating shadow on the leather glove of the owner’s hand” (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 44). Even the shadow cast by this shimmering object is “pulsating,” as if, although the flowerpot is inanimate, it somehow has a mysterious kind of inner energy of its own. Al-e-Ahmad’s intrusive narrator assigns this delicate flowerpot its symbolic meaning:

“Perhaps for the first time in [the passenger’s] life, he was face to face with beauty; or if not, perhaps it was the first time he comprehended the meaning of beauty” (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 44). This lout can understand the meaning of beauty, but is still too careless to protect and preserve it. The flowerpot’s shattering implies that, alas, the “delicate and beautiful” (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 44) things of this world cannot endure in Iran. In “Seh’tar,” Al-e Ahmad appears to be using the smashing of the delicate *seh’tar* to make this same point and also to be directly associating Islamic values with the destruction of both the *seh’tar* and the young musician’s happiness. However, Mirsepassi (2000), forgetting his comment that Al-e Ahmad’s “earlier writings, mainly fiction, challenged the ignorance of blindly following Iranian and Islamic values and habits” (p. 98), argues that “Seh’tar” asserts (1) that “Truly religious society is incompatible with the class system’’ and (2) also that “fulfillment is impossible in a class society” (p. 102). In other words, in “Seh’tar,” class is the “problem” causing the destruction of the symbolic musical instrument. Thus, according to Mirsepassi (2000), Al-e Ahmad’s story implies that “[c]lass privilege turns religion into hypocrisy and annihilates any possibility of brotherhood” (p. 102).

This reading of the story does not account for its actual details. First, the story never identifies the young musician’s social class. After three years of starving himself in order to save enough money in order to buy a *seh’tar*, he is “dishevelled” and “sallow” and could be mistaken for “an opium addict” (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, pp. 59, 61). Thus, his appearance does not reveal his ‘class’. Second, the religious zealot (who owns a perfume shop near the mosque and who

breaks the Seh'tar) is not concerned about class issues. On the contrary, the story emphasizes that the zealot is outraged because he believes that the young musician is breaking a *religious* taboo: "The [perfume seller] kept yelling, cursing, calling the musician an atheist, boiling mad from the insult to the house of God, calling on all Moslems for help "(Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 62). Overall, this and other similar passages make Hillmann's (1982) interpretation of "Seh'tar" much more persuasive than Mirsepassi's (2000) class-based reading: "The story itself is a classic Al-e Ahmad indictment of misguided Shi'i Moslem faith which, as a young man . . . he observed being practiced by many uneducated Iranians"(p. 58). Similar indictments of Shi'ism occur in Al-e Ahmad's "The Untimely Breaking of the Fast," *The School Principal*, *By the Pen* and even *Occidentosis*, which is usually perceived as a passionate defense of Shi'ism as a bulwark against Westernization.

"The Untimely Breaking of the Fast" and "My Sister and the Spider"

In "The Untimely Breaking of the Fast," Al-e Ahmad continues to criticize Islamic values and customs, while in "My Sister and the Spider," his target is ('traditional') folk cultures, beliefs and practices. In the first of these stories, the protagonist is Amiz Reza, a poor bazaar broker and also "a religious man" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 50). During the blessed month of Ramazan, he curses some "oafs" who are breaking their fast and even beats a "miserable beggar" who is sitting by the road and smoking a pipe (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 52). Although he desperately wants to observe the prohibition against eating and drinking during the day, doing so is torturous for him because he constantly has to rush around the bazaar in order to eke out a

meagre living for himself and his family. At night, he gorges himself on watermelon and drinks as much ice water as possible, and then can "do nothing but lie on his straw mat," feeling "as limp and languid as a corpse" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 53). On one particularly hot day, when "his brain [is] nearly exploding from [his] thirst" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 54), Amiz impulsively gets on a bus, travels for an hour to a small village, and gulps down bread and meatballs and tea. When he returns home, his wife curses him while the moon stares "upon the scene with a despondent, grief-stricken face and a pitying glance," and the stars, who appear to represent Al-e-Ahmad's own perspective, are "overcome by laughter in the face of all this wretchedness and stupidity and [are] winking at each other in mockery of us" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 51).

"My Sister and the Spider" provides an even more scathing indictment, in this case, of Iranian local cultural forms and beliefs. Abbas, this story's first-person narrator, is a young boy of around ten years old. His father is a *mullah*, and his older sister, who is dying from breast cancer, refuses to allow a male doctor to treat her. Accordingly, her mother asks Abbas to bring home "a handful of lead" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 26) from the local lead molder. Without knowing what the lead will be used for, Abbas struggles to carry home a full bucket of it. Later, he overhears a "unknown woman" tell his mother and aunt, "[The cancer is] getting a grip on her like a spider. . . . Branding is for these situations (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 29). "Horrified," the sobbing boy rushes into his sister's room, shouting, "What do they want to do to you sister? I won't let them, sister, I won't allow it" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 30). Abbas cannot save his sister,

who dies immediately after the women place molten lead on her breasts in order to “treat” her cancer.

Most readers will probably agree that, together, “The Breaking of the Fast” and “My Sister and the Spider” provide an unqualified rejection of Islamic and Iranian local or ‘traditional’ socio-cultural practices. However, Mirsepassi (2000) argues that like “Seh’tar,” “The Breaking of the Fast” criticizes Iran’s ‘class relations’ and class hierarchy rather than its religion.[1] Mirsepassi (2000) point outs that early in this story, the narrator mentions that Amiz is “not one of those prosperous brokers at the heart of the bazaar who [are] able to secure several years’ income with a single transaction” (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 51) and, thus, are also able to relax in a cool place while fasting during the day. Instead, Amiz has “to dash around around from here to there, all day, every day, from sun-up to sun-set, under the hot sun” (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 50). Based on these passages, Mirsepassi (2000) concludes that if “Al-e Ahmad’s fiction says anything about religion,” it asserts that “[c]lass privilege turns religion into hypocrisy and annihilates any possibility of brotherhood” (p. 102). Thus, in a “classless [socialist?] society’’, everyone would equally share the burden of fasting, and Iran would have “a ‘humanist religion’ of fulfilled potential and brotherhood” (Mirsepassi, 2000, p. 102).

If Iran’s oppressed Baha’is and women or other oppressed minority populations have to wait for the coming of the Messiah or a ‘’classless society’’ before ‘religion’ can become democratic, dialogical, egalitarian, and inclusive (what Mirsepassi refers to as ‘humanist’), then they will have a very long wait, indeed. More importantly, Al-e Ahmad did not discuss either

“humanism,” or “brotherhood” in this short story, and the details in “The Breaking of the Fast” also do not support Mirsepassi’s (2000) interpretation. “Class” and “brotherhood” are not significant issues for Amiz. Even if he could relax all day as the wealthy brokers do, he would still judge others based on their strict adherence to Islamic ideology, and even if Iran were “classless,” he would still not have any “brothers,” or friends, because he is fundamentally unlikeable. The story makes clear that his repulsiveness results from his strict adherence to Islamic teaching and practices. For example, after Amiz bloodies a beggar for smoking, some onlookers protest. In response, Amiz, “the veins of his neck bulging, [and his] face red as flame, screams, “may his foul neck be broken! Let him crawl into some broken down hovel and slobber over any snake venom he wants in private! Doing it out in public like this is a declaration of war on God!”(Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 52). Even after the police fine Amiz, his authoritarian morality, religious fanaticism and self-righteousness protect him from any feelings of guilt: “In spite of all this [the fine], to tell the truth, deep within his heart, he was pleased with himself for having struck a blow against the evildoers of this world” (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 53). Amiz and the authoritarian religious zealot who destroys the musical instrument in ‘Seh’tar” are similar figures, whose presence in Al-e Ahmad’s stories reveals and expresses one of the major contradictions in his writing as a whole: despite calling for the Iranian masses to return to their own ‘’traditions,’’ or to their Perso-Islamic legacies and historico-cultural splendors - - and to resist Westernization, he *also* emphasizes, “in narrative after narrative’’ (Hillman, 1988, p. x), the noxious effects of these same ‘’traditions’’(older cultural values and forms) in the lives of ‘ordinary’ Iranians .

Al-e Ahmad's criticism of the chains of tradition and local cultural forms is nowhere more clear and urgent than in "My Sister and the Spider," one of his many stories that are "sheer autobiography" (Hillman, 1988, p. xi). (In ''My Husband, Jalal,'' his wife observes, ''I know or have seen most of the characters in Jalal's stories'' (as cited in Hillman, 1988, p. xi).) The central focus in "My Sister and the Spider"- - the older sister's death following the hot-lead "treatment" - - is based on an actual event in Al-e-Ahmad's life. In his brief essay "An Autobiography of Sorts," Al-e Ahmad (1982) mentions that, in his family, he "was the first boy after seven girls" (p. 14). He goes on to report that two of his sisters died of chicken pox and diarrhea in childhood and "another died of cancer at age thirty-five" (p. 14). The manner of this sister's death appears to have always haunted him. For example, although his memoir *A Stone on a Grave* (2008) is about mainly his inability to have children, Al-e Ahmad includes his older sister in his thought-processes and reflections. He remembers that when he heard his mother crying out at his father's grave, he thought of his sister's voice. Then he asks, *"By the way, mother, do you remember that you had placed molten lead on my sister's chest to cure her cancer? Do you?"* (p. 89). In "My Sister and the Spider" the narrator is Al-e-Ahmad as a boy, and this story portrays a particular Iranian local custom through a horrified child's perspective.

The horror in this story completely refutes Mirsepassi's (2000) claims that Al-e Ahmad "equates the rural with the pure wisdom of the common people" and that by repeating this theme throughout his works, "he creates a mood of nostalgia for a lost yet superior world" (p. 104). In fact, Al-e Ahmad consistently and even obsessively criticizes the beliefs, values, and

customs of the so-called “common people’’ and is never “nostalgic” about Iran’s rural past, except when he is eulogizing the distant pre-Safavid (pre-1500 AD) past of “bygone times” (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 43). Anyone seeking to learn his views of “the common man” (he overtly excludes women) in either the recent past or present times and conditions, should read *Occidentosis.* Here, in his most famous work, he repeatedly criticizes the “primitive mode of thought” of the “superstitious, prejudiced folk” who are “swarming” from the countryside into Iran’s cities, and he urges all Iranians not to “remain fanatically in the bonds of tradition”(Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 78). This theme continues throughout Al-e Ahmad’s writing, including *A Stone on a Grave* (2008), his most recent posthumous publication, which will be discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis .

The School Principal

Background

In 1946, Al-e Ahmad graduated from the faculty of Letters of the Tehran Teachers’ College. In the following year, he was hired as a school teacher by the Ministry of Education. Unable to support himself as a writer, he continued to work as a teacher in different periods of his life (“Al-e Ahmad, Jalal,” 2012). During the 1955-1956 school year, he was the principal of Safa Elementary School in the north Tehran neighbourhood of Tajrish (Hillmann, 1988). Two years later, he published the novel[2] *The School Principal*, which is both “the most read and highly regarded, and [also] “the first of his major works to appear in English” (Hillmann, 1988, p.

xi). This novel's first-person narrator describes his year as the newly appointed principal of a small new elementary school located somewhere on the outskirts of Tehran. In his "An Autobiography of sorts," Al-e Ahmad (1982) refers to *The School Principal* as "the results of personal reflection and immediate instinctive impressions of the small but extremely important realm of the school. But with direct allusions to general conditions of the day and these sorts of independence-shattering problems"(p. 17). Here, the reference to "immediate instinctive impressions" reflects Al-e Ahmad's interest in closely examining and observing the social world around him, while the "independence-shattering problems" refer to the Westernization of Iran, a topic that Al-e Ahmad explores in detail in *Occidentosis*, which includes a chapter harshly criticizing Iran's educational institutions and practices.

Al-e Ahmad's description of *The School Principal* represents it as a thoughtful work of social criticism. In fact, this novel takes the reader on a wild ride through the narrator's memories as he spews out his contempt for not only Iran's educational apparatuses and all spheres of Iranian social life, but also for his school's teachers, his students, their parents, and, above all, himself. For example, he mutters, "Curses on this damn country [Iran]" and, when an "idle woman'' tries to flirt with him, he comments, "She evidently hadn't learned that school principals, if they hadn't actually been castrated, were an infirm and irritable lot" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, pp. 92, 99). Overall, *The School Principal* leaves no doubt that Al-e Ahmad is "the anti-thesis of a tongue-tied critic"(Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 62), but never comes even close to supporting the popular perception of him as a staunch nationalist who "rediscovered Islam".

Plot

The straightforward, episodic plot of *The School Principal* consists of the narrator's description of his experiences as a school principal during the Fall and Winter terms of a single school year. The narrator begins by explaining why he became a principal and concludes by revealing why he resigned. He became a principal, he explains, because he "was utterly nauseated with teaching; ten years of teaching abc's to the blank, gaping faces of the people's children, all of it the stupidest nonsense you can possibly imagine" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 36). After he witnesses unrelieved stupidity, futility, and absurdity for eight months, he, his vice-principal, and a janitor beat a Grade Five student almost to death after he has raped a younger boy. The narrator remembers:

> We dragged him in front of all the children, beat him and kicked him about. The new Janitor brought some freshly cut switches from the neighbour's orchard; and I broke three of them over the boy's head and shoulders: I was so savage that if the switches hadn't broken, I might have killed him. The *nazem* [the vice principal] had to come to the rescue. After he intervened, they carried what was left of the boy into the office and dismissed the children (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 131).

Together, the narrator's bitter explanation of why he became a principal and his shocking description of his beating of a student provide a frame for his narrative. Within this frame, he describes his first day at school; the teachers, the children and their parents; and also the school's daily activities and routines. In addition; he often interrupts his account of the school and the educational institutions and apparatuses to present vivid and always negative portraits of the local population and their institutions. In effect, the plot of *The School Principal* takes the

reader on a guided tour of the narrator's version of rural Iranian social life during the mid-1950s.

Commenting on this episodic plot, Hillmann (1974) remarks that "to observe that *The School Principal* is not a tightly knit, dramatic story involving round or developing characters or depicting concomitant and interdependent conflicts is merely to recognize that Al-e Ahmad is not out to create much of a story per se." (p. 19). Instead, he presents "a series of vivid and pointed sketches, like those in [his] short stories" ("Al-e Ahmad, Jalal," 2012). Each of his novel's 19 relatively brief chapters, averaging about seven pages in length, presents one or more episodes intended to demonstrate the failures of Iran's educational institutions and practices in particular and also of social ills and problems closely bound with the Iranian mode of life and popular cultural forms and practices in general. Most of the chapters could stand alone as self-contained short stories. For example, Hillmann (1982), extracted *The School Principal*'s second chapter, gave it the title "A Principal's First Day at School," and included it as one the short fictions in the anthology *Iranian Society*.

As an episodic narrative, the 19 chapters are united by the continuous presence of the narrator's bitter, cynical, and often bleakly humorous voice, as well as the ongoing inclusion of the school's teachers and staff in many of the chapters. Typically, each chapter consists of a series of descriptions followed by scornful comments. In Chapter 5, for example, the narrator describes how the teachers arranged among themselves to take turns skipping school in the afternoons; then he remarks, "There was no further fear that the kids would get constipated

from too much knowledge!"(Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 57). Cumulatively, the narrator's descriptions and comments provide a scathing criticism of Iran's educational institutions, ways of life and cultural practices.

Genre

As Hillmann (1974) points out, no persuasive or reliable data and historical materials can be found "to demonstrate the accuracy and veracity" of Al-e Ahmad's criticism (p. 26). However, "many readers" have apparently believed that *The School Principal* "mirrors pieces of truths and real, recognizable situations similar to what they themselves have experienced" (Hillmann, 1974, p. 26). Indeed, Hillmann (1988) speaks on behalf of these readers when he reports that "at the time of its publication, [*The School Principal*] exhibited an unprecedented, uncompromising realism and force in its representation of a specific contemporary problem involving explicit social criticism" (p. xi). Undoubtedly, this novel demonstrates Al-e Ahmad's characteristic skill in presenting small, realistic details, but, as will be seen, *The School Principal*'s overall "realism," far from being "uncompromising," is significantly undermined by its generic elements borrowed from naturalism, farce, and the Absurd. The result is a unique mix of generic conventions that should prevent discerning readers from easily identifying exactly what kind of world Al-e Ahmad's novel has plunged them into. More important, Al-e Ahmad's blend of genres creates an intense sense of the grotesque that pushes *The School Principal* beyond the boundaries of realism and also limits the persuasiveness of this novel's social criticism.

Throughout *The School Principal*, Al-e Ahmad compromises his attempt at realism by strongly inflecting it with elements of naturalism, a genre that is much better suited than realism for expressing his bleak image and pessimistic view of Iranian cultural life and of 'popular' cultural forms and practices. ''Naturalism," is not only, like realism, a particular way of selecting and rendering materials. It is also a mode of fiction initially developed by nineteenth-century European writers who wished to promote a particular thesis based on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. This thesis was "that a human being exists entirely in the order of nature and does not have a soul nor any mode of participating in a religious or spiritual world beyond the natural world; and therefore, that such a being is merely a higher-order animal"(Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 271). These biological and philosophical assumptions distinguish Naturalists from Realists, who make an attempt at "objectivity," for "in observing life, the Naturalists already expect a certain pattern" (Furst & Skrine, 1978, p. 9). For this reason, and also because a Naturalist's concept of human life is so narrow, the "writer in fact has no more liberty than his characters" (Furst & skrine, 1978, p. 18). Nevertheless, during the 1870s, Naturalists like Emile Zola never tired of promoting their belief that they were presenting their subjects with "scientific objectivity" (Abrams and Harpham, 2005, p. 272).

In a survey of the history of the Persian novel, Yavari (2002) connects these early Naturalists to their 20th-century Iranian followers. He explains that during the Pahlavi era (when Al-e Ahmad was writing), Iranian novels "primarily describing social conditions, influenced by the literary naturalism of European novelists like Emile Zola, appeared in quick succession." *The*

School Principal is a good example of this development. Since naturalism is essentially a form of materialism - - and, therefore, the opposite of the scholastic doctrines of the institutionalized (clerical) Islam and of a certain Islamic philosophy - - the narrator repeatedly mocks the other characters' spiritual aspirations, as he does when he overhears a teacher who is leading his students in their prayers:

> The words of the Koran, in resonant, sonorous tones and heavily accented stress, rolled imperiously out of the fourth grade window . . . . The cry of the Moslems. How wonderfully reassuring . . . . I was sure this teacher was a complete good-for-nothing. He undoubtedly attended nightly Koran readings . . . . The minds of this place's future citizenry must really be at ease. (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 47).

Here, the narrator's sarcasm is as obvious as his contempt for the prayer session is overwhelming: he cannot imagine that either the teacher could be sincere or that the ritualistic prayers could be comforting.

By denying the spiritual, Naturalists necessarily focus on the bestial, so that the "recurrent imagery of naturalist writing is drawn from the animal world, and its vocabulary . . . abounds in the 'law of claw and fang'" (Furst & Skrine, 1978, p. 16). Similarly, *The School Principal* abounds in animal and insect imagery: the narrator compares the other characters to bears and hyenas (p. 43), dogs (pp. 51, 61, 86, 107, 130, 132), cats (p. 54), ticks (pp. 60, 106), sheep (pp. 66, 130), monkeys (p. 70), roosters (p. 90), wolves (p. 94), and donkeys (pp. 56, 131). Moreover, after he publically beats the rapist, the narrator's comments reveal the Naturalists' vocabulary of "claw and fang": he explains that he made up his mind to beat the boy and "then turned into a mad dog" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 132).

Novels portraying child abuse and characters with strong animal drives are normally grim studies of brutality that attempt to invoke empathy for the victims. In contrast, the elements of farce and the Absurd in *The School Principal* provoke uneasy laughter and preclude reader empathy. "Farce," a form of "low comedy," uses "highly exaggerated or caricatured types of characters [and] puts them into improbable and ludicrous situations"(Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 40). *The School Principal* follows this convention. None of the characters has a name, and each character, with the qualified exception of the narrator, "is built around 'a single idea or quality' and is presented without much individualizing detail" (Forster, as cited in Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 33). For example, the narrator refers to the teachers at his school as only "the first-grade teacher," "the second-grade teacher," etc., and emphasizes their grotesque physical appearance and behaviors. Thus, the second-grade teacher is "short and squat" and "cross-eyed"; He "squeaks" instead of "speaks" and giggles "with every little squeak" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 41). In contrast to the short and squat second-grade teacher, the fourth-grade teacher is "an incredibly obese fellow"—"Half of him is enough to make one ordinary man" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 40). Each secondary character is assigned one or two simple attitudes and/or behaviours when he or she first appears in the novel, and then is made to repeat them rigidly until it ends. Characters like these belong in a slapstick comedy of the Laurel and Hardy era, rather than in a novel of "uncompromising realism," and no one should mistake *The School Principal* for one.

Finally, elements of farce often appear in the "literature of the Absurd," which uses black humour to help represent human life as meaningless "as it moves from the nothing from whence it came towards the nothingness where it must end'' (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 1). Al-e Ahmad translated the works of the European absurdists Albert Camus and Eugene lonesco into Persian and highly praises these authors in the conclusion of *Occidentosis* (Al-e Ahmad, 1984). In *The School Principal*, many of the narrator's attitudes suggest a strong sense of the Absurd. In this respect, the narrator is very similar to Meursault, the disillusioned narrator of Alberta Camus' (1942/1961) novel, *The Outsider*. Meursault often emphasizes the futility of not only his own life, but also all human endeavours: "Nothing, nothing had the least importance, and I knew quite well why" (p. 118). Similarly, a strong undercurrent of futility -- of Absurd nothingness runs through *The School Principal*. For example, the school's janitor tells the narrator, "You're just a stranger who happened to drop by these parts." The narrator comments, "He was right. He had sized me up quicker than anyone else. He had understood from the beginning that I was a nothing at the school" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 63). Later, he expresses a Meursault-like indifference when he explains, "I kept telling myself I should drop everything and quit; but my apathy wouldn't let me. I lacked the energy" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 129). Lacking the energy to even try to improve his life, the narrator can merely endure but never thrive.

Small details and major episodes also contribute to the overwhelming sense of absurd futility in *The School Principal.* For example, Camus' (1942/1975) absurd humans in *The Myth of*

Sisyphus are creatures condemned to repeat and repeat and repeat the same trivial actions. Similarly, the characters in *The School Principal* have no water in their school, and must use a bucket and "a watering can with a hole in it"(Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 59) to fetch water from a nearby garden. As well, many of the episodes in Al-e Ahmad's novel have the effect of demonstrating the absurdity of Iran's educational institutions and/or Iranian ways of life and popular cultural forms and political practices. In one episode, the fifth-grade handicrafts teacher assigns an unusual crafts project to one of this students: this teacher gives the boy six pornographic pictures "with instructions to paste them on plywood, sand the board down with emery paper, and return [the board] to him "(Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 76). After the boy's parents complain to the Minister of Education, he orders that the teacher be given enough money to allow him to marry, and later is invited to the wedding. Meanwhile, the narrator returns the six pictures to the teacher, advising him, "if you don't paste them on a board, they'll cause you less trouble" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 80). Episodes such as this one lead even Hillmann (1974), who, overall, greatly admires what he perceives to be Al-e Ahmad's "realism," to suggest that perhaps the reader of *The School Principal* will eventually feel "that some of [its] action has been contrived to create such a wholly negative situation"(p. 24).

Point of View, the Narrator, and the Author

At the end of *The School Principal*, the narrator becomes reluctantly involved with the angry parents of the boy who has been raped by the older student. The narrator's comment on the parents is

> Surely things like this happen in other places. But you can bet they don't wash their dirty linen in public like this stupid mother and father, who have gone everywhere broadcasting their own rape and hence increasing its stink. . . . Curses on all their stupid heads. With fathers and mothers like these, children have a right to turn out to be pederasts, pretty boys, thieves, and liars . . . . How I wished I'd applied my fists and feet to that father [the father of the raped boy] with the impudent mouth (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, pp. 132-133).

In a passage like this one - - and there are many other similar statements in *The School Principal* - - the narrator's tone is so bitter, his hatred is so vile, and his reasoning is so illogical (stupid parents give their children the right to be pederasts?) that Al-e Ahmad's novel inevitably raises questions about the distance or difference between the narrator and the author: is the narrator an unreliable first-person narrator and, therefore, a target of the author's criticism, or is he a reliable narrator and similar to the author?

The critics are divided on this issue. For obvious reasons, the admirers of Al-e Ahmad resist the possibility that the narrator and the author could be similar. For example, in his introduction to *The School Principal*, Hillmann (1974) asserts - - without offering any supporting evidence - - that the "narrator speaks not for Al-e Ahmad but for himself" and also that "a clear distinction [exists] between the writer and his narrator" (pp. 19, 21). Later, however, when Hillmann (1988) was writing the introduction to *By the Pen*, he appears to have had second thoughts, for here he describes the narrator as "a thinly disguised autobiographical character"(p. xi). Most critics agree with this latter view. Ghanoonparvar (1993), for example, argues that "in Al-e Ahmad's writings, the authorial voice resonates, often loudly and clearly,

throughout both his non-fictional work, in which his style is direct without any attempt to hide behind a dispassionate scholarly mask, and his fiction, in which he tries to disguise this authorial voice behind that of a narrator"(p. 72). Similarly, the anonymous author of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*'s entry on Al-e Ahmad comments, "Al-e Ahmad was an uncertain master of fictional character. Indeed, most of his fiction is cast in the form of a first-person narrative in which the division between author and protagonist is paper-thin" ("Al-e Ahmad, Jalal," 2012). The following paragraphs will provide textual evidence from *The School Principal* to support this argument.

The first issue involves what Ghanoonparvar (1993) calls the "authorial voice" (p. 72). In some works in which the author intends the narrator to be unreliable and also to express perceptions and interpretations that do not coincide with those of the author, a "double voice" can be detected. Jonathan Swift's (1729/1992) essay "A Modest Proposal" is probably the most famous example of this narrative strategy. In this essay, Swift uses an insane speaker (the proposer) to discuss, among other topics, recipes for stewed babies, and occasionally inserts his (Swift's) voice into the essay to provide a 'rational corrective' to the proposer's insanity. As Phiddian (1996) explains, "In order to negotiate the ironies of the piece, the reader must learn to distinguish between Swift's voice and the proposer's" (p. 608). In *The School Principal*, the reader will search in vain for textual evidence of such a double voice, which would have demonstrated and confirmed that Al-e Ahmad does not support the opinions and values of his narrator.

On the contrary, only one voice speaks in *The School Principal* - - the same "agitated and aggravated" (Talattof, 2000, p. 82) voice that speaks throughout most of Al-e Ahmad's writing. Here, for example are two passages on the same topic: the noxious influence of imperialism and 'Western' technology on Iran:

- Didn't you know that the streets and traffic lights and civilization and pavement [in Iran] all belong to those who, in cars built in t**he**ir own country [the USA], trample the rest of the world?
- Although each machine displaces ten workers and an ox, it still needs attendants, even in the village, skilled attendants. And where do you obtain them? You see what a sorry mess things become!

In the first of these passages, the narrator of *The School Principal* is reacting to the news that an American driving an American-built car has run over one of the school's teachers (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 88). In the second passage, Al-e-Ahmad in *Occidentosis* is reacting to the introduction of 'Western' machinery into Iranian villages (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 66). In each passage, the anger towards imperialism or the so-called 'West' and 'Westernization'; the impatient, irritated, and aggrieved mood; and even the rhetorical use of sharp, angry questions all suggest that the same voice is speaking. In fact, each passage could be extracted from its own work and inserted into the other one without disrupting either work's tone or continuity.

The second issue to consider in the context of the authorial voice in *The School Principal* is the narrator's opinions and attitudes, which closely resemble those expressed in Al-e Ahmad's non-fiction. In the following paragraphs, the topics of Iranian education, effeminate

Iranian men, and the most debilitating effects of Westernization on Iranian men will be used to illustrate this point.

Both the narrator of *The School Principal* and Al-e Ahmad in *Occidentosis* loathe the Iranian educational institutions and its curriculums with all their hearts. In Al-e Ahmad's novel, the narrator directs an endless flood of invective towards Iranian pedagogy and the Iranian curriculum. In his view, they are "the stupidest nonsense you could possibly imagine" (p. 36), "such crap" (p. 36), "that crap" and "this b. s."(p. 39), "That Malarky" (p. 49), "reams of b. s." and "this kind of crap" (p. 92). Inevitably for the narrator, therefore, the handicrafts made by Iranian school children are "worthless junk" and "thousands of pieces of . . . junk," and a concerned father's reasons for wanting a tutor for his child are nothing more than "fat farts" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, pp. 117, 118, 112). Similarly, in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad (1984) with much less vulgarity but an equal tendency towards rhetorical overkill, complains that in Iranian schools' programs, "there is no trace of reliance on tradition, no imprint of the culture of the past, nothing of the ethics or philosophy, no notion of literature - - no relation between yesterday and tomorrow, between home and school, between East and West, between collective and individual" (p. 113). Al-e Ahmad does not notice that throughout *Occidentosis*, he frequently criticizes the Iranian clergy precisely for their "reliance on tradition" (e.g., pp. 116-117). No, what matters to him is his certainty that everything in the Iranian curriculum is, in effect, nothing but worthless "crap."

The narrator and the author of *The School Principal* also share the same view of the effect of Westernization on Iranian men: it makes them "effeminate." The narrator mentions, once, that he is married, but says nothing about either his wife or his domestic life. Instead, he dwells on, to the point of obsessive concern, the appearance and mannerisms of the men he considers to have been Westernized. This motif first appears in *The School Principal* when the narrator notices one of the fifth-and-sixth grade teachers at his school: "a youngster with slicked down Brylcreemed hair, tight-cuffed trousers, a pocket handkerchief and a wide yellow tie . . . . He [is] forever touching up the sides of his hair and glancing at himself in the mirror"(Al-e-Ahmad, 1974, p. 1). Later, when the narrator overhears this "young Brylcreemed fellow" whistling a "European dance tune," the reader recognizes that this character represents all the "pretty boys" in Iran who have been infected by Westernization (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, pp. 47, 51, p. 111). Just the mere sighting of such a man is enough to infuriate the narrator. For example, consider his rage when he meets a "white-smocked and perfumed" doctor at the local hospital - - a doctor "whose mannerisms [resemble] those of the popular movie stars": "I took the doctor's hand, led him aside, and whispered in his ear every single swear word and insult that I could think of, against him, his colleagues, and his whole profession" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 90). His "whole profession"? Apparently, even just a whiff of perfume can be a dangerous thing. In *Occidentosis*, Al-e-Ahmad (1984) reveals a similar no-tolerance sexual politics and policy for "effeminate" Westernized men. In his chapter on "Asses in Lions Skins" (occidentotics, or Westernized Iranian men), he comments, "The occidentotic is effete. He is effeminate. He attends to his grooming a great deal. He spends much time sprucing himself up. Sometimes he

even plucks his eyelashes" (p. 96). In *The School Principal*, the effete young dandies do not pluck their eyelashes, but one of them does "[change] his tie every day"; this habit, along with his ties' "weird designs and patterns" and his "eau du cologne" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 104) are presented as unmistakable signs of his degeneracy and lack of 'manhood' or 'manly honor'.

The narrator and Al-e Ahmad both believe that Westernization not only makes Iranian men effeminate but also has even more profoundly debilitating effects on them. In both *The School Principal* and *Occidentosis*, Westernization is represented as isolating Iranian men from the cultural past and *sonnat* or 'tradition,' draining away their personalities, and filling up the resulting emptiness with fear and anxiety. (The word "men" is used deliberately here: both the narrator and Al-e Ahmad rarely mention women, and both use only masculine pronouns when discussing the effects of Westernization.) Below are three pairs of quotations on the effects of Westernization. In each pair, the wording is very similar and the meaning is identical

- [T]hese young dandies - - a bunch of harmless camp followers for those Europhiles among us who [worship] everything Western. They hadn't the foggiest notion where they'd come from . . . *(The School Principal*, p. 92).

- The occidentotic . . . is like a particle of dust suspended in the void, or a shaving floating on the water. He has severed his ties with the depths of society, culture, and tradition . . . He is a thing with no ties to the past and no perception of the future (*Occidentosis*, p. 99).

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- But even worse than all of the above [the Westernized teachers' rootlessness, "ineptitude," and "narrow-mindedness"] was the teachers' complete and total

lack of personality. It totally overwhelmed me. They couldn't speak two words about anything . . . . (*The School Principal*, p. 93).

- The occidentotic has no character. He is a thing without authenticity. His person, his home, and his words convey nothing in particular (*Occidentosis*, p. 95).

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- These men of tomorrow [the students at the narrator's school] were going to be so frightened by [their] examinations, and their brains and their nerves so frayed by terror that by the time they had their diplomas and their degrees, they would really be a new breed of men. Men full of fear. Paper bags full of fear and anxiety (*The School Principal*, pp. 120-121).

- The only palpable characteristic [the occidentotic] has is fear . . . . He has only fear: fear of tomorrow, 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 (*Occidentosis*, p. 95).

Given the above pairs of quotations, Hillman's (1974) assertion that a "clear distinction" (p. 21) exists between the writer and the narrator of *The School Principal* becomes impossible to accept. Although Al-e Ahmad and his narrator might have some minor differences, the writer and his character, overall, blur into each other. This blurring becomes important because the narrator expresses neither a "strong sense of nationalism" (Hillmann, 1974, p. 35) nor any sense of "a 'humanist religion' of fulfilled potential and brotherhood" (Mirsepassi, 2000, p. 102) -- the two values that are often claimed to be the foundation of Al-e Ahmad's thinking.

The Theme of Futility

In *The School Principal*, the narrator mocks Iran's "national symbol of the lion standing up . . . on three legs, trying to maintain his balance, with joined eyebrows, sword in hand, and

lady sun riding piggyback"(Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 37), and he also expresses nothing but contempt for any manifestation of Islamic practices. Rather than expressing positive themes involving nationalism or religion, *The School Principal* actually suggests the futility of all human endeavours in a country like Iran seemingly in the grip of customs, folk ways, and popular religious practices and beliefs. Not only this novel's many farcical and absurd elements, as discussed earlier, but also the narrator's many direct expressions of futility create this theme. As a principal, the narrator actually exercises, in theory, a great deal of power in his school. However, in practice, he gladly turns over the authority for running the school to the young vice-principal and spends most of his time in his office, ''securely on the sidelines," where he does "[his] own work" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, pp. 113, 43). (Apparently, he does some kind of writing.). Hillmann (1988) states that the narrator "feels sympathy for the children being administered corporal punishment and the poverty that is the lot of the majority of them"(p. xii). However, he actually feels sorry for only one particularly small boy with a face "like a cat's" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 55), and whenever the vice-principal beats the children, the narrator retreats into his office, closes his door, and plugs his ears so that he cannot hear the children's screams. He does make some minor physical improvements at the school and obtains shoes and hats for the poorest children. However, he explains, "My interest in all this didn't spring from pity or any sense of altruism. The point was, our school was slowly ceasing to function" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 66). Generally, the narrator does as little as possible at the school and even stops going there in the afternoons.

He justifies his inactivity by frequently protesting the futility of any significant attempt by him to improve conditions at the school. For example, he explains, “I sensed my present wasn’t what was keeping the school running and that if I weren’t there, it wouldn’t have made a bit of difference” (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 56). Convinced that someone “who tries to make reforms from a realm of authority no bigger than the tip of his nose is the most ridiculous man in the world” (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 124), the narrator becomes increasingly bitter and frustrated. At one point, he sinks into a fit of despair that would make even Camus’ (1942/1969) Meursault seem optimistic in comparison: “Why?” Why had I come [to the school]? I didn’t know myself. When I thought about it, I realized that in all my life, in every crummy place I’d ever been, I had always sunk deeper into the muck, until I finally grew so accustomed to the stink that I lost even the desire to cry out” (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, pp. 107-108). When, at the end of the novel, the narrator beats a boy almost to death, this action can be viewed as the uncontrollable and inevitable release of repressed and displaced frustration and aggression.

In a discussion of Solzhenitsyn’s characters, Lukacs’s observations are helpful for understanding Al-e Ahmad’s narrator. Lukacs suggests that

> A character may well be inwardly capable of denying certain forms of the society in which he is forced to live . . . in such a way that his inner integrity (which they threaten) may be intact; however, the conversion of this rejection into a really individual praxis . . . is rendered impossible by society and therefore he must remain enmeshed in a more or less abstractly distorted inwardness. In this process, his character acquires crotchety eccentricity (as cited in Swingewood, 1975, p. 273).

Similarly, Al-e Ahmad's narrator perceives himself as being forced to live in a "society" (his school, which he compares to a "prison" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 108)). He can inwardly reject this so-called 'society' (a slippery and vague concept), but he tells himself, "[I]f you're the principal or some other donkey is - - what difference does it make?" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 131). Hence, as Lukacs would say, the narrator cannot convert his rejection of 'society' into "a really individual praxis," or plan of rebellion. All he can do is retreat into his office - - an image suggesting his withdrawal into his own "distorted inwardness" - - and mutter bleakly about the futility of any attempted rebellion or improvement.

In the next section of this chapter, the analysis of Al-e Ahmad's novel *By the Pen* will show how this novel extends the theme of futility from the individual level in *The School Principal* to the social and political spheres and realms by arguing that a revolution against an oppressive government can only replace one form of oppression with another.

By the Pen

Background

By the Pen was first published in 1961, three years after the publication of *The School Principal* and also the same year in which Al-e Ahmad presented his initial draft of *Occidentosis* at the Congress on the Aim of Iranian Education (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 25). To some extent, *By the Pen* anticipates *Occidentosis*. In both works, Al-e Ahmad journeys back in time to Iran's distant past: *By the Pen* is set in an imaginary place and time that are thinly disguised

representations of Iran's Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722), and *Occidentosis'*s second and third chapters discuss both the pre-Safavid and Safavid eras and times in order to uncover "the roots of occidentosis" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 45). However, whereas *Occidentosis* focuses on the Westernization of Iran*, By the Pen* provides an allegory intended to reveal the reasons for the failures of the Noqtavis' rebellion against the Safavid Dynasty in the 16th century and of the leftist movements in Iran after World War II. As well, this ambitious novel also deals with the proper role of the writer in 'society' and celebrates martyrdom as "the most effective kind of resistance against oppression" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 114).

In two of his other works, Al-e Ahmad reveals his two thematic intentions concerning *By the Pen*'s historical allegory. First, he briefly mentions this novel in his book *Arzabi-ye Shetabzadeh* [Hasty Assessment], which has not been translated into English:

> [Al-e Ahmad] asserts that the story depicts the effects historically consequent to the official linking of church and state with the advent of the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722); that is to say, the creation of a society no longer willing to suffer for principles and ideals, but preferring to pay lip service to past Shi'i Moslem heroes and martyrs instead (Hillmann, 1988, p. xvii).

Second, in his "My Autobiography of Sorts," Al-e Ahmad (1982) explains that *By the Pen* "is written in an eastern folktale style, and in it deals with the hows and whys of the defeat of contemporary [Iranian] leftist movements" (p. 18). Essentially, the allegory in *By the Pen* asserts that the Safavids and the leftists both failed because they merely replaced one kind of corrupt government with another kind (Here one should point out in passing that in the 1950s,

Mosaddegh's government did not actually fail for this reason). In this respect, *By the Pen* extends the theme of futility expressed in *The School Principal*.

Critics have noted that, in addition to allegorizing two historical eras in the history of Iran, *By the Pen* also provides "fascinating parallels to recent events in Iran" ("By the Pen,"2010). Al-e Ahmad's "good writer" in the novel is Mirza Asadollah, a morally impeccable writer who expresses views similar to those of the author and is very reluctant to join a revolutionary movement against "His Majesty" (Mohammad Reza Shah, who ruled Iran from 1941-1979, except during a brief period in the 1950s). Asadollah's explanation for his unwillingness to join the rebellion foreshadows -- with eerie precision -- that eventual outcome of the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979:

> Supposing that these folks [the revolutionaries] win and take over the government. Still, in my opinion, nothing serious will have taken place. One rival will have gone and another replaced it. You know, I am against any government in principle, because it is necessary for every government to exercise force, which is followed by cruelty, then confiscations, executioners, jails and exiles (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 78).

The prescience of such a passage supports Al-e Ahmad's perception of literature "as an antenna so tall that it [can] help to predict future events" (as cited in Talattof, 2000, p. 83) and also helps *By the Pen* to have some contemporary relevance.

Despite these strengths, however, Hillmann's comment in 1988 that *By the Pen* "remains little discussed, and perhaps little read" (p. xix) appears to still apply today. Except for Hillmann in his introduction to this novel, no critic writing in English has devoted more than few

sentences to it. One problem is that, as Hillmann (1988) comments, Al-e Ahmad's plot "owes more to the Iranian past than to prophecy" (p. xx). *By the Pen's* political and religious intricacies "may appear obscure to non-Persian readers"("By the Pen,"2000), and even Persian readers may not appreciate Al-e Ahmad's slow-moving plot, which in the last two of this novel's seven chapters, grinds to a complete halt while the characters have long, earnest philosophical and political debates about government, revolution, and martyrdom. For these reasons, *By the Pen* has more interest as a sociological document than as "a weaving of a tale" (Hillmann, 1984, p. xii), or as a work of fiction.

Plot

In *By the Pen*, Al-e Ahmad interweaves two plots in order to reveal the reasons for the failure of two political movements in Iran in the 16th and mid-twentieth centuries. The main plot portrays the lives of two scribes (Mirza Asadollah and Mirza Abodozzaki) in order to contrast their attitudes towards the craft of writing, political revolutions, and martyrdom, and also to ultimately affirm and celebrate the views of Asadollah. Whereas the unselfish but unsuccessful Asodollah can barely eke out a living for his family by writing (mainly) petitions for his customers and writing out the homework of the children of wealthy aristocrats, the opportunistic and successful Abodossaki will do anything to make money, including writing panegyric poems "about the sound of the belching of the Minister of Stables after he [has] eaten sweet rice" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 11) and selling potions made out of ingredients including donkey brains and dried mice to "cure" various illnesses. Moreover, the local elders

prefer to ask the “easily contented and trustworthy” Asadollah (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 8), rather than the corrupt Religious Magistrate, to write up their will and deeds. Although he is poor, Asadollah is universally respected by everyone except for the “cabbage heads” (the clerics) (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 7), who resent him for meddling in “their” business.

After using his first three “episodes” (chapters) to describe the two scribes, Al-e Ahmad uses Episode Four to introduce his sub-plot, which involves the revolutionary activities of the “Calenders” and “His Majesty” and his government. Ghanoonparvar (1988) explains that “calendar” derives from the Persian *qalandar* and denotes “one of a sufic order of wandering mendicant dervishes” (p. 120). The Calenders allegorize the Noqtavi sect, which “pursued secret activities against the Safavid regime, established safe houses for the oppressed, and eventually became very popular” (Hillmann, 1988, p. xx). In *By the Pen*, the Calenders, who believe that human beings have more need of worship than God does, initially gained popular support by appealing to the “abundance of crippled, disabled and blinded people begging in the streets” (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 36), steadily increased their influence, and are now a serious threat to His Majesty’s government and its allies in the clergy, who have been confiscating the wealth and property of wealthy Calender supporters murdered by government agents.

Al-e Ahmad brings his two plots together by showing how and why the two scribes become involved in the Calenders’ revolution. After refusing to help Abodozzaki to assist the clergy in expropriating the property of a Calender supporter, Asadollah very reluctantly agrees to join the Calenders, but not before in engaging in a long debate about the nature of

government and the futility of revolution. Asadollah argues that “Government, has from the very beginning, been the business of the brainless” and the bloodthirsty (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 78). History, according to Asadollah, ‘’is full of the logic of those who have had a chance in government: “The first chapter is on slaughter, the second on slaughter, and the last, as well, on slaughter” (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 78). Despite his contempt for government and also despite his certainty that the Calenders will merely replace this Majesty’s and the cleric’s oppression with a new oppression of their own, Asadollah agrees to become the secretary of the Judicial Court in the Calenders’ government.

Just as the Noqtavis’ revolutionary threat to the Safavid state failed, so does the Calenders’ revolution after the new government becomes as brutal and unjust as His Majesty’s regime. Hillmann (1988) comments that “the appeal and the point to the narrative are much less in what happens next than in why things happen as they do in Iranian culture, including what readers will early on guess is an almost inevitable outcome” (p. xx). As Hillmann suggests, even readers who know nothing about the Noqtavis will know from all the ominous foreshadowing in *By the Pen* that the Calenders’ revolution will fail and that its outcome will confirm Asadollah’s world-weary predictions about its fate. When the combination of the Calenders’ corruption and His Majesty’s cunning restores the previous government, all that remains is for the characters to hold another long debate about the merits of martyrdom before Assadollah announces his decision to become a martyr rather than try to flee from His Majesty’s soldiers. (“The memory of the martyrs governs the people’s spirits,” he explains (Al-e

Ahmad, 1988, p. 114).) However, before the new government can arrest, torture, and execute Asadollah, his wealthy uncle bribes some high officials, who add Asadollah's name to the list of those to be exiled. Then the inner story of *By the Pen* ends with Asadollah putting on his sandals and vest and, like a righteous prophet, wandering off into the desert.

Genre

By the Pen is an allegorical novel written in a folktale format. Abrams and Harpham (2005) define "allegory" as "a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the 'literal,' or primary, level of signification, and at the same time, to communicate a second, correlated order of signification" (p. 5). Traditionally, "allegory" is conceptualized as "an extended or sustained metaphor" (Macey, 2000, p. 8), or as what Owens (1998) calls "a single metaphor introduced in continuous series" (p. 320). An allegory can be provided by not only a verbal narrative, but also a visual image and, as Macey (2000) observes, the allegory "is one of the most common and fertile of all the devices used in literature and the visual arts" (p. 8). Nevertheless, Romantic art theory privileged the symbol over the allegory, and the modernists uncritically inherited its critical suppression" (Owens, 1998). As a result, twentieth-century allegories, such as those by Kafka and Borges, are usually not called "allegories," but "parables" or "fables" (Owens, 1998, p. 321). This suppression of allegory led to its neglect by most critics, prompting Jameson (1998b) to remark that "those advancing 'beyond' the New

Criticism have yet to confront the problem of political allegory head-on, let alone the problem of allegory in general and as such" (p. 82).

Benjamin (1969, 1977, 1999) and Jameson (1971, 1988a, 1988b, 1990, 1991, 1992) himself have been the most important exceptions to this rule. In his studies of the *Trauerspiel,* or the German baroque drama of the 16th and 17th centuries and, later, of Baudelaire's poetry and 20th–century commodities, Benjamin developed an elaborate and convoluted theory of allegory, which, as Owens (1998) comments, "defies summary" (p. 327). Although Benjamin scholars have been unable to reach a consensus about the details of this theory, it is based on the simple assumption that "[a]ny person, any object, any relationship can mean anything else" (Benjamin, 1977, p. 175). Furthermore, Benjamin explains, "With this possibility a destructive, but just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which detail is of no great importance" (p. 175). Finally, because allegory supposedly "betrays and devalues things in an inexpressible manner" (apparently, by assigning new meanings to them), Benjamin (1977) perceives the allegorist and the allegorical impulse as essentially sadistic:

> It is indeed characteristic of the sadist that he humiliates his objects and then - - or thereby - - satisfies it. And that is what the allegorist does in this age drunk with acts of cruelty, both lived and imagined. This even applies to religious paintings (p. 185).

According to this view, the allegorist "strips [things] naked" of "their natural characteristics" and then gives them new characteristics" and then gives them new characteristics on the allegorical level (Benjamin, 1977, pp. 185, 184).

In the three areas of study identified in the previous paragraph, Benjamin found both inspiration for and confirmation of his theory of allegory: in the *Trauerspiel's* emphasis on ruins and corpses, which he allegorized as the catastrophes of history (Benjamin, 1977); in the urban poetry of Baudelaire (1958), who wrote, for example, in "The Swan," "Paris may change, my melancholy is fixed. / New palaces, and scaffolding, and blocks, / And suburbs old, are symbols all to me" (p. 81); and also in mass-produced commodities, which led Benjamin (1999), recalling Marx's (1990) ideas about the fetishizing of commodities, to state that allegory "stand[s] for that which the commodity makes of the experiences that people have in this century" (p. 328). Here, allegory is not just means of representation, but also what Leddin (2008) calls "an experiential modality" (p. 16).

Benjamin noted that a resourceful allegorist can use a commodity to signify anything else -- "in a kind of profane parody of the creative naming of God" (Eagleton, 1990, p. 326). Thus, for Benjamin, the allegorist is, paradoxically, both a 'sadist" and also a kind of redeemer figure: in Eagleton's (1990) words, he or she "grubs among the ruins of once integral meanings to permutate them in startling new ways" (p. 327). For example, although the German *Trauerspiel* presents history as degraded and spiritually bankrupt, and "progress" as one catastrophe after another, its images of ruins and corpses should, according to Benjamin, be read against the grain as "a negative index of some utterly inconceivable transcendence waiting patiently in the wings" (Eagleton, 1990, p. 326). Consequently, Benjamin (1977) allegorizes all the *Trauerspiel's*

negative images as, first, catastrophes and, second, in terms of their opposites, as when he claims, “Seen from the point of view of death, the product of the corpse is life” (p. 218).

Jameson’s view of allegory is similar to Benjamin’s, but Jameson allows for more uncertainty and ambiguity when interpreting allegorical signifiers. He introduces his analysis of contemporary cinema by asserting, “If everything means something else, so does technology” (Jameson, 1992, p. 11). In his voluminous writing, Jameson does, indeed, provide allegorical readings of not only technology, but also for many other subjects of his wide-ranging studies. For example, when analyzing Alfred Hitchcock’s films, he interprets their pervasive murders as allegories of these films’ production and consumption; similarly, the murderers in these films are “the very inscription of Hitchcock himself (and his demiurgic function) *within* the film[s]” (Jameson, 1990, p. 121). In Jameson’s writing, the allegorical impulse spreads like a contagion. For example, for Jameson (1991), an elevator or an escalator is “the allegorical signifier of that older [19th-century] promenade we are no longer allowed to conduct on our own” (p. 42). Also for Jameson, as for Benjamin, the allegorical impulse has a redemptive function. Jameson (1990) argues, for example, that the allegorization of thriller films “raises them from their seemingly immediate consumption in relief or suspense and promotes them to the more philosophical dignity of *meanings*” (p. 123). Jameson does not explain why thriller films, or anything else, cannot have “meanings” without being allegorized. He seems, like Benjamin, to perceive the “details” of this world as signifiers that have been hollowed out of meaning and are now available for new meanings to be assigned to them.

Although Jameson appears to be both assertive and certain in his own allegorical readings of, for example, elevators and escalators, he is, generally, more dubious than Benjamin is about the accuracy of allegorical connections made between a signifier and its alleged allegorical signified. In his own discussion of the *Trauerspiel*, Jameson (1971) refers to allegory as "the privileged mode of our own life in time, a clumsy deciphering of meaning from moment to moment, the painful attempt to restore a continuity to heterogeneous, disconnected instants" (P. 72). Here, the adjectives "clumsy" and "painful" express Jameson's reluctance to valorize allegorical reading, despite their perceived redemptive 'function'. Moreover, in his analysis of 'postmodern' installation art, Jameson (1991) distinguishes between older and "newer" (the so-called postmodern) allegory: although the latter "must still attach its one-on-one conceptual labels to its objects after the fashion of *The Pilgrim's Progress,*" the newer form of allegory turns "the process of allegorical interpretation [into] a kind of scanning that, moving back and forth across the text [the various elements of the postmodern installation] readjusts its terms in constant modification of a type quite different from our stereotypes of some static medieval or biblical decoding" (p. 168). Consequently, for Jameson, the decoding of a postmodern allegory will, necessarily, be more tentative and provisional than that of earlier allegories.

Do Benjamin's and Jameson's theories of allegory help us to understand, or "decode," Al-e Ahmad's allegory in *By the Pen?* First, the belief that "everything means something else" (Jameson, 1992, p. 11) is not new. Just as Benjamin (1977) found a "material affinity between baroque and medieval Christianity" (220), one can detect a strong similarity between

Benjamin's and Jameson's theories and Plato's belief that "appearances are the allegorical equivalents of a higher reality" (Macey, 2000, p. 8), and also between these theories and the "medieval conception of the world as God's book" (Jameson, 1988 b, p. 126) and of the Bible as God's allegory. For example, Bede (c.673-735), an historian and biblical commentator, wrote that "All things in Scripture – times and places, names and numbers, are full of spiritual figure, of typic mystery, of heavenly sacraments" (as cited in MacQueen, 1970, p. 37). Thus, for Bede, in Genesis XXXVII, "the coat of many colours which the patriarch Jacob made for his son Joseph is also an indirect representation of the grace of diverse virtues which God the father has ordained and given us always to be clad until the end of our life" (as cited in MacQueen, 1970, p. 51). As Heidegger argued in "The Origin of the Work of Art," by imputing an allegorical dimension to every work of art and, by extension, also to every image in every work of art, a critic generalizes the term "allegory" to the degree that it loses its meaning (Owens, 1998, p. 124).

Second, Benjamin's and Jameson's definitions of "allegory" are also not helpful for interpreting Al-e Ahmad. Benjamin's commodity-based definition - - the only definition he provides - - does not apply to literary texts. Jameson's (1998 b) definition of "allegory" does not actually add anything new to our understanding of it. He writes that in "that peculiar phenomenon we call allegory . . . a single coded object or item of the outside world is suddenly overloaded with meaning, lifted up into a crucial element of a new and complicated object-language or overcoding erected on the basis of the older, simpler, 'natural' sign-system" (p.

126). When this definition is translated into plain English, it can be seen to restate the straight forward and standard definition of "allegory" in Abrams and Harpham's (2005) *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* quoted at the beginning of this section of this thesis: in an allegory, "the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well [i.e., the "coded object[s] or item[s] of the outside world"] are contrived by the author to make sense on the 'literal,' or primary, level of signification [i.e., on the level "of the older, simpler 'natural' sign system"], and at the same time to communicate a second, correlated order of signification" [i.e., "a crucial element of a new and complicated object-language or over-coding]" (p. 5).

Abrams and Harpham's (2005) definition of "allegory" is well-suited for analyzing Al-e Ahmad's *By the Pen,* which, far from being an example of what Jameson (1991) would call a 'newer allegory," attaches "one-on-one [abstractions] to its objects after the fashion of *The Pilgrim's Progress"* (p. 168), but without giving the characters, places, and events allegorical names. On what Abrams and Harpham (2005) would refer to as its "primary level" (p. 5), *By the Pen* tells the story of two scribes, Mizra Asadollah and Mizra Abdozzaki, and of how they and the secondary characters get caught up in a revolution in an imaginary Iran. On this level, this novel is "about" mainly the proper role of the writer in 'society'. On what Abrams and Harpham (2005) would call "the second, correlated order of signification," the plot of *By the Pen* "closely parallels, first, a specific period in the reign of Safavid Shah Abbas the Great (ruled 1587-1629) and, second, the rise and fall of Mohammed Mosaddeq (1882-1967), who served as prime minister in Iran from the spring of 1951 to mid-summer 1953" (Hillman, 1988, p. xviii). Given

this novel's primary-level focus on the role of the writer in society, Al-e Ahmad's main intended audience was probably other Iranian cultural workers or the so-called 'intellectuals', who would have been familiar enough with Iran's history to decipher *By the Pen's* allegory.

Abrams and Harpham (2005) also distinguish between two main types of allegory: (1) "[h]istorical and political allegory in which the characters and actions that are signified literally in their turn represent, or 'allegorize,' historical personages and events" and (2) "the sustained allegory of ideas, [in which] the central device is the personification of abstract entities such as virtues, vices, states of mind, modes of life, and types of characters" (pp. 6-7). In *By the Pen,* Al-e Ahmad combines both types of allegories. His allegory is "historical and political" because its characters allegorize Iran's historical past. On this level, *By the Pen,* which, as was mentioned in the previous section of this thesis, characterizes history as a succession of slaughters, suggests that Al-e Ahmad shared Benjamin's and Jameson's kind of grim view of history: for Benjamin (1977), history could be best represented, or allegorized, by "a death's head," and for Jameson (1991), "[h]istory progresses by failure rather than by success" (p. 209). Al-e Ahmad's novel is also an "allegory of ideas" because many of his characters personify abstract concepts. Unlike the explicit European medieval allegories, *By the Pen* does not have characters with names such as "Faithful" or "Hopeful," which would specify the characters' allegorical meanings (Abrams and Harpham, 2005). However, the saintly Mirza Asadollah, for example, could have been named "Selfless Virtue," while His Majesty obviously represents "Pure Evil" in Al-e Ahmad's sustained allegory of ideas.

Al-e Ahmad's allegory can also be read in terms of the four levels of meaning traditionally used in medieval interpretations of scriptural and allegorical materials. The medieval scholars assigned such materials literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical levels of meaning (Abrams & Harpham, 2005) and also divided the allegorical level into an additional four levels. Bede, for example, wrote that allegory "figuratively conveys a meaning which in some passages is historical, in others typological [that is, reading the Old Testament as a "type," or prophecy, of the revelation to come in the New Testament], in others moral (that is, concerned with the conduct of life), in others anagogical (that is, a meaning which leads us upwards to heaven)" (as cited in MacQueen, 1970, p. 51). On the historical level, the allegory in *By the Pen* presents two events and two historical eras in Iran's history. On the typological level, the figures and events in the first of these conjunctures can be understood as figurative types of the corresponding figures and events of the second era. On the moral level, Al-e Ahmad's allegory "argues" that writers must be selfless and socially committed and that martyrdom is the purest response to tyranny. Finally, *By the Pen* does not have an anagogical level, because nothing in this novel suggests either a "heaven" or any kind of eschatology. According to Mirza Asadollah, the "memory of the martyrs," and not the hope or promise of heaven, "governs the people's spirits"(Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 114).

When Al-e Ahmad was writing *By the Pen* during the late 1950's and/or the early 1960's, contemporary allegories were both common and popular in Iran and in many other countries. For example, the best-known work of Nima Yushij (1897-1960), "the most celebrated" and "the

most emulated" Iranian poet of his time, is "Manali" (1947), in part an allegory of Yushij's life, his development of Iran's "New Poetry," and his difficulties while confronting those who opposed his innovations (Talattof, 2000, pp. 26, 41). Moreover, by the late 1950s, when the Shah's policies, which catered to the interests of Iran's wealthy dominant classes and dominant powers, created widespread dissatisfaction among the oppressed classes and the multitude, "[Iranian] [w]riters overthrew the regime many times allegorically and symbolically, in order to encourage people to rise against their situation" (Talattof, 2000, pp. 69-70). Talatoff (2000) provides a long list of Iranian fiction writers, poets, and other writers who used allegory to indirectly criticize Iranian forms of social life under the Shah.

Jameson (1988a), who suggested that allegory in general should be regarded "as a cultural and historical symptom rather than as one intellectual option among others" (p. 127) tried to account for allegory's popularity not only in Iran, but also in all so-called "Third-World" countries (Jameson, 1986). In an article that quickly became infamous, he argued that in "First-World" countries, the capitalist mode of production creates a split between a text's private and public elements, as well as in an individual reader. As a result, the reader can no longer read such a text correctly, or in relation to his or her public/political environment. Hence, in the First World, this environment and political commitment are "recontained and psychologized or subjectivized by way of the public-private split" (Jameson, 1986, p. 71) because the reader cannot think beyond his or her individual situations. In contrast, Third-World countries, which Jameson (1986) believes have no mode of production, do not have this problem. (He does not

discuss the "Second-World," or "Socialist" countries.) This perceived difference leads to Jameson's (1986) thesis: "All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories,* even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when these forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel" (p. 69). A critic who believes that everything means something else will have no difficulty in also believing that all texts produced in a huge sector of the world will *necessarily* be allegories. However, Jameson's thesis has been strongly criticized for other reasons, most notably by Ahmad (2008), who was offended by both Jameson's "Three Worlds Theory" and his essentializing of an enormous body of literature.

Ahmed (2000) also pointed out that Jameson's "rhetoric of otherness" (p. 93) does not account for all the allegories such as Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and Ellison's *The Invisible Man* that are produced in the so-called ''First-World" countries like the United States. (Anderson (1998) subscribes to a similar orientalist discourse when he presents a list of deficiencies of Third World or 'inferior other' countries, claiming that the so-called Third World lacks ''the minimum conditions of modernity" and "full capitalist modernization" (pp. 120-21).). However, even if other "Third World" countries did lack a mode of production, and also even if this 'lack' did account for the allegories written in these countries, a much simpler explanation can be suggested for the allegories produced in Iran during the Shah's rule. As Boroujerdi (1996), Abrahamiam (1999), and Talattof (2000) point out, in post-War Iran, when Al-e Ahmad was writing (1945-1969), writers faced continual arrest and very harsh government censorship.

The state censors closed down several of the political and literary magazines that he wrote for and/or edited during different episodes of his life (Al-e Ahmad, 1982), and after *By the Pen* was published, the censors ensured that most of its copies remained in its publisher's warehouse until the late 1970s (Hillman, 1988). As Talattof (2000) reports, "Allegory, symbol, and most importantly, metaphor became useful tools for veiling meanings to be conveyed to readers despite censorship efforts" (p. 70). Boroujerdi (1996) makes the same point and also attributes the allegories in Post-War Iran to "the illiteracy of a general public in need of mythical-symbolic characters to whom they could relate" (p. 48). Overall, the most likely explanation for Al-e Ahmad's choice of a remote, pseudo-historical, allegorical setting for his criticism of the Shah and his regime is the desire to avoid censorship and ensure *By the Pen's* publication.

Finally, Al-e Ahmad's choice of the folktale format, with its "once-upon-a-time" narrative techniques, further distances *By the Pen's* provocative narrative from contemporary times. The "folktale" is "a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally; many of these tales eventually achieve written form" (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 105). In *By the Pen,* Al-e Ahmad alludes to the folktale by framing his main story "with a version of a famous folktale about a shepherd who is chosen vizier [an important court official]" (Hillmann, 1988, p. xix). In the main story, the narrator reinforces the effects of the framing story by often reminding his "dear readers" about "the storytellers," who lived during some distant "day and age" and whose oral stories the narrator has apparently collated and is now presenting in

writtenform(Al-eAhmad,1988,pp.7,10,9).

Point of View, the Narrator, and the Author

In *By the Pen*, a third-person narrator tells the story, and the protagonist (the "good" scribe, Mirza Asadollah) expresses this novel's themes. The narrator is a reporter who identifies himself with his readers because both he and they "are neither storytellers nor historians" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 118). He represents himself as simply collating and then retelling stories written by "storytellers" of long ago. He occasionally blames them for anything in his report that might offend the reader, and emphasizes that he is neither telling a story about himself, nor is in any way the "author" of the story that he is telling. Thus, when he is reporting that one of his characters lusted after another man's wife, he comments, "Let the storytellers be blamed, but they say that on top of all this, Khanlar Khan had had eyes for Darakhshandeh Khanom" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 10). Generally, the narrator is friendly and polite, often directly addressing his "dearest reader" in order to clarify some detail in the plot. With this narrative strategy, Al-e Ahmad captures some of the spirit of traditional folktale and, more importantly, also distances himself from the narrator's story.

However, Al-e Ahmad is not the kind of author who can let a story or novel speak for itself. In *By the Pen*, he uses Asadollah to, in effect, directly articulate the novel's main themes. Hillmann (1988) comments that Asadollah "seems ideologically very close to Al-e Ahmad"(p.

xviii). The many similarities between *Occidentosis* and *By the Pen* support this argument. For example, in *Occidentosis,* Al-e Ahmad (1984) claims that during the Safavid Dynasty, Iranians were transformed "into beggars picking crumbs from the tables of departed martyrs'' (p. 45). Moreover, he adds "When we gave up the chance for martyrdom to content ourselves with glorifying the martyrs of the past, we became the gatekeepers of graveyards" (p. 45). Finally, to confirm his authority, Al-e Ahmad directs the reader not to some Islamic text on the importance of martyrdom, but to his previous novel: "I have spoken of this subject in [*By the Pen*]" (p. 45). In this novel, Asadollah not only believes that the "power of truth and justice is found in the words of martyrs," but also wants to become a martyr himself because martyrdom "wipes the domination of injustice from the spirit of the people" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, pp. 79, 114). Martyrdom, Asadollah continues, is an act that preserves the martyrs' "honor" and is also "what will reach the next generation aside from the rotten book of history" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 114).

With beliefs like these, Asadollah can be imagined as Al-e Ahmad's idealized self - - a man of impeccable integrity and uncompromising principles. In *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad (1984) argues that only this kind of person can save Iran from Westernization:

> Especially for us, who live in this age of transformation and crisis and are undergoing this period of social transition, it is only with the help of self-sacrificing, self-surpassing, and principled people (who in the usage of pop psychology are termed antisocial, rigid, and unbalanced) that the weight of this transformation and crisis may be borne and that the social disorder described in this work may be remedied (p. 131).

Both Asadollah and Al-e Ahmad (as he represents himself in his writing) are "principled," but also "antisocial, rigid, and unbalanced." Asadollah, who states, "I do hate and I hate deeply. I am the epitome of hatred. I am the epitome of the negation of the status quo," is willing to abandon his children because not they, but resistance against oppression, is "the human meaning of [his] life" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, pp. 82, 115). Similarly, Al-e Ahmad(1984), who hates all those who have become "corrupted and stupefied by [Western] corporeal pleasures" (p. 133) explains that when he observed a male doctor examining his wife for possible infertility, he (Al-e Ahmad) suddenly "let go of the kid," or lost all his desire to have children: "it was one of those movements when hatred appeared, to the point of death, hatred towards any and every kid . . .'' (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 24). This passage must surely be "the epitome of the negation of the status quo," which, in most cultures, cherishes children. In addition, this passage also mocks the claim made by Al-e Ahmad's wife that "Jalal was on a path and he was travelling it with love" (Daneshvar, 2008, p. 99).

The Themes of Futility and Gullibility

Al-e Ahmad's writing "ended up helping Islamic forces in their attempts to gain a place among oppositional voices" (Talattof, 2000, p. 83) and is often credited for contributing to the ideological themes and forms produced, mobilized, propagated and circulated by the (Leninist/nationalist) Left and Islamist/nationalist forces in the process of 1978-1979 Iranian revolution (e.g., Keddie, 2006), which tended to impose unity, to produce homogenization or sameness, to legitimate boundaries and hierarchy -- in the name of defending national

identities, local customs and culture and in opposition to the expansion of Western/American imperialism -- and to prevent democratic, dialogical, and egalitarian imaginaries and alternatives to flourish. As Hillmann (1984, p. 20) points out, the question of how Al-e Ahmad would have perceived Khomeini's Islamic Republic "is ultimately unanswerable" (p. 29). Nevertheless, when Al-e Ahmad was writing *By the Pen* (circa 1959-1961), he appears to have believed that any kind of political revolution was futile. Indeed, Asadollah, repeatedly emphasizes this point in unmistakable terms. He believes not only that "*every* government" must become oppressive in order to maintain its premises of power and sustain and produce its command and strategies of power but also that "*every* religion or ideology renews . . . old worn out quarrels . . . and becomes a new excuse for excommunication, and then bloodshed and settling old accounts with the people" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 77, emphasis added).Thus, believing that "when you are not able to do something for the people, the least you can do is to preserve your own honor" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 55), Asadollah initially refuses to support the Calenders and their revolution.

After he finally does agree to join the Calenders, they confirm his worst fears, with depressing inevitability. When they capture three of His Majesty's secret agents, the Calenders mutilate them, put them backwards on donkeys, and march them through the streets, accompanied by bugles and drums. Next, they begin decapitating "anyone guilty of pilfering, philandering, or looting" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 62). Even the highly principled Asadollah gets caught up in the new regime's cruelty: as the Calenders' first Secretary of the Judicial Court, he

decrees that anyone who commits theft must either return the property or pay the damages. These penalties are enlightened, but anyone who cannot carry them out gets a large tattoo "hacked on his forehead and . . . [is] driven out of the city" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 87). The final outrage occurs when the Calenders allow the clerics to keep all their confiscated properties. After this decision, "the whole business [the revolutionary government] is ruined" (Al-e-Ahmad, 1988, p. 90) because the masses no longer trust the Calenders. In case the reader is uncertain about the meaning of all these portentous events, Al-e Ahmad (1988) has Asadollah provide a running commentary, as when he tells a Calender, ". . . I don't see any difference between this government and the one before" (p. 97). Eventually, His Majesty's counter-revolutionary activities and the Calenders' own excesses lead to the monarchy's restoration. In order to gain refuge in India, the Calenders sell the 300 women in His Majesty's harem to the Indian court. Once again, a character leaves no doubt about how the reader should interpret the Calenders' decline: "If I am not mistaken, the mission of our [the Calenders'] uprising is ending in pimping" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 112).

Along with the theme involving the futility of revolutions, a kind of sub-theme emerges in *By the Pen's* final chapters: the gullibility of "the masses". Unlike Franz Fanon (1963/2004), who expresses his endless faith in the colonized, oppressed/exploited 'masses' and their revolutionary *praxis* -- particularly the peasantry and even the lumpenproletariat -- as "one of the most spontaneously and radically revolutionary forces [in a colony]" (p. 81), Al-e Ahmad consistently portrays Iran's general population, in particular, the oppressed classes, as cultural

dupes, ignorant, and gullible. This theme is evident in the depiction of the villages in *The School Principal*, the emphasis on the "primitive mode of thought" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 69) of the rural population in *Occidentosis,* and in the urban population's gullibility, ignorance, and timidity in *By the Pen*. Mashhadi Ramazan, a grocer, introduces this theme early in this novel when he exclaims, "What a screwed up city this has become. If I were in the Calenders' shoes in a city like this, I would claim to be God himself, never mind the Imam of the age" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 33). Before the revolution, the Calenders thrive partly because a significant sector of general population believe the story that the first Calender leader, who jumped into a vat of acid and then disappeared, "has gone into occultation, and would soon reappear to establish justice and equity throughout the world" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 36). After the revolution, the general population enjoy the ''banquet of spoils" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 79) that the Calenders initially bring them; however, when the Calenders reveal their willingness to oppress their subjects, His Majesty's agents immediately begins to work on the population and to exploit their fears. Before long, "all the people in the city, men and women, [pour] into the streets - - exactly like ants whose nest has been flooded and who sense danger -- frightened and awe-striken'' (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 99). Here, the simile involving ants recalls all the animal and insect imagery in *The School Principal* and also strips the multitude of their human dignity.

Although Al-e Ahmad (1984) is consistently critical of the general Iranian population, in particular, the oppressed classes, he does not scold its members for their shortcomings, because he expects nothing more from them. He emphasizes this point in *Occidentosis*:

“Certainly, the ordinary man in the streets is not to blame [for the failure of the struggle against the Shah since the Constitutional Era]. He goes any way you point him. That is, he assumes any form you train him to” (p. 92). No, the poor, ignorant, gullible masses “are not to be blamed for all [the] setbacks [in Iran]; it is the incorrect leadership of these struggles that has led to such outcomes” (p. 93). *By the Pen* demonstrates this point very clearly. The “masses” in this novel have no one to lead them against the Calenders after their regime reveals its true nature. All they can do is to scurry about in the streets -- like frightened ants -- until His Majesty regains power and restores order.

Conclusion

The five short stories and two novels discussed in this chapter represent a wide range of genres but express a consistent criticism of the socio-cultural life, the institutions, the pedagogy, and the general population of Iran. The five stories are realistic sketches of everyday life in Iran. Their reader will search in vain in them for some textual evidence that Al-e-Ahmad either celebrated “the pure wisdom of the common people’’ or felt any kind of “special identification with Islam” (Mirsepassi, 2000, pp. 104, 110) - - two of the most common claims made by Al-e Ahmad’s supporters. Instead, these five stories present a narrator who cannot identify himself with the worshipping pilgrims at a sacred Islamic shrine (in “The Pilgrimage”), grim parables about the destruction of beauty and joy in everyday Iranian life (in “The China Flowerpot” and “Seh’tar”), and highly critical studies of the malign influence of Islamic practices and folk customs on the average Iranian (in “The Untimely Breaking of the fast” and “My Sister

and the Spider," respectively). Together, these stories suggest no sense of a "community" whose members are cooperating together for the sake of the 'common good' or collective needs and desires, but only of isolated individuals struggling and failing to find anything resembling either success or happiness in their lives.

The School Principal builds on these five stories by presenting an equally pessimistic view of Iranian education and the wider Iranian ways of living and social-cultural life. Although this work might hold "a unique place in modern Persian fiction" (Hillmann, 1974, p. 22), it is still, by any standards, "an odd sort of social novel" ("The School Principal," 2010). Its elements of naturalism deny the characters their human dignity, while the satirical elements of farce and the Absurd inhibit reader empathy. This novel's greatest problem, however, is its blurring of the narrator and the author into an ugly voice that asserts, for example, that the teachers at his school "have a right" to beat the children: "Don't forget that when [the teachers] were children had gone to school, they had certainly taken their beating. Now it was their turn to do the beating" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 121). In the end, the vicious narrator's iconoclasm is too all-encompassing to enable Al-e Ahmad's novel to provide thoughtful social criticism. *The School Principal* is a black comedy that is too exaggerated to "inspire positive action and reform" (Hillmann, 1974, p. 27) and also too mean-spirited to imply authorial compassion or empathy.

In *By the Pen*, Al-e Ahmad "disguises the often shrill and opinionated voice evident in his polemical essays and much of his fiction'' (Ghanoonparvar, 1988, p. viii) by using a detached narrator to tell a purportedly imaginary story set in an unidentified past. The narrative

allegorizes Iran's failed rebellions of the Safavid dynasty and the 20th century, and strongly challenges the widespread perception that Al-e Ahmad strongly believed that an Islamic government could achieve positive social change. On the contrary, the plot of *By the Pen* - - based on Al-e Ahmad's understanding of two historical eras widely separated in Iranian history - - emphasizes that *all* governments are corrupt and that, for this reason, *all* revolutions must ultimately fail. Moreover, Al-e Ahmad's surrogate in *By the Pen* believes that the "times when religions were the main factor in bringing about change have passed" and does not agree that "martyrdom belongs exclusively to the domain of religion" (Al-e Ahmad, 1988, p. 80). In other words, in *By the Pen*, Al-e Ahmad is promoting a 'secular' version of martyrdom undertaken by 'secular' men of principle like Asadollah. This position is consistent with Al-e Ahmad's (1984) claims in *Occidentosis* that the Iranian clergy "have drawn into their cocoons of fanaticism and paralysis" and that "education and intellectualism will take the decisive role away from both [the state and religious institutions]" in determining Iran's future (pp. 117, 74).

Chapter 3

Occidentosis

In 1962, Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969) published *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, "a violent pamphlet directed against a terrible malady that alienates Iranians from their identity and bewitches them with the West" (Keddie, 2006, p. 190). This "malady", identified as *Gharbzadeghi* in Persian, was the original title of the work and has been variously translated as "Occidentosis," "Westoxication" (Keddie, 2006, p. 189), "the Plague from the West" (Abrahamian, 1993, p. 23), and "Weststruckness" (Hillman, 1988, p. xv). No matter how this term is translated, however, its main meaning is clear: Iranian 'Westernization' (which Al-e Ahmad equates with dependence, moral and sexual degeneracy, and lack of national manhood) is "a disease that [has] infected Iranian society from outside and debased Iranian life and cultural subjectivity" (Ashtiani, 1994, p. 61). Moreover, in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad not only diagnoses the disease plaguing the country, but also offers a cure: the return to the self (*khish),* both to re-define cultural identity against colonial ideology and imperialist (techno-scientific) onslaught and to realize the 'third way' (*rah-e-sevvom),* or self-reliance (Al-e Ahmad, 1984; 1978b, p. 214), i.e., a specifically Iranian path of autarkic development and state sovereignty informed by the authentic Perso-Islamic past (prior to the Savafid era), and free of toxic imperialist Western influences.

During the 1960's, when the Iranian oppressed classes were suffering under the double burden of Western (particularly American) imperialism and the Shah's state oppression, both Al-e Ahmad's diagnosis and cure exerted a very powerful appeal upon a significant sector of the Iranian imagination. As a result, the coined word "*Gharbzadeghi"* permanently entered the Persian language, Al-e Ahmad became "the intellectual leader of a new generation of Iranian thinkers" (Keddie, 2006, p. 189), and *Occidentosis* is credited with spearheading the 1960's Iranian search for a form of identity rooted in Perso-Islamic legacies (Keddie, 2006). Indeed, Al-e Ahmad "was the only contemporary writer to obtain favourable comments from [Ayatollah] Khomeini" (Abrahamian, 1993, p. 23). Al-e Ahmad also called for the return to the self, or to an authentic identity (that ''speaks into the present''), and the creation of an alliance between the so-called ''engaged intellectuals'' and ''the progressive wing of the clergy'' to resist imperialism (including the West's debased sexual morality and commodification of culture) and to re-assert Iran's sovereignty by building an autonomous political-economic order (that would protect *Khodi capital,* or the so-called ''national bourgeoisie'') in response to Euro/American imperialist domination (Al-e Ahmad,1984; 1978a; 1978b).

This chapter will argue that despite *Occidentosis's* importance "as a document of the ideological ferment that ultimately led to revolution" (Algar, 1984, p. 7), Al-e Ahmad's argument is not convincing. On the one hand, its simplicity and strong emotional and moral appeal, along with Al-e Ahmad's "unmistakable force, sincerity, and originality" (Algar, 1984, p. 11), turned *Occidentosis* into a ringing call for action and its author into "the conscience of

many [Iranian] intellectuals" (Keddie, 2006, p. 189). On the other hand, as Algar (1984) points out, Al-e Ahmad often appears to be "unsystematic" (p. 11) as a thinker. Frequently, he does not bother to verify his historical materials and information, to support his main claims, or to avoid self-contradictions. Al-e Ahmad's argument in *Occidentosis* articulates his deepest moral and sexual anxieties and fears concerning radical social, politico-economic and cultural changes, and appeals mainly to ahistorical abstractions, Manichean assumptions (e.g., assumptions about occidentotic *vs*. homegrown/engaged intellectuals), rigid categorizations, facile generalizations, and general categories (the "West" *vs*. The "East"), rather than presenting a concrete analysis of concrete historical social forms, i.e., a critique of historically specific forms of power and an analysis of contradictory social relations. As a result, Al-e Ahmad's argument cannot sustain a close analysis and deconstructive criticism. To support this thesis, the remainder of this chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) Historical and Personal Contexts of *Occidentosis*, (b) Summary and Analysis of Chapters, (c) Methodological Problems, (d) Key Issues: the West and Technology, Iran and Islam, and (e) Conclusions.

Historical and Personal Contexts of *Occidentosis*

Al-e Ahmad (1984) presented his first draft of *Occidentosis* to two sessions of the Congress on the Aim of Iranian Education, on November 29th, 1961 and January 17th, 1962 (p. 25). When he was writing this draft, Iran was languishing in what he describes as an "age of transformation and crisis" (p. 131) - - the result of more than half a century of imperialist interventions in Iran's political affairs, mass protest movements of workers, nomad and peasant

revolts and resistances (Cronin, 2010), minorities' struggles for autonomy (Malm & Esmailian, 2007), and the Reza Shah's and Mohammad Reza Shah's authoritarian statism. The latter entailed oppressive nationalist policies and practices, forced development, and top-down planning, as well as the Mohammad Reza Shah's mismanagement of Iran's oil revenues and resources. In this context, Al-e Ahmad, who, as a child, had witnessed his clerical father's ruin after the 'laicizing' reforms of Reza Shah, and "later broke away from Islam" by joining the Leninist Tudeh Party of Iran (Keddie, 2006, p. 206), appears to have regained his interest in Islam, which he then perceived as Iran's "only remaining barrier to western capitalism and rampant consumerism" (Afary & Anderson, 2005, p. 59). Both the historical and personal contexts of *Occidentosis* will be discussed in this section.

Historical Background

Although Iran was never a formal colony, it had been, since 1908, when oil was first discovered within its territories, closely interconnected with global capital and integrated into the world market, vulnerable to inter-imperialist competition and shaken by global crises generated by local and global waves of the struggles of the oppressed classes. Rich in oil, but lacking the technology to produce it and short of oil skilled technicians to run the oil industry (Kinzer, 2003), the Iranian state relied upon investment, technology, and qualified Western oil technicians, first from Great Britain and the British Petroleum Company (prior to and after World War One) and, later, from mainly the United States (after World War Two). As Halliday (1979) argues, the imperialist states gave "considerable encouragement" to Iran's

development, but “only insofar as this [accorded] with their own interests” (pp. 169-170). Thus, under British imperialism, government revenues from the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company amounted to only 10-15 percent of the value of Iran’s oil exports, and under the Americans, the Shah’s regime increased its oil rents but was encouraged to spend huge amounts on “US-backed military aggrandizement” (Bromley, 1994, p. 151).

Iran’s integration into the world market and reliance on oil revenues to finance state institutions meant that the Iranian state -- as the concentrated and organized force and the driving force of capitalist development within a profoundly contradictory social formation -- remains unstable social form and vulnerable to local/global disruptions (Cronin, 2010), not only because its political-economic strategy and form of (capitalist) development were intimately connected with the export of a single commodity whose market the state did not control (Halliday, 1979), but also because imperialist forces were deeply involved in Iran’s political affairs. The potential success of Iran’s Constitutional Revolution provoked Tsarist Russia to send troops to enforce order, to maintain stability and to safeguard central state power in 1908; the threat of a Communist-led movement encouraged the British imperialist forces to urge Reza Shah to stage a coup in 1921; his alleged opposition to the Allies led to an Anglo-Soviet invasion and Reza Shah’s abdication in 1941; and most importantly, after the 1941 occupation/crisis, for more than ten years, the workers’ militancy and the oppressed masses’ unrest disturbed Iran’s political landscape (Marshall, 1988), interrupted the imperialist control over oil production (Abrahamian, 2013; Turner, 1980), and opened up cracks in the social universe of capital. In

other words, the ending of Reza Shah's authoritarian regime created an opportunity and space for the oppressed classes to initiate a new wave of struggles against the Shah's regime and British imperialism. The workers' insubordination and the various mass movements (such as the women's movements, the movement to nationalize oil, and the Azerbaijani and Kurdish autonomy movements) not only undermined the Shah's political power but also disrupted capital accumulation in the oil-rich province of Khuzestan (where the oil industry was controlled by British Petroleum), created new popular political and cultural forms (for example, "mass festivals"), and radicalized the struggle for autonomy and dignity in a non-Euro American context (Abrahamian, 1993; Marshall, 1988; Turner, 1980).

This process resulted in the political and cultural proliferation of the Left and critical thought and wide popular support for anti-monarchist forces such as the nationalist, the labor, and the women's movements, which called for social reforms, Iran's independence, and the nationalization of oil industry and demanded land re-distribution, educational opportunities, union recognition, higher wages, shorter hours of work, labour protection, equality for women, and equal pay for men and women (Abrahamian, 2008, 2013; Poya, 1999; Sanasarian, 1982). In this context, in response to these unpredictable political developments and the popular political upheavals (e.g., the July 1952 uprising, which radicalized Mosaddegh's liberal nationalist politics), and because of Iran's strategic importance as a state bordering the Soviet Union during the 'Cold War', the royalist and imperialist forces (the USA and Britain) helped oust Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953, in a coup known in Iran as the *28th*

Mordad (Abrahamian, 2013; Marshall, 1988; Parsa 1989). This coup was supposed to impose a strong central state and to guarantee the security of the Shah's regime by supporting its drive for both internal and regional dominance (Halliday, 1979), which was central to the interests of the imperialist forces, and also by sustaining Iran's capitalist development.

Later, in 1961 (the same year when Al-e Ahmad began writing *Occidentosis*), President Kennedy came to office in the USA, and his government and administration emphasized that the Iranian state's stability, social order, and future form of capitalist development depended upon internal reform, or ''economic and social programs, especially land reform'' (Hooglund, 1982, p. 47). The Shah's response in 1962 was the so-called "White Revolution," which gained the US administration's approval. This reform was supposed to undermine the landlords' local power bases and enhance the power of the state in the rural areas, helped the Shah and his authoritarian regime to exercise political power for the next fifteen years (Halliday, 1979; Hooglund, 1982).

The debilitating role of imperialism in Iran (Abrahamian 2013; Bromley, 1994; Marshall, 1988; Keddie, 2006), in terms of weakening or crushing democratic mass movements, supporting authoritarian forces, and undermining the oppressed multitude's desire for democracy, social justice, and dignity, must be emphasized. However, as the distinguished Iranian Leninist Jazani (1980) noted, "While it is our [Marxist-Leninists'] duty to increase the consciousness of the masses regarding neo-colonialism and indirect imperialist tyranny, we must never forget that tyranny and exploitation are being [directly] imposed on us through

internal elements . . .'' (p. 98). First, during the early 1960s, Iran was suffering from unequal distribution of wealth, high Illiteracy rates, stagnation of agrarian production (Hooglund, 1982), terrible poverty in rural areas and shanty-towns, a deficient infrastructure, housing shortages, rocketing rents in major cities, massive corruption, and an authoritarian state financed by oil rents and backed by Western imperialist powers in imposing capitalist development and catch-up nationalism (Rupert & Solomon, 2006) -- all problems that Al-e Ahmad addresses in *Occidentosis*. As Halliday (1979) argues, "These are to a certain extent *internal* problems that cannot be attributed solely to any contemporary or recent discouragement of Iranian development by the U.S.A. or multinational companies. The latter have, indirectly, reinforced Iran's backwardness, but they did not create it" (pp. 170-71). Centuries of reliance on "primeval means of production" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 79; Marshall, 1988) -- the latter must be understood as a part of the labor process and an aspect of power relations (Corrigan et al, 1978) -- contributed to these problems, and 40 years (1921-61) of the authoritarian statism and state-forced models of development and accumulation aggravated them. For example, the Shah did nothing to bring about much-needed land reforms until political struggles within the state, between him and the landlords, and struggles against the state such as strikes, mass demonstrations and university occupations (Poya, 1999; Marshall, 1988) along with U.S. pressure finally forced him to do so.

Although the Shah introduced his reforms with much bombast, the exotic images of progress and infinite improvement (on the basis of the linear, technological and rationalist view

of history inherited from the liberal ideology of the Enlightenment), and many promises (the arrival of the promised land in the image of Euro-American states), his new development programs actually "benefitted [only] a minority of the toilers, while leaving the rest no better off and sometimes worse off" (Harman, 1994). Essentially, these reforms destroyed the certainties associated with an age-old social form, a distinctive way of life and local cultural values, without providing any sense of material/social-cultural security in return (read, for example Halliday, 1979; Hooglund, 1982; Harman, 1994). Al-e Ahmad (1984) was still refining his first draft of *Occidentosis* in 1961 (p. 25), when Iran's land reforms were just beginning, and he understood the dangers involved in the land reforms and the instabilities and profound social contradictions associated with the predatory expansion of capital/capitalist space and the ways in which development was being implemented. The result of the land reform and development plan (read as discourses and strategies of power), according to Al-e Ahmad(1984), was the encouragement of peasant migration to the major cities, the creation of 'cancerous urbanization', and the 'mushrooming of shanty-towns' (Marshall, 1988, p. 36) and city slums existing alongside the expensive real estate, developments that culminated in the disruption and weakening, or more precisely, the re-configuration of the older forms of Iranian cultural identity and the Iranian patriarchal family (Al-e Ahmad, 1984).

Personal Context

When Al-e Ahmad began writing *Occidentosis* in 1961, he was just 38 years old, but had already lived a full life suggesting a "deeply felt need for a constant and abrupt change of

direction" (Algar, 1984, p. 11). He had been born to a devout Muslim family but, in 1944, joined the Tudeh Party, Iran's most Leninist organization. Between then and 1961, he rose rapidly within this party, and wrote prolifically for it, and then quit abruptly in 1947 and went on to become a teacher, a writer of fiction, translator, political activist, anthropological researcher, and editor. Together, his activities exposed him to many different sectors of the Iranian population, but his experiences in anthropology appear to have been particularly important in relation to *Occidentosis.* After writing and editing a total of eight monographs on Iranian subjects, he suddenly quit because of disagreements with his academic sponsors. Later, he explained:

> I saw they wanted to make the monographs into something worthy of being presented to Westerners, i.e., inevitably written according to Western criteria. I wasn't suited for this task. What I was aiming at was gaining renewed acquaintance with ourselves, a new evaluation of our native environment in accordance with criteria of our own (as cited in Algar, 1984, p. 12).

Here, Al-e Ahmad expresses the key elements of his concept of Occidentosis - - a profound suspicion and dislike of Westernization as a threat to Iranian authentic identity and sovereignty (the latter equated with a form of national honor/manhood), and an equally strong conviction that the return to the self (*bazgasht be khish*) and self-reliance, i.e., a process of self-discovery/disalienation and reclaiming of the glorious (pre-Safavid) Perso-Islamic sovereign past could be "the basis of anti-imperialist action" (Keddie, 2006, p. 188) and an alternative to occidentosis, oppressive dependency, and the surrender of sovereignty.

Cliff (as cited in Harman, 1994) provides an orthodox Leninist analysis and some insights helpful for understanding the socio-historical practices and political views of a cultural worker and social critic like Al-e Ahmad in a post-colonial state. First, when the 'ruling class' and the state managers are perceived as weak and/or corrupt (in the sense that by their 'association' with capitalist imperialism, they facilitate plunder, exploitation and "reproduction of cheap labor power" (Johnson, 1983, p. 234), and the workers are unable to build a mass movement against exploitation, the intelligentsia, armed with ''the language, logic and calculations of power''(Holloway, 2010, p. 15), will begin to feel "that they have a mission to solve the problems of society as a whole" (Cliff, as cited in Harman, 1994). Similarly, throughout *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad (1984) reveals his strong sense of mission as an 'intellectual', perceived by him as a particular kind of (male) individual, a member of a vanguard elite, or one of his society's ''outstanding personalities''(*shakhsiyathaye barjesteh)* (p. 131), who is not only the bearer of change but also the possessor of correct knowledge, eternal truths, reason, and scientific rationality. For example, after asking rhetorically how the conflict between the state and the religious institutions will end, he states, "It is up to the intellectual to provide the answer" (p. 74).

Second, Cliff asserts that "The intelligentsia [in postcolonial states] is sensitive to their country's technical lag. Participating as it does in the scientific and technical world of the 20th century; it is stifled by the backwardness of its own nation" (as cited in Harman, 1994). Similarly, in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad, repeatedly criticizes Iran's "backwardness" (which he

identified as the main factor causing Iran's alleged degeneration, decadence, and cultural decline), as when he writes, "We [Iranians] are about nineteen or twenty million people, 75 percent of whom live in the countryside, or in tents or huts, following ways from the dawn of creation, ignorant of new values, condemned to the relations of lord and serf, unfamiliar with the machine, having primitive tools . . ." and using "cow dung" for fuel (p. 64). Third, Cliff writes, "The spiritual life of the intellectual is also in crisis. In a crumbling order where the traditional pattern is disintegrated, they feel insecure, rootless, lacking in firm values" (as cited in Harman, 1994). In *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad offers the Perso-Islamic legacy or past - - prior to the Safavid era - - as the source of original/authentic identity for Iranians, but not of personal identity for himself. As Algar (1984) comments, "Al-i Ahmad's remarks concerning the 'origins' of Islam are hardly those of a believer" (p. 18), and although he calls for an alliance between the clergy and 'engaged intellectuals' as a 'unified body' (*tan-e-wahed*) against Westernization, the colonial ideology and imperialist-imposed regimes (Al-e Ahmad, 1978b), his frequent criticisms of the *ulama* (Iran's Shi'a clerical establishment) suggest that "his conversion [to Shi'a Islam] was more political than religious" (Keddie, 2006, p. 189).

Finally, Cliff states that the intellectuals in post-colonial countries "care a lot for measures to drag the nation out of stagnation, but very little for democracy" (as cited in Harman, 1994). Al-e Ahmad's (1984) attitude towards democracy and the kind of freedom that it provides is deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, he claims, "Diversity itself - - if in the sense of division of labour and in response to the diversity of, interests, tastes, capabilities, and

outlooks among the people - - is very useful, and is the hallmark of freedom" (p. 113). On the other hand, he reveals a few pages later that he vehemently opposes the mixed marriages that result when Iranians studying abroad marry Europeans or Americans - - such unions are "one of the most acute symptoms of occidentosis" - - and he calls for "an orderly and appropriate plan in accordance with the technical and scientific needs of the country" for preventing Iranian students from studying in any other country except for India or Japan (p. 121), even though he claims earlier that "For us [Iranians], never a callow or bigoted nation, the way the West has always been open" (p. 42). As well, Al-e Ahmad identifies "the constant vigilance against the seeds of Fascism" as a "basic problem of Western civilization" (p. 122), yet throughout *Occidentosis*, he reveals strong elitist, Manichean, anti-democratic and authoritarian tendencies of his own. For example, he portrays the rural Iranian oppressed multitude as 'primitive' (*badavi*), superstitious, cultural dupes and politically inarticulate/dormant, too busy "reaping grass, sun-drying dung, watering cattle and sheep, and praying for rain" (p. 65) to be capable of effecting radical social change, and emphasizes that only a "self-sacrificing, self-surpassing, and principled" elite can save Iran from its "social disorder" (p. 131). Along with celebrating the cult of the heroic leader, Al-e Ahmad asserts that the Iranian masses' "best interests" do not lie in imitating "Western-style democracy" (p. 110). He strongly opposes the Shah's form of authoritarian regime but does not want anything like ''democracy'' (grass-roots, bottom-up, direct or popular forms of democracy) to replace it. A democracy, in his view, would allow Iranians to study wherever they pleased, and to marry whomever they pleased, and to ''grow corrupted and stupefied by corporeal pleasures" (p. 133).

Summary and Analysis of Chapters

Al-e Ahmad divides his analysis of Iranian's occidentosis into a preface and eleven chapters. Almost every chapter includes a diatribe against the "West" and the "machine," and he discusses his other main topics (e.g., education and his solutions) in more than one chapter. However, overall, he begins by explaining the etymology of his book (in his Preface) and the meaning of "Occidentosis" (in Chapter One), then summarises its history in Iran (in Chapters Two-Five), offers his solutions (in Chapter Six), criticizes present-day (early 1960's) Iran and the West (in Chapters Seven-Ten), and, finally concludes with an apocalyptic warning of a future nuclear holocaust caused by "the machine demon" (in Chapter Eleven, p. 137). As this image suggests, he resembles an Old Testament prophet delivering a fiery sermon at the gates of his city and predicting certain doom unless his listeners heed his message. In the following paragraphs, the main ideas of each section of his book will be summarized and discussed.

Preface and Chapter One (Introduction)

In his preface, Al-e Ahmad (1984) reveals his initial inability to find a publisher for his "wretched book" (p. 26), explains the origins of the term ''occidentosis," and also demonstrates the strong, paradoxical, Western influence on his thinking. For "six or seven years," the Iranian censors prevented *Occidentosis* from being published, but Al-e Ahmad remained convinced of its continuing relevance because, as he explains with his characteristic exaggeration and fervour, "[Y]ou see that the limbs of our society have been afflicted, how the contagion

[Westernization] spreads day by day" (p. 26). Moreover, he explains, he owes the term "occidentosis" to one of his mentors, Ahmad Fardid, who participated in the same congress where Al-e Ahmad delivered his first draft of his book on this subject. Finally, he acknowledges the influence of Ernst Junger, whose "work on nihilism" (*Uber die linie*) explores "more or less the same subject" (p. 25) that Al-e Ahmad deals with in *Occidentosis*. This allusion is the first sign of one of the main contradictions in Al-e Ahmad's book: although he professes to despise "Western" influences with all his heart, his text is "peppered with references to Albert Camus, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Paul Sartre, [and other European writers]" (Afary & Anderson, 2005, p. 59), and his comments about the emergence, genealogy and the early history of Islam "have something in common with analyses made by Western scholars" (Algar, 1984, p. 18). Moreover, he never asked how the so-called 'West', where the 'culture' is supposedly "diseased" and produces the "featureless plain of mediocrity that is the lot of the broad masses" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 129), could *also* produce critical thinkers and writers like Camus, Gramsci, Marcuse, Marx, and Sartre (all mentioned in his texts).

After explaining background issues, Al-e Ahmad uses *Occidentosis*," first chapter ("Diagnosing an Illness") to define "occidentosis", state his purpose for writing, and explain his view of the world. He states, "I speak of 'occidentosis' as of tuberculoses" (p. 27). Then, using the first of his many homespun metaphors, he immediately clarifies this comparison: "But perhaps [occidentosis] more closely resembles an infestation of weevils. Have you seen how they attack wheat? From the inside. The bran remains intact, but it is just a shell, like a cocoon

left behind on a tree"(p. 27). Here, although he elsewhere emphasises the ''primitivism," ignorance and "backwardness" of rural Iranians, he portrays and positions himself as a man of the folk and the popular rural classes or the ordinary Iranians, using an image common in their daily lives and addressing the reader by using a casual, conversational tone. Later, he speaks in his more "academic" voice to provide a definition for the educated reader: "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 [Iranians] are such a people" (p. 34). The machine, "this contemporary monster," whose "fateful onslaught" (p. 31) sweeps away everything that is good, pure and ''authentic'' (*aseel*) in Iranian life, - - that is to say, this process that threatens moral values and loyalty to the past, undermines older social forms and ways of living, and weakens centers of authority such as Shi'a clergy and the Iranian (patriarchal) institution of family - - is the distinguishing feature in Al-e Ahmad's interpretation of the world. Hence, plagues and demons are the most appropriate metaphors for 'Western capital' and its technology, and all countries are divided into just two "worlds" locked into a colossal Manichean conflict: "Our age is of two worlds: one producing and exporting machines, the other importing and consuming them and wearing them out" (p. 30). Al-e Ahmad attempts to re-interpret and re-define the distant past to find the only force capable of resisting the "machine": "[O]nly we in our Islamic totality, formal and real, obstructed the spread (through colonialism, effectively equivalent to Christianity) of European civilization" (p. 33), and only the creation of an alliance - - a unity between the ''progressive wing of the clergy'' and the engaged

intellectual, armed with the glorious Perso-Islamic heritage and the legacy of the dead/undead or martyrs -- can do so again. Thus, Al-e Ahmad demonizes Westernization -- ‘‘this contemporary monster’’ (p. 31) and romanticizes the Perso-Islamic cultural past as the bulwark in the struggle against imperialism and also in the East’s defence against the expansion of predatory capitalist relations, cultural imitation, the importation of Western values and institutions, and Iran’s means for preserving and maintaining authoritarian sexual morality and patriarchal, family institution.

Chapters Two-Four

In Chapters Two-Four, Al-e Ahmad (1984) analyzes the development of occidentosis in Iran from ancient times up to and including the coup against Prime Minister Mosaddegh in 1953. His goal in these chapters is to explain why occidentosis is occurring in Iran and to answer the question “Why did we [Iranians] utterly fail to develop and advance the machine, leaving it to the others to so encompass its development that by the time we awakened, every oil rig had become a nail driven into our land?” (p. 35). Al-e Ahmad argues that although Iranians have always “looked to the West” (p. 37) and have been unduly attracted by it, Iran (Persia) still managed to achieve a kind of Golden Age from about the seventh century A.D. and the founding of Islam, to about 1500 A.D. and the beginning of the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722). During this Golden Age, the militant Muslim rulers - - regardless of their political stripes - - united against the Christian powers, attacked the West and protected the East, but the Safavids turned Muslims against each other, creating the Shi’ite-Sunni divide and transforming Iranians

‘’from travelers in the universal caravan of Islam into guardians of tombs, into beggars picking crumbs from the tables of departed martyrs” (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 45). Moreover, the Safavids not only divided the Muslim world, but also made Iran a backward, inward-looking country suffering from a metaphorical “chronic anemia” (p. 53). As a result, during the early eighteenth century, when the Safavid Dynasty was ending, “the West awoke in an industrial resurrection, [and Iranians] passed into the slumber of the Seven Sleepers” (p. 55). Thus, while the ‘West’ was busily developing the foundations of science, technology, and industry, the Iranians remained “uninformed and uninvolved” (p. 59). During this historical era, while the Iranian clergy “engrossed themselves in the finer points of prayer and ritual purity, or grew lost in doubt between two and three,’’ and most other Iranians remained in an apathetic stupor, the West gradually imposed “the god technology” (p. 59) on Iran.

Al-e Ahmad’s analysis of Iranian history is based entirely on his division of it into two completely contrasting times with no historical and cultural links and dialogue between them. Although later in *Occidentosis*, he identifies “the melancholia of glorying in the [country’s] remote past” as one of the ‘’new catastrophes” (pp. 134, 133) in the present-day Iranian forms of social life, his description of Iran’s Golden Age demonstrates that he himself is not immune to this social-historical condition. After implying that Islam is a peaceful religion, because its “*salam* is the most peace-loving, pacific religious motto in the world” (p 40), he almost immediately contradicts himself by detailing and celebrating Muslim rulers’ aggressive militarism prior to the emergence of the Safavid era:

> We have always felt jealousy or hatred towards the West. We competed with her. We fought for her verdant land, busy ports, placid towns, and steady rainfall. All through those bygone times, we regarded ourselves as worthy of possessing such bounty and our own beliefs and customs as true. We called them unbelievers; we saw them as lost souls . . . . At times we went so far as to declare open season on their lives and goods; thus, we raided westward all we could (p. 43).

The rhetoric here, particularly that of declaring "open season" on Westerners' lives, anticipates the call of some certain current Islamists for a jihad against 'Westernization'/Westoxication and the Great Satan (*Shaytan-e-bozorg*), and, in particular, against the aggressive, naked imperialism of the U.S.A. Like these Islamists, Al-e Ahmad seems to believe ''that modern technology [and colonial ideology or Westernization in general] [can] only be tamed through a return to the twin concepts of martyrdom and jihad, the latter in its strictly combative meaning" (Afary and Anderson, 2005, p. 59). Al-e Ahmad himself supports this conclusion about his views, for he bitterly comments, "When we gave up the chance for martyrdom to content ourselves with glorifying the martyrs of the past, we became the gate keepers of the graveyards" (p. 45).

Al-e Ahmad (1984) concludes his analysis by lamenting and detailing "Middle Eastern backwardness over the last three centuries" (p. 48), particularly that of Iran. Whereas during the Golden Age, Iranians were "warriors" (p. 49) and the champions of Islam, today they are mere slaves of the machine with "the brand of occidentosis . . . imprinted on their foreheads" (p. 57). Al-e Ahmad's romanticization of Iran's lost Golden Age is most obvious when he writes that when it ended, Iran became "lost to the world of living, a graveyard of sweet memories of open roads and caravans loaded with goods" (p. 47). To return Iran to the world of the living,

and to save Iranians from the Western imperialist powers, Western oil companies, and Western technology, the lost warrior spirit of the dead or the undead, i.e., the legacy of martyrdom (*shahadat*), the authentic Perso-Islamic identity, and the memories of the glorious past must be resurrected. Only then will Iran save itself from the West's onslaught or neo-imperial policies, oppressive dependence, and moral decay, and be able to turn the "sweet memories" of the distant past into a new, authentic identity/culture and a new, vibrant force in the present.

Chapter 5: The War of Contradictions [A Cluster of Conflicts]

Before Al-e Ahmad's (1984) offers his recommendations in Chapter Six for breaking the hold of occidentosis on Iranians, he uses Chapter Five to describe the current dismal state of Iran and to list the seven "contradictions'' that occidentosis has inflicted on Iranians. Just as in his short stories, Al-e Ahmad usually depicts "the plight of lower-middle class Iranians in their mostly unsuccessful attempts to find meaning or joy in life" (Hillman, 1988, p. X), he also emphasizes in *Occidentosis* the joylessness, meaningless, emptiness of the present life in Iran: "We now resemble an alien people, with unfamiliar customs, a culture with no roots in our land and no chance of blossoming here. Thus all that we have is stillborn, in our politics, our culture, and our daily life"(Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 64). "*All* that we have" -- Al-e Ahmad allows for no exceptions, no hint of joy or vitality in Iranian mode of life. Moreover, according to the analysis in Chapter Five, *all* Iran's problems have the same basic cause: the "machine," which has become "the greatest feudal lord, sitting on the throne of the Great Khan" (p. 68) and turning its victims into a subject and abject population.

Al-e Ahmad follows this claim by combining “a Nietzschean critique of modern technology with a Marxist one of alienated labour [while] also attacking the cultural hegemony of the West” (Afary and Anderson, 2005, p. 59). Blackburn (1996) explains that Nietzsche “is notorious for stressing the ‘will to power’ that is the basis of human nature, the ‘resentment’ that comes when it is denied its basis in action, and the corruptions of human nature, encouraged by religions, such as Christianity, that feed on such resentment” (p. 262). In Al-e Ahmad’s analysis of the machine’s/Western technology’s pernicious effects on Iranian forms of social life, the heroic spirit of militant Muslims during the Golden Age, and the machine and Westernization, are assigned the roles that the “will to power” and “religions”, respectively, have in Nietzsche’s philosophy, so that the machine and the West are portrayed as having a debilitating effect on Iran. Thus, after being dynamic Golden Age warriors “who traveled in the quiver of Islam as far as Andalusia,’’ Iranians have become mere passive sufferers, “all awaiting the Imam of the Age” to save them (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, pp. 43, 71).

In this enervated state, Iranians are too passive, docile and weak to overcome any of the seven “contradictions” caused by the machine. For example, Al-e Ahamd’s first contradiction is that “to respond to the machine’s call to urbanization, we uproot the people from the villages and send them to the city, where there’s neither work nor housing and shelter for them, while the machine steps into the village itself” (p. 66). Al-e Ahmad hates Iran’s growing cities, which he compares to “malignant tumors” (p. 38), as much as he hates the world of machines. However, in this context, he ignores three important points. First, rural areas are not fixed, self-

contained entities with lives of their own, but as part of the wider socio-political/cultural relationships, their transformation must be understood in relation to the urban political events/crises, and the ways in which the cities are entangled in urban conflicts and social resistance to urban development. Second, the recent migrants' and peasants' children working in the cities do not necessarily cut their ties with the land, the peasant cultures, and the rural folk; rather, they inhabit two worlds and live in heterogeneous temporalities simultaneously (Chatterjee, 2004, 2011) in the sense that they (as the bridge or mediator between two worlds) frequently commute or return to the countryside (Hooglund, 1982), transmit "urban unrest and political ideas" (Wolf, 1979, p. 270), and articulate or supplement the folk cultures and images of the past with the urban popular cultures and new or emergent social identities, as happened in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s (Kazemi, 1980; Hooglund, 1982; Bashiriyeh, 1984). Third, it was not the "machine's call to urbanization" as such that brought about disjuncture and social dislocations; rather, the agrarian class/power relations, together with the commercialization of the land and state-sponsored development policies, disrupted social life and forced millions of peasants to migrate to the major cities and join the ranks of the urban workers in Iran (Hooglund, 1982; Marshall, 1988; Parsa, 1989). To put it differently, the poor conditions that Al-e Ahmad observes in Iran's expanding cities represent a failure of the Shah's development policy rather than of urbanization and the machine *per se*. The Shah's regime invested huge amounts of Iran's oil revenues in military expenditures -- 54 percent of the national budget (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 106) -- and in police power and security forces to contain the workers' militancy and to repress tribal revolts, student movements, and other dissenting voices (Parsa,

1989). This militarization of political regime could have been avoided by a popular force or a democratic movement that ended the 'land speculation' (Kazemi, 1980, pp. 25-26) and redirected and spent oil rents and surpluses on improving living and working conditions and developing public housing, medical facilities, and paved roads. In other words, the basic infrastructure could have been built in the cities and the countryside for a relatively small amount per capita, and doing so would have ameliorated the misery of the impoverished peasants, nomads, and the landless laborers and created huge improvements in urban life. Thus, Al-e Ahmad fails to link the specific strategies and discourses of power (e.g., the Shah's development policy or accumulation strategy) to the threats posed by tribal revolts, peasant resistance, regional uprisings, and various mass protest movements in Iran (Marshall, 1988; Parsa, 1989; Cronin, 2010), and, thereby, he overlooks the popular discontent and the Iranian masses' struggles for political democracy, democratic equality, and basic amenities including higher wages, educational opportunities, health clinics, bus service, better housing, and clean and safe neighbourhoods.

Chapter Six: "How to Break the Spell"

In Chapter Six, Al-e Ahmad (1984) offers his cure for Iran's occidentosis and dependence on Western technology, blames Westernization and the so-called "West" entirely for Iran's problems and, in effect, provides a version of dependency theory, but *also* acknowledges the Shah's complicity in Iran's dependence on the Western imperialist states.

Al-e Ahmad (1984) offers Iranians three options for dealing with "the machine and technology":

> What are we to do? Must we remain the mere consumers we are today or are we to shut our doors to the machine and technology and retreat into the depths of our ancient ways, our national and religious traditions? Or is there a third way? (p. 78)

For Al-e Ahmad, adopting his first alternative involves continuing to live "on handouts from the West" and taking the "easy road" for solving the problem of Iranians' "indolence, aimlessness, and idleness" (p. 78). The second alternative, that of "retreating into our own cocoon," is "something that no cricket has ever done" (p. 78), and should also be rejected. Finally, in one of the few positive references in *Occidentosis* to contemporary Iran, Al-e Ahmad introduces his third alternative:

> We are a nation engaged in transformation and if we suffer from such a confusion of values in both life and thought, it is because we are shedding our old skin. You might say we are studying the conditions of our permit to enter a new realm. (p. 78)

This information that Iranians are actually doing something to improve their lives comes as a surprise, for previously in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad has emphasized that they are lost in their own "thick-headedness, languor, and fatalism" (p. 70). In any case, his "third road" is the recognition that Iran cannot return to its 'pre-industrial' past, but must gain control of its own technology. "To achieve control of the machine", he points out, "one must build it" (p. 79). In order to do so, Iranians must build an independent economy, a new educational system, a new industrial sector, and new local markets. Al-e Ahmad is, characteristically, vague about how the transformation can be accomplished: "Please don't ask me to go into details; this isn't my line

or the function of this book" (p. 79). However, he at least acknowledges that the "machine" is not evil in itself, as his frequent demonizing of it suggests, and that the key is to control the machine instead of remaining "in bondage to it" (p. 79).

Although the title of Chapter Six appears to suggest that either all or most of it will be devoted to solutions for the problem of occidentosis, only the first 2 of these chapter's thirteen pages deal with solutions. In the remainder of Chapter Six, Al-e Ahmad fluctuates between blaming the 'West' and blaming Iranians for Iran's problems. In some passages, his assigning of blame is straightforward and unequivocal. For example, after claiming that Western organizations like UNESCO are deliberately preventing Iran from gaining control of Western technology, he states, "All our ruin and disorder spring from this one point, from the fact that, in global terms, [Western organizations] have forced us to act for the sake of the economic interest of the makers of the machine" (p. 83). Here, "*All* our ruin and disorder" leaves no room for qualification or debate, and "have *forced* us" turns Iranians into the helpless victims of "the fate decreed by the machine"(p. 91). Moreover, this fate has left the Iranian masses both victimized by and totally dependent on the West. "If only this dependency would solve anything for us" (p. 91), Al-e Ahmad comments but, of course, the object of creating politico-economic dependency is to enrich the wealthy states at the expense of the neo-colonized ones, and not to solve their problems for them.

Al-e Ahmad's dependency analysis suggests or coincides with dependency theory, which emerged around 1960 ("Dependency Theory", 2010), or at about the same time when he was

writing *Occidentosis*. According to certain strands of dependency theory, global resources flow from "periphery" or ''satellite'' countries to "core" or wealthy ones, impoverishing and plundering the former and enriching the latter while the former are being integrated into the world market and the internationalized capital accumulation processes ("Dependency Theory," 2010). Moreover, technology plays a key role in dependency theory, just as the "machine" does in Al-e Ahmad's argument in *Occidentosis*. For example, Vernengo (2004) writes that

> At the core of the dependency relation between centre and periphery lays the inability of the periphery to develop an autonomous and dynamic process of technological innovation. Technology - - the promethean force unleashed by the Industrial Revolution - - is at the centre of the stage. The centre countries controlled the technology and the systems for generating technology. Foreign capital could not solve the problem, since it only led to limited transmission of technology, but not the process of innovation itself. (as cited in "Dependency Theory," 2010).

Vernengo's (2004) argument here is essentially the same as the political and economic argument against 'the West' in *Occidentosis*: again and again, Al-e Ahmad (1984) criticizes colonial imperialism and 'the West' for turning Iranians into "mere consumers" (p. 78), and not producers, of the machine. Moreover, some dependency theorists (Frank, 1969, 1970) argue that the post-colonial countries must reduce their relationship with the global market ''so that they can pursue a path more in keeping with their own needs, less dictated by external pressures" ("Dependency Theory", 2010). Al-e Ahmad's "third way"(*rah-e-sevvom*) for Iranians is this kind of path, one that he, like his mentor, Khalil Maleki, believes will enable Iranians to achieve a specifically Iranian path of self-reliance or autarkic development and political sovereignty (Katouzian, 2004) free from Western influences.

Although not all academics agree with dependency theory, some would probably support Al-e Ahmad's dependency-based analysis of the Iranian state's relationship with the Western imperialist states. On the one hand, Callinicos (2009) argues that the dependency approach is "completely at odds with the economic patterns that developed after 1945" (p. 179). He cites Kidron (1962), who, in summing up the immediate post-war experience, wrote, "Capital does not flow overwhelmingly from mature to developing capitalist countries. On the contrary, foreign investments are increasingly being made as between the developing countries themselves" (as cited in Callinicos, 2009, p. 179). A World Bank (1985) report found that this statement continued to hold true for the international political economy (capital flow and FDI or foreign direct investment) between 1965 and 1983, when "about three-quarters of foreign direct investment [went] to industrial countries "(as cited in Callinicos, 2009, p. 179; Callinicos, 1993, p. 42). Moreover, this argument can be made for Iran under Reza Shah between 1925 and 1941 when the amount of foreign direct investment was small, ''foreign loans were turned down," and Reza Shah financed his state activities, nationalist agenda, and development strategies and programs ''by using oil revenues and large sums raised through taxation'' (Marshall, 1988, p. 14; Poya, 1999, pp. 36-7). In this regard, one must not overlook the data showing that in the 1940s-1950s, only 10 per cent of the Iran's revenue came from the oil industry while 40 per cent came from agrarian production ''where women played an important role in the production of food and labour-intensive goods in household-centred industries'' (Poya, 1999, pp. 36-7).

Despite all these arguments, however, some commentators on Iran claim that while the Iranian political economy was integrated into the world market and global capital, the Iranian national state remained ‘‘a subordinate state’’ in the international political economy (Marshall, 1988, p. 17) and the Iranian political economy did become dependent on the West during the post-war era. Halliday (1979) argues that, depending on state policy, the acquisition of technology itself can create dependencies, especially with “the establishment of enterprises that are restricted to the technologically relatively simple final stages of production” (p. 159). The development of such enterprises in Iran ‘’led to a disproportionate increase in the need to import the necessary components” and “a high dependence on imports” (Holliday, 1979, p. 159). Al-e Ahmad’s (1984) Table One shows that the Iranian state imports far exceeded its exports from 1952-1961, so that its balance of trades deficit increased steadily and dramatically during this episode (p. 84).

Jazani (1980) also supports Al-e Ahmad’s dependency analysis, arguing that when foreign capital investment and imports increase in a neo-colonial/postcolonial country, its entire “system of production will become directly or indirectly dependent on the economic and production system of the imperialist monopolies” (p. 78). Jazani (1980) identifies what he considers to be the five “most important” (p. 80) forms of the Iranian bourgeoisie’s dependence on the Western imperialist monopolies: (1) dependence through capital: the total capital, including the financial credits, used in a particular industry; (2) dependence through machinery: Al-e-Ahmad’s main concern; (3) technological and technical dependence: the influence of

foreign "advisers," another of Al-e Ahmad's main targets in *Occidentosis*; (4) dependence on imported goods for the new industries; and (5) dependence through the payments made to foreign industries for the use of their patents, systems, and production processes. According to Jazani (1980), "Such payments are sometimes as high as 15% of the total selling price of a particular product" (p. 81). All these assumed dependencies led Jazani (1980) to describe Iran's form of emerging capitalist social formation as "dependent capitalism" (p. 72); similarly, Bromley (1994) refers to Iran's post-war development as "dependent development" (p. 153).

Although Al-e Ahmad (1984) could find support for his dependency analysis of Iran's relationship with the Western imperialist states, he is on much less certain ground when he blames the imperialist forces (or "the West" in his expression) for "all" of Iran's "ruin and disorder" (p. 83). Indeed, in *Occidentosis* as a whole, he himself tends to undermine this claim, as he usually blames the West, but also acknowledges the collusion of the Iranian (political/economic) forces in Iran's "dependency" and the surrender of sovereignty. Towards the end of Chapter Six, after stating, "[Iran's] oil goes and the machine, with all its commitments, comes in return", he suddenly comments, "But, one must say in all fairness that our own politics and economics have not been without a role in this process" (p. 87). His language here becomes convoluted: he uses the negative construction "[We] have not been without a role," instead of stating directly, "Our home-grown problems and discourses of power are also to blame." However, despite his equivocating somewhat on this point, he at least recognizes that the home-grown political practices and local social-economic conditions

are contributing to Iran's problems or Iran's ruin (to use Al-e Ahmad's word). However, he does not go as far as Jazani (1980), who, throughout his analysis of capitalist social formation in Iran, emphasises the complicity of the "comprador bourgeoisie" (p. 33) with the Western imperialist pillage of Iranian oil and resources. Furthermore, Al-e Ahmad's recurrent assertion that occidentosis is like "a contagious disease, like the plague, like cholera" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 136), deflects attention away from the home-grown ideologies and the local forms and patterns of power relations (which cannot be held responsible for a "plague") and places responsibility for Iran's problems mainly on the West or imperialism - - the active agents spreading the "disease."

That being said, in this context, the following critical points must not be ignored. First, Al-e Ahmad seems to advocate a fixed and one-sided relationship between the Iranian state and global capital in his dependency-based approach. He fails to account for the reciprocal and interdependent, but at the same time, conflictual relationship between Iran and the international political economy and has no grasp of their organic relations and the precise ways in which both are subject to change and transformation. Second, in his dependency approach, Al-e Ahmad overemphasizes external influences on Iran, and fails to recognize that, following the example of the Reza Shah (1925-1941), Iran's government was playing a crucial role in Iran's cultural life and political economy: in safeguarding the process of capital accumulation, in regulating cultural relations/activities (including the alleged 'imported' ideas, values, and cultural expressions that Al-e Ahmad complains about), and in constructing a social identity that

draws heavily upon the imagined (glorious) national past and invokes a romantic nostalgia for this imagined identity or past in the present (Banani, 1969; Marshall, 1988; Poya, 1999; Vaziri, 1993). Al-e Ahmad's under-emphasis on the active role of the Iranian state and his failure to recognize the internal relations between the state-form and the everyday world of production and reproduction conceal both the historically specific forms of power and exploitation and the effects of the struggles of the oppressed within, against, and beyond the state in Iran. Third, Al-e Ahmad's dependency analysis is directly tied to his instrumentalist conception of the state in the sense that he views it as an object or instrument manipulable at will by the 'comprador' bourgeoisie or 'dominant class,' which pulls all the strings while at the same time the latter itself is controlled by imperialism as an all-powerful, omnipotent totality. In such an instrumentalist image of the state, the state both "acts on *behalf* of the dominant class" and "it acts at the *behest* of that class" (Shapiro, 1981, p. 8). In other words, Al-e Ahmad views the Iranian state simply as an instrument or a puppet of imperialism or the West, while he perceives the latter as a kind of Cartesian cogito that consciously manipulates and controls all the local elites and state managers at its whim. In this way, Al-e Ahmad's image and notion of the state overlooks that the state, like capital, is neither a thing nor a subject, but rather a form of social relation (Holloway, 1995) which presents itself as an autonomous entity or sphere with its own internal rationality or logic. Fourth, Al-e Ahmad's positivistic conception of the state also does not consider that "the state and the economy do not exist as externally related entities, but as moments of the class relation from which they are constituted" (Burnham, 1995, p. 96). Moreover, the state as a historically specific social form, one could argue, is

predicated on the everyday local and global social contradictions and conflicts (Burnham, 1995; Holloway, 1995; Sayer, 1987) that attempt to reduce the difference of forces and relations of inequality to "abstract equality and abstract identity" (Bonefeld, 2003, p. 206). On the basis of these premises, a recognition of the interdependence of the local and global political economy debunks the myth of an autonomous national state and the ideological fiction of a self-reliant national economy (Harris, 1983; Radice, 1984; Holloway, 1995) and dissolves the distinction made, by Al-e Ahmad (1984), Poulantzas (1976), Halliday (1979), and other dependency theorists, between "'dependent' and non-dependent' states" (Holloway, 1995, p. 125).

Thus, Al-e Ahmad's dependency-based analysis is predicated on *a priori* assumptions, deductive reasoning, and essentialism when he posits that there is an overarching, single common essence among *tawabeh* (the satellites/dependencies), or more precisely, the post-colonial states (Al-e Ahmad, 1978b, pp. 274-75). Such a universalist approach lacks historical specificity; is unable to provide any concrete explanation for historical transformations and social change, in particular, state forms; and lumps together diverse social formations into a single homogeneous entity (Bartra, 1993; Kazemi, 1980, p. 9). In the same way, this universal scheme of history has little room for the everyday struggles of workers, peasants, nomads and other oppressed forces against power or relations of domination in Iran. In this sense, echoing Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man,* Al-e Ahmad (1984) believes that the Western machine or 'rationalized technology' has not only eliminated all forms of social contradictions and conflicts, but also has integrated workers and the oppressed multitude into the so-called 'system'

(Marcuse, 1991; Swingewood, 1977). This belief suggests that, despite his disdain for Western technology/and the machine, Al-e Ahmad subscribes to the ideologies of technicism and technological determinism when he regards the 'Western' machine or instrumental rationality as the driving force of history that causes oppressive dependence and intellectual and spiritual homelessness, breaks down the older forms of moral relations/and order, and undermines the Iranian (patriarchal) family values. In other words, he places great emphasis on the world of the machine, technology, and capital as an omnipotent and omnipresent power in order to explain social change in Iran.

In short, Al-e Ahmad's overemphasis on 'external causation' discounts the "external-internal nexus" (Johnson's, 1983, p. 234), and his determinist and functionalist perspective encourages political impotence in that he, like Marcuse and Foucault, assigns ''power priority over resistance when in fact resistance constitutes power" (Ryan, 1993, p. 132), so that, the discourses and strategies of power should be understood as responses to the everyday local and global resistance movements and struggles (Holloway, 2009, 2010; Ryan, 1989, 1993).

Chapters Seven to Ten

Logically, the conclusion for *Occidentosis* should follow immediately after Chapter Six, in which Al-e Ahmad presents his recommendations for curing the Western "disease" that has sickened all Iranian forms of social life. However, before offering his conclusions, Al-e Ahmad inserts four more chapters dealing with Iran's occidentotic intellectuals ("Asses in Lions' Skins",

p. 93); Iranian forms of social life in general ("A Society in Collapse", p. 102); the role of Iranian education (which is to "foster occidentosis", (p. 112); and the main trends ("The Worms in the Apple", p. 123) in Western countries, respectively. As this list of the contents of these chapters suggests, their tone is overwhelmingly negative. Although in Chapter Six Al-e Ahmad warns Iranians not to "retreat into depths of [their] the ancient ways, [their] national and religious traditions" (p. 78), in Chapter Seven he describes the occidentotic as a man who "has severed his ties with the depths of society, culture, and tradition" (p. 92), or who, in other words, has done what Al-e Ahmad, in Chapter Six, apparently advises all Iranians to do. In any case, even though *Occidentosis* reveals that Al-e Ahmad has been heavily influenced by Western thinkers, such as Marx, for example, he despises any sign of Western influences in other Iranians. An occidentotic is just "a thing with no ties to the past and no perception of the future"; a man with "no character"; and an "effeminate" man who "attends to his grooming a great deal" (pp. 92, 95, 96). Clearly, Al-e Ahmad deeply resents Iran's increasing "cultural Westernization," and associates all Westernized habits, lifestyles, and ways of thought (except for his own) with "Western politico-economic domination" (Keddie, 2006, p. 189).

In Chapters 8-10, Al-e Ahmad's rhetoric gradually builds in intensity and bitterness, leading to his apocalyptic conclusion in his final chapter, so that, as in his novel *The School Principal* (1958), "the picture of life shown is comprehensively negative"(Hillmann, 1988, p. XV). In these chapters, Al-e Ahmad (1984) alternates between pointing his accusatory finger at his own country, where, for example, the cities "are cancerous members that grow day by day with

no pattern, with no authenticity" (p. 104), and denouncing the West, where the political parties "are forums to satisfy the melancholia of unbalanced and mentally ill persons who . . . have lost the chance to express any sort of will of their own" (p. 125). Al-e Ahmad makes this latter, preposterous claim even though (1) he earlier laments Iran's lack of Western-style parties and use of "party-like cabals" (p. 109) instead, and (2) he knows that "Western democracy", which favours "freedom of speech, freedom of expression, [and] freedom of access to the media," "relies on parties [for its governance]" (p. 109). Much of Chapters Eight-Ten is similar, as Al-e Ahmad lurches along from one target to the next, often contradicting what he either has said previously or will say later. For example, in his discussion of Iran's nomadic tribes, he asserts that "their chiefs pull the strings in *all* [the Iranian state's] internal and external policies'' (p. 102, emphasis added). If so, then (1) these chiefs must be extremely powerful in Iran, and (2) the Western imperialist countries cannot *also* be "pulling all the strings," after all. However, a few paragraphs later, Al-e Ahmad claims that "our government's policies regarding the tribes has consisted in leaving them to their own devices, to rot in their own poverty and disease and to tremble in the face of recurrent droughts until not a breath remains to them" (p.103). If this claim is accurate, then the chiefs cannot possibly be the main influence on *all* of the Iranian state's policies. Moreover, earlier in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad has repeatedly emphasized that it is "Western industry," not the nomadic chiefs, that "holds [Iran's] destiny" (p. 62).

In his introduction to *Occidentosis*, Algar (1984) comments, "In chapters 8, 9, and 10, Al-i Ahmad is on very firm ground and his powers of analysis are at their strongest"(p. 15). On the

contrary, however, his "powers of analysis" in these chapters are hopelessly muddled. He reveals the "incoherence" not of "Iranian society" (Algar, 1984, p. 15), but of his own conceptual framework, and simplistic Manichean reasoning, and method of social inquiry/analysis (by making ahistorical abstractions and facile generalizations). For example, he ridicules those Iranians who mimic and seek revelation "not in scriptures but in European books or from the lips of reporters for Reuters, United Press, and so forth" (p. 98), and he particularly singles out those who read *Time* magazine (p. 87). However, in his three chapters on Iranian history, he often cites European historians (e.g., p. 29), and, later, he twice cites *Time* as an authoritative source that supports his own claims (pp. 85, 123).

Chapter Eleven: "The Hour Draws Near"

Al-e Ahmad's analysis of a "society in collapse," plagued by "the diseased state" (p. 125) of Westerners from without and afflicted by ''backward'' and "twisted thinking" (p. 133) from within, reaches an apocalyptic finale in the conclusion of *Occidentosis*. His last words are from the *Qur'an*, but in this chapter, he reminds one more of the New Testament's Book of Revelation, which provides a horrific image of the fiery destruction of the Earth, whose inhabitants have become drunk with the wine of their "abominations" and "fornications" (Rev. 17:4). Similarly, Al-e Ahmad (1984), after, in his previous chapter, criticising all occidentotics for becoming "corrupted and stupefied by corporeal pleasures" (p. 133), foresees the end of the world in a nuclear holocaust. After citing four Western writers (Camus, Ionesco, Sartre, and

Nabokov) and agreeing with another Westerner (Ingmar Bergman) that "the age of faith has past and now is the age of torment," Al-e Ahmad presents his image of the future:

> And now I see that all these fictional endings [in the Westerner's works] raise the threat of the final hour, when the machine demon (if we don't rein it in or put its spirit in the bottle) will set the hydrogen bomb at the end of the road for humanity. On that note, I will rest my pen at the Qur'anic verse: "The hour draws near and the moon is split in two" (p. 137).

This quotation represents Al-e Ahmad's only reference in *Occidentosis* to the *Qur'an*. According to Algar (1984), Al-e Ahmad's interpretation of the verse cited (54:1) "is unacceptable to the *'ulama"* and "is a further indication that Al-e Ahmad was not immune from the disease he describes" (Endnote 104 in Al-e Ahmad 1984, p. 150).

Methodological and Analytical Problems

Al-e Ahmad (1984) is a forceful, energetic writer, and many of his individual sentences and passages are eloquent and memorable. For example, when he introduces his recommendations for breaking the "spell" of occidentosis, he writes, "The machine is a means, and not an end. The end is to abolish poverty and to put material and spiritual welfare within the reach of all" (p. 79). No one would wish to argue with such statements, which, like many others in *Occidentosis*, could have been extracted from their context and used as slogans to inspire the Iranian oppressed multitudes to end their oppression and exploitation, to resist strategies of power, and to free themselves from Western imperialist domination and influences. However, Al-e Ahmad is often unable to provide either accurate historical

information and/or support for his arguments or to avoid contradicting himself in both small and major matters. He himself appears to be aware of these problems, for in his introduction to *Occidentosis*, he refers to "the recklessness of this work," to its "disordered pages," and to "all its hasty conclusions and judgements" (p. 26). This awareness, however, does not motivate him to try to provide a more historically accurate argument and well researched study.

His first main problem is that he is not, as Algar (1984) points out, "a historian," but an individual "in a hurry to communicate [his] discovery [of occidentosis] to others" (p. 14). He has, as Algar (1984) also mentions, "neither the time nor the patience to engage in careful historical research, and at some points in the book he even enjoins his readers to dig up the historical evidence for a given assertion" (p. 14). The most striking example of this tendency occurs when he is trying to analyse the discovery of oil in Iran before World War One: "You see that I am not writing history. I am establishing some points in all haste. Go dig up the evidence from the histories yourselves" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 61). In another passage, after providing a "fact" about Constantinople in the seventh century, Al-e Ahmad comments, "Surely we can interpret this clear footprint, this historical fact, as a sign that Mongols hadn't yet done enough to break the back of Islam" (p. 51). However, Algar states, "Unfortunately for the author's argument, [he has confused Constantinople with Constantine in Algeria]" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 143, endnote 47). In fact, Al-e Ahmad's historical chapters (Chapters Two-Four) are useless as "history" because they contain so many errors. In Endnote 22 for his introduction to *Occidentosis*, Algar (1984) identifies nine of his endnotes for *Occidentosis* itself that draw

attention to Al-e Ahmad's historical errors, but there are actually a total of 24 such endnotes (or about 25% of the total): see also endnotes 9, 12, 25, 29, 32, 38, 43, 47, 48, 50, 56, 57, 58, 82, 99, and 104. Some of these errors "are significant enough to undermine [Al-e Ahmad's] argument" (Algar, 1984, p. 14) in his historical chapters, which claim to analyze the historical roots of occidentosis. All these errors eventually compel Algar (1984) to lose patience with Al-e Ahmad: after he describes a recent book on religious leadership in Iran as having been "written in the familiar bombast of the clergy" (pp. 59-60), Algar comments that this book is "a work more carefully written and coherently argued than much of Ali-Ahmad's production, despite his accusation of bombast" (p. 145, endnote 59).

Along with making many historical errors, some of which, Algar (1984), believes, distort both history and "the nature of Islam" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 140, endnote 25), Al-e Ahmad also frequently contradicts himself. Ironically, although he entitles one of his chapters "The War of Contradictions" and exclaims "Look at the contradiction!" (p. 132) when he is discussing the conflict between Iran's broadening intellectual environment and increasingly restricted leadership apparatus, he is unable to identify the contradictions in his own writing, particularly when he is writing about the role of "religion" (Perso-Islamic legacies) as a defence against the Western imperialist expansion and the colonial ideology. On the one hand, he harshly criticises the "first-generation occidentotics of the Constitutional Era" for "[paving] the way to occidentosis in equating religion with superstition" (p. 59). On the other hand, he himself makes the same equation when he also criticizes "the primitive mode of thought" of Iran's rural

population, who are Iran's key repository of "religious" and "nonreligious" practices and guardian of folk cultures or historical memories in general: "Drumming a copper tub during eclipses of the sun and moon; *special prayers* and talismans for averting the evil eye and avoiding diseases and calamities; and reciting the sayings of Kulsum Nana all evince common superstitions" (p. 69, emphasis added). Finally, after including "special prayers" in his list of superstitions, Al-e Ahmad goes on to repeatedly criticize occidentotics for, in effect, *not* praying and *not* having any ties with "tradition" (p. 92) and to assert once again that "irreligion" is "one of the main symptoms of occidentosis" (p. 117), except, apparently, when he himself is being irreligious.

Ashtiani (1994) has noted that Iran's anti-modernization movement' of the 1970s - - which Al-e Ahmad's works helped to inspire -- "was full of ambiguities and inconsistencies. It was in fact reformist, yet called for a return to tradition, religious in symbolism but blessed by secular intellectuals and the modern middle class" (p. 63). Al-e Ahmad's argument in *Occidentosis* may be even more contradictory and inconsistent than the autonomous counter-power movement(s) that followed it: Al-e Ahmad is reformist, yet calls for self-reliance and a return to the national self/tradition, yet often describes the so-called Iranian traditions or popular cultural forms and practices as "primitive" and "backward"; his call for a return to an authentic self or identity and self-reliance is religious in orientation, yet his more intellectual affinities are not with Orthodox Islamic writers, scholars and philosophers, but with 19th- and 20th - century Europeans. By formulating such "a strange synthesis" of Marxism, existentialism,

and Islam (Afary & Anderson, 2005, p. 57), along with (one may add) a patriarchal form of sexual morality combined with ideologies of heterosexuality and ''feminized domesticity' (to borrow the phrase of Rupert & Solomon, 2006), Al-e Ahmad hoped to shape an alternative narrative, discourse, and identity in response to occidentosis, which allegedly was creating contaminated sexual bodies and inviting Iranian men to adopt an effeminate identity (an identity lacking national manhood), which, supposedly, was rooted in Western moral norms. In this way, by thinking in terms of generalizations and abstractions, he was probably bound to help produce an ideology fraught with contradictions.

In this context, the main problem with Al-e Ahmad's reasoning is not that he calls for Iran's simultaneous "modernization"(a euphemism for rational-technocratic form of political domination infused with liberal discourses/strategies of rapid growth) and preservation of "tradition"(a vague concept cherished, fetishized, and presented as a people's cultural past by Al-e Ahmad). These are not necessarily incompatible and could co-exist as contradictory. (When Mustafa Kemal, the autocratic nationalist and the founder of Turkish republic, was reforming Turkey during the 1920s, he also called for both modernization and preservation, advocating on behalf of "a modern Turkey, [but] not a Turkey drained of its culture"(Veeser, 2010, p. 139).) The main problem with Al-e Ahmad's reasoning, rather, is two-fold. First, he presents both modernization and the preservation of tradition in contradictory terms. Thus, he represents modernization as being both necessary for Iran's resistance against Westernization and also inextricably linked to the "encroachment of the machine on the human domain" and the

subsequent “diminishment” of humanity (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 130) -- the same diminishment that he sees everywhere in the “West.” Similarly, he represents Islam and Iranian traditions as Iran’s best or even only defense against the West, and also as the main obstacles to the emancipation of Iran’s “superstitious, prejudiced folk” (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 69) -- the same “folk” who, in his view, make up most of Iran’s population. Second, Al-e Ahmad’s personal Iranian national imagined community is so exclusionary that no one would be left in it to carry out either modernization or preservation. Except for a few “outstanding personalities” (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, P. 131) -- Iranian intellectuals who agree with him -- Al-e Ahmad despises all social classes in Iran equally. He needs to explain how they would be capable of carrying out the challenging process of balancing modernization and preservation of tradition.

The West and Technology, Iran and Its Islam

In Al-e Ahmad’s (1984) view, as expressed in *Occidentosis*, the two conflicting forces are the so-called “West” and its technology and Iran and its Islam or its great Perso-Islamic heritage. Until “some three hundred years ago,” Iran’s relationship with its fierce rival had, “as its sole aspect, motive, and cause, hatred, jealousy, and rivalry”, but today, those factors have been “replaced by rueful, worshipful longing” (Al-e Ahmad 1983, p. 43) because Iran has succumbed to occidentosis: the dread disease from the West. Therefore, the “cure’’ for Iran’s problems lies in drawing on and recovering the glorious Perso-Islamic legacies and in returning to the politics of the self - - to achieve self-reliance, autarkic development, and state sovereignty - - the same factors that made Iran great during its Golden Age of long ago. In this

section, the main strengths, weaknesses, and contradictions of this argument will be analyzed.

The West and Technology

The main strength of Al-e Ahmad's argument is that it is based on simple metaphors that everyone can easily understand: Westernization ("occidentosis") is a deadly disease - - it "closely resembles an infestation of weevils" (p. 26), Al-e Ahmad helpfully explains - - and the reassertion of national sovereignty/authentic identity is the cure. Every Iranian, no matter how politically inarticulate ("primitive" or "backward" or "superstitious," in Al-e Ahmad's words), can immediately appreciate the meaning of these metaphors, which conveniently essentialize both the West (as the site of disease) and the reassertion of authentic identity/self (as the method of cure). Al-e Ahmad excels at creating such simple metaphors, which come mainly from the everyday lives of rural Iranians and play an important role in his positioning of himself as a 'man of the folk' or the oppressed classes/popular masses, despite his obvious learning. For example, when he wants to explain that, during the Second World War, the Allies and Axis Forces were basically the same in their desire to pillage and exploit Iran's riches and resources, he comments, "If the cows in a barn yard don't all have the same temperament, at least they all smell the same" (p. 62), and a sector of Iranian's population can subscribe to his beliefs that, yes, so too were the Allies and the Axis Forces identical. Similarly, when he is presenting his unusual view that China is part of the "West," he evokes a rural aura and uses another pair of country-boy metaphors to explain his way of reasoning: "I would at least sniff out rather more keenly than the shepherd's dog and see more clearly than a crow what others have closed their

eyes to . . .” (p. 28). Such metaphors and images not only help Al-e Ahmad to clarify his thoughts but also to align him with the folksy world and popular cultural forms and practices of the “subaltern.”

Simple metaphors, however, are not a substitute for a well-thought analysis (in this case, an analysis of concrete historical social forms and situations), and Al-e Ahmad’s discussion of both the “West” and “technology” is problematic. Throughout *Occidentosis,* he speaks of the “West” with a knowing tone, as if he were intimately familiar with it. In fact, when he was writing this book, he had never been outside of Iran. (From 1963-1964, *after* completing *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad travelled to Europe, the Soviet Union, the United States (Harvard University), and Saudi Arabia (Algar, 1984).) Throughout *Occidentosis*, his lack of first-hand experience of the Western world is clear: he considers, for example, that, since the Chinese have their own technology, China is part of the “West”; that all Westerners (except for his favorite Western authors) are “machine tenders and carbon copies” (p. 105); that “To build Japanese gardens, set Indian cuisine on the table, and drink tea Chinese-style are the skills of every half-fledged Western youth” (p. 127); and that male and female American astronauts “are subjected to harsh experiments like so many mice, then breed, and then give birth” (p. 130). Such howlers compete with Al-e Ahmad’s historical inaccuracies to evoke the Western reader’s derision. For example, Al-e Ahmad states that World War One ended “in about 1920” (p. 61); that the “United States recovered much faster from World War II than it did from the First World War” (p. 62); and that imperialism originated in the Europeans’ “search for

aphrodisiacs in Africa, India, and America" (p. 41). Al-e Ahmad, who also believes that the "flight from mechanosis" has made the West reach "the stage of turning to Eastern politics" (p. 126), knows very little about life as it is actually lived in the "West".

Partly for this reason, he essentializes the "West," as if it were a small region where everyone thinks exactly the same way and everyone (again, except for his favorite Western writers) is morally corrupt. Al-e Ahmad did not differentiate among "Western media, Western societies, politicians, industries, imperialism, [or between] European [and] American forces" (K. Sheibani, personal communication, May, 2015). Similarly, he repeatedly emphasizes that Westerners are conformists - - "submissive, tractable, homogeneous people," "on the level of draft animals in obedience" (p. 130), and "slave[s] to the machine" (p. 105). However, he does not explain how such a "submissive, tractable" population has been able to aggressively and forcefully, under the rubric of progress, impose Western beliefs, values, institutions and technologies throughout the world, or how a morally diseased population could have achieved a (limited) form of democracy, with its "freedom of speech, freedom of expression of belief, freedom of access to the media" (p. 109) whereas either many or most oppressed classes and impoverished masses in postcolonial countries suffer from authoritarian forms of state. Moreover, as usual, he cannot avoid contradicting himself. For example, while discussing the supposedly dangerous attempt of some Iranians to educate themselves "in the European style," he quotes Muhammad Baqir Hushyar, who wrote in 1948 that "the system of [Europeans'] learning, from the nursery school to the university, is based on the church" (p. 57). However,

just two pages later, he asserts that by the early 1900s, “the god technology had for years exercised absolute rule over Europe mounted on the throne of its banks and stock exchanges, and it no longer tolerated any other god, laughing in the face of every tradition and technology” (p. 59). Al-e Ahmad does not explain how, if the “god technology” had destroyed all other European gods by the early 1900s, the European educational institutions and forms could still have been “based on the church” in 1948. In any case, neither assertion is accurate, and by making them, Al-e Ahmad once again “betrays his ignorance” (Algar, 1984, p. 145, end note 57) of the Western world, in particular, of its heterogeneous life forms and its contradictory social relations and antagonistic forces .

Because Al-e Ahmad was fascinated by what he perceived to be simple binary distinctions such as those between the “East” and the “West,” and the “past” and the “present,” he overlooked the fluid relationship between them. Thus, his discourse about the East and the West does not include the concept of hybridity, or the idea that “cultural differences come into contact and conflict, and unsettle all the stable identities that are constructed around oppositions such as past and present, inside and outside, or inclusion and exclusion” (Bhabha, as cited by Macey, 2001, p. 192). Without allowing for hybridity, Al-e Ahmad could develop only a simplistic understanding of the difference between the “East” and the “West.”

Al-e Ahmad is equally unable to argue effectively about the role that “technology” either plays in the West or should play in Iran. In a few passages, he appears to be indicating that he is

not a “technophobe,” or someone who hates and fears all technology (Postman, 1992, p. 7), but an advocate of self-reliance and independence, who neither rejects the world of technology, nor refuses to use the Western-made machines, and desires Iranians to mobilize domestic resources, to make their own technologies, and to have control over the production and use of the technology in their own country:

> I am not speaking of rejecting the machine or banishing it, as the utopians of the nineteenth century sought to do. History has fated the world to fall prey to the machine. It is a question of how to encounter the machine and technology (p. 30).

The best way to “encounter” the machine is to learn how to produce it and use it to benefit *all* Iranians: “The machine should naturally serve us as a trampoline, so that we may stand on it and jump the farther by its rebound” (p. 79). This view embodies a number of theoretical difficulties. First, this line of argument is based on the ideological fictions of ‘national self-sufficiency’ and ‘managed economy,’ positing that every state or ‘national economic regime’ (Radice, 1984; Harris, 1983) must control its own resources and means of production and be able to develop innovative new technologies and supplant foreign-produced machinery with that of indigenous produced machines/technology to build a strong sovereign state in the pursuit of self-reliance or autarkic development.

Second, for all his complaints and bitterness about the world of machines, Al-e Ahmad seems to conceptualize development and history as matter of technological progress that would benefit all Iranians regardless of social class, social/sexual division of labor, and the specific forms of power embodied in capitalism and machinery (Panzieri, 1980). In this context,

Al-e Ahmad's conception of technique/machinery as the fundamental source and motor of social transformation and development, which closely resembles Trotsky's view (Reinfelder, 1980; Trotsky, 1972), is problematic because technology/machinery has no independent and autonomous life in abstraction from the specific historical forms of the labor process, the concrete discourses and strategies of power, and disruptive "memorie[s] and straying imagination[s]" (Horkheimer, as cited in Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 67; Horkheimer, 1974, p. 22). In other words, the world of technology, dead labor, fixed capital, and reification do not stand apart from the wider historical social relations and from the everyday resistance to the strategies of power. Thus, Al-e Ahmad fails to grasp the inextricable connection between technology as constant capital or the embodiment of dead labor (Marcuse 1964/1991), and the valorization process and class conflicts. He seems to believe that national control over and new use of the machine by a 'sovereign' state can lead to liberation and 'genuine' national development. As well, several other questions remain: Al-e Ahmad does not specify whose concrete forms of power/interest are served and which concrete social forces benefit from the indigenous technology in a 'globalized' world. What would be the impact of indigenous technology/machines on women's and workers' lives in Iran? Thus, given Al-e Ahmad's view of the Iranian state as puppet, subordinate to imperialist states and international capital, it is not clear how the Iranian state could pursue its own development and how an alleged 'dependent' state could attain the imperialist-controlled forms of technology.

Overall, moreover, Al-e Ahmad does not suggest that he is "neutral" about technology, or that, in other words, he recognizes that every technology "is both a burden and a blessing; not either-or, but this-and-that" (Postman, 1992, p. 5). On the contrary, he typically refers to "technology" and "the machine" with unreserved loathing. In his chapter on how to break the spell of occidentosis, he criticizes those Iranians who feel "[d]read of the machine" and calls upon them to "grow up a little" (p. 80). Nevertheless, he still concludes his book with a warning that "the machine demon" (p. 137) will bring about a nuclear holocaust, and elsewhere, he refers to the machine as "this contemporary monster" (p. 31), to the sound of the machine as "the most loathsome of all sounds" (p. 117), and to "mechanism" as "the murder of beauty and poetry, spirit and humanity" (p. 136). In passages like these - - and *Occidentosis* includes many similar ones - - Al-e Ahmad demonizes technology, asserting, for example, that, in the machine-plagued West, the machine has turned "every ordinary man-in-the-street" into "a solitary, cold, hardened nut and bolt in the hands of organizations" (p. 106). Al-e Ahmad never explains how Iranians, if they follow his "third road" and build and use their own machines, will be able to avoid the same fate that has allegedly befallen most Westerners. How can this "most loathsome" of socio-cultural artifacts be quickly contained and controlled by Iranians, given that Westerners have supposedly been unable to do so during the last two hundred and fifty years? Al-e Ahmad never answers this question, but he *does* emphasize that "every belief and value [has] collapsed before the triumph of technology" (p. 37) and also that *every* machine creates soul-deadening "conformity" in its users. "What difference does it make?" he asks. "The

machine is the machine. One bottles milk for children, and another turns out mortar rounds for young and old" (p. 124).

Iran and Islam

Al-e Ahmad should be on much firmer ground when he is analyzing the Iranian form of social life and the role of Islam than when he is criticizing the West and its technology: he had spent most of his life in Iran and was born "into a family of strong [Islamic] traditions" (Algar, 1984, p. 9). However, his discussion of Iran and Islam is equally flawed by inaccuracies and contradictions, and the general perception of his views on these subjects is very different from what he actually writes in *Occidentosis*. Generally, Al-e-Ahmad is widely perceived as an Iranian nationalist whose "quest for disalienation" (Fanon, 1952/1967, p. 223) and the "return to the self" or tradition or authentic identity prompted him to make a significant theoretical and political contribution to oppositional discourses and to the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979. Thus, although he might not have been "fully in tune with the historical forces that were to bring about revolution" (Algar, 1984, p. 20), he did, nevertheless, promote the creation of an alliance - - between the ''engaged intellectuals and the progressive wing of clergies'' - - and a "return" to a sovereign self informed by the glorious Perso-Islamic past or Iran's so-called "authentic" identity "as the only remaining barrier to Western capitalism and rampant consumerism" (Afary & Anderson, 2005, p. 59). Moreover, Al-e-Ahmad supposedly "modernized the old religious narratives by connecting them to some of the themes of leftist

thought" and, thereby, made them "more palatable to students and intellectuals" (Afary & Anderson, 2005, p. 60).

However, *Occidentosis* provides very little evidence to support this popular perception of Al-e Ahmad. For an "Iranian nationalist," he is actually surprisingly critical of Iran and the "East," except when writing of the distant past. He proudly boasts that the Middle East is "the source of all that Western civilization contains" (p. 36) - - without considering that he identifies technology, the machine, and "mechanosis" as purely Western phenomena. He also emphasizes the glorious (to him) era when Muslims felt "the spirit of competition" with the West and declared "open season" on the lives of Westerners (p. 43). Finally, in his penultimate chapter, he wonders, "Why shouldn't the nations of the East wake up to see what treasures they hold?" (p. 128), but he never dwells upon them or even concretely identifies them. Instead, his focus is overwhelmingly negative. As Algar (1984) comments, "Al-i-Ahmad seems to have harboured persistently ambivalent feelings towards the Arabs" (p. 23) - - who make up most of the population of Middle East. He claims, "Islam, which became Islam when it reached the settled lands between the Tigres and the Euphrates, until then being the Arab's primitiveness and *Jahiliyya* [ignorance], had never [in the Muslim world before the Safavids] risen up in slaughter" (p. 40). "Primitive," along with "backward", is also his favorite adjective when writing about Iranians, whose "primitive implements" engender "a primitive mode of thought" in the countryside, from where "superstitious, prejudiced folk" are "swarming [like insects] into the cities" (p. 69). Overall, Al-e Ahmad concludes that most Iranians "remain

fanatically in the bonds of tradition" (p. 78), while the occidentotics have completely severed their ties with tradition (p. 92), and that both Iran's political and religious governments have withdrawn "into the womb of the immobility, the fanaticisms, the feuds, and the ignorance of the Middle Ages" (p. 76).

The mentioning of "tradition" and the "Middle Ages" points to another major discrepancy between how Al-e Ahmad is widely perceived and what he actually writes, and also to a contradiction between what he implies about the positive value of Iranian/Islamic tradition and how he actually characterizes it. Generally, scholars describe Al-e-Ahmad as the great defender of the "tradition" or *sonnat* in a country imagined to have undergone the process of Westernization under the Shah. Ashtiani (1994), for example, asserts that for Al-e Ahmad, "The return to Islamic and Iranian traditions was part of a quest to realize a uniquely national modernity" (p. 61). To clarify this point, Ashtiani (1994) quotes Gellner, who explains that social formations in the process of Westernization "are torn between [it] and (in a broad sense) populism, that is, the idealization of the local folk tradition" (p.61). Furthermore, Gellner continues, "the romanticism of the local tradition, real or imagined, is a consequence of the desire to maintain self-respect, to possess and identity, *not* borrowed from abroad" (as cited in Ashtiani, 1994, p. 61). These claims on behalf of Al-e Ahmad may *sound* impressive, but, in fact, he never actually "romanticizes" the "local folk tradition" or even refers to it positively, even though his frequent rural-based metaphors seem to be positioning him as one of the "local folk." Instead, he criticises Iranians' adherence to and fetishization of traditions or popular

cultural forms and practices as evidence of their "backwardness." For example, he argues that, in Iran, the machine's destruction of "all the local craft industries" has "its positive aspects," for "the hands and eyes and lungs of children should not be ruined producing carpets to adorn the homes of the high and mighty" (p. 69). In fact, "the abolition of . . . local crafts" is the "greatest virtue" of the machine's invasion of farms and villages. Al-e Ahmad expresses no desire to either maintain or "return" to tradition, even though he seems to be doing so when he repeatedly criticises occidentotics for rejecting it.

Iran's most important institutionalized traditions or practices are related to religious discourses, in particular, Islamic discursive and extradiscursive practices, but these do not fare any better in Al-e Ahmad's analysis, which expresses the same hostility towards them that one finds in his short stories. Hillmann (1988) reports that these stories "question religious values and customs": "The reader senses the authorial presence of Al-i-Ahmad as an intellectual social critic in narrative after narrative of people caught in their own traditions" (p. x). For example, in "My Sister and the Spider," Al-e Ahmad tells the story of his older sister who dies of breast cancer, which she refuses to have treated by a male physician because it would be inappropriate for a male to look at her unclothed. Instead, she submits to a folk or home remedy, the placing of a red hot iron filing on her breast (Hillmann, 1988). Similarly, in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad, the author best known for his nostalgia for authentic identity and for his call for a "return" to the self or tradition or the glorious Perso-Islamic legacy, consistently criticizes Islamic discourses, beliefs and traditions. Although he repeatedly verbally attacks

occidentotics for being “indifferent” (p. 94) to religion and rejecting tradition, he himself often criticizes both, as when he discusses the “90 percent of the people of [Iran] who still live according to religious criteria” : “The poorer these people are, the more they rely on religious beliefs as the sole means of making life bearable. Those enjoying no success in the present necessarily seek it in heaven, in religion, and the afterworld” (p. 71) - - because they believe that they have something to look forward to - - but, in *Occidentosis*, he never provides any “signs of the recovery of personal faith” (Algar, 1984, p. 18).

Moreover, Al-e Ahmad is particularly critical of the *‘ulama,* even though they would have to be (according to Al-e Ahmad) at the forefront of any future anti-establishment protests, anti-Westernization movement, and “return to the (sovereign) self” or authentic identity in Iran. Again and again, he condemns the clerics for their attachment to and fetishization of religious traditions and discourses, which he compares to a retreat into a “cocoon” (e.g., pp. 55, 60, 117). In one of his most bitter attacks against the clergy, he accuses them of having withdrawn into their cocoons of fanaticism and paralysis in the face of the West’s onslaught (p. 117). Then, to clarify, Al-e Ahmad provides one of his more bizarre rural abstractions and metaphors: “Those exiled from the world of universals will clutch at minutiae. When the house has been carried off in the flood or has collapsed in an earthquake, you go looking for a door in the debris to bear the rotting corpse of a loved one to the graveyard” (p. 118). Here, “the world of universals” and the “minutiae” appear to be the global context in which Westernization is taking place, and “the finer points of prayer and ritual purity” (p. 59), respectively. The

destroyed house is Iranian social life, the "door" is these "finer points", and "the rotting corpse", perhaps, is either tradition or religion or both. Nevertheless, although Al-e Ahmad, in not only *Occidentosis,* but also in other works, "castigates [the clergy] for attachment to religious tradition [*sunnat*], which he seems to associate in an exclusive and debilitating sense with the past" (Algar, 1984, p. 20), he, *also* calls for Iranians - - or more precisely, a *tan-e-wahed* or a unified body of ''Great men of culture'' or the uncorrupted 'outstanding men' as the subjects of history and bearers of Reason and transcendental Truth (Al-e Ahmad, 1978a, pp. 21-32, 127-88; 1978b, pp. 10, 60, 68, 73, 169-74) - - to, in effect, reclaim the great past by resurrecting the spirit, memories and practices of the glorious Perso-Islamic heroes/warriors and by remembering the legacy of the undead, or the martyrs.

Finally, many scholars have speculated about whether Al-e Ahmad intended his bitter criticisms of the "clergy" to include the Ayatollah Khomeini and whether Al-e Ahmad would have supported the Iranian revolution of 1979 (e.g., Algar, 1984). Mottahedeh (1985) reports that Al-e Ahmad "is . . . supposed to have visited Khomeini . . . before his exile in 1964 and "is supposed to have said to him while shaking his hand, if we continue to join hands we will defeat the government"' (p. 303). However, Mottahedeh does not provide a source for this information. In volume two of *On the Service and Betrayal of Intellectuals,* Al-e Ahmad (1978b) mentions Khomeini and then immediately adds that the "clergy" often act as the "governments' de facto ally" (p. 66) in the sense that the clergy have worked with the power and helped legitimize or perpetuate the authoritarian states such as the Shah's tyrannical

regime that was notorious for suppressing labour activists and dissenting voices especially Marxists and Leftists. Later in this same text, Al-e Ahmad (1978b) asserts, without going into details, that Khomeini's political activities "have gone too far," thereby sending him into exile (p. 188): ultimately, the question of how exactly Al-e Ahmad perceived Khomeini (e.g., Mirfetros, 2001, pp. 105-106) is unanswerable.

Conclusion

In *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad strongly criticizes the Westernization of Iran's political economy and socio-cultural relations by equating this process with the surrender of sovereignty, oppressive dependency, and the apparent lack of national manhood, and offers the creation of an alliance and the reviving and re-assertion of the sovereign self or authentic Perso-Islamic identity as the last remaining defence against the "disease" of occidentosis, or Westernized debased sexual morality, values, and customs. In particular, he loathes Western technology and the "machine," but despite his anger against the machine, he subscribes to a fatalistic conception of technology and instrumental rationality, claiming that an independent, sovereign Iran must produce and control its own technology and industries to realize a 'third road,' or his promised land of self-reliant and autarkic development. Al-e Ahmad develops this basic argument by defining "occidentosis," traveling back in time to trace the origins and development of this disease, making his recommendations for reforms, and then providing an unrelenting criticism of Iranian forms of social life, gradually building up to an apocalyptic conclusion.

Most scholars view Al-e Ahmad as an important figure in the intellectual background of the Iranian revolution. Ashtiani (1994), for example, concludes that for Al-e Ahmad, ''the critique of [occidentosis] was an answer to a yearning for an 'authentic' (Islamic) identity" (p. 63). As this conclusion suggests, he is widely admired for his perceived influence on the revolutionary forces that created the Islamic republic of Iran. Indeed, Afary and Anderson (2005) speculate that "Without the support of some of the leftist intellectuals within Iran [such as Al-e Ahmad] . . . Khomeini's blueprint for an Islamist revolution might have remained in the drafting stage" (pp. 58-59).

A close reading and deconstructive analysis of *Occidentosis*, however, suggests that the future revolutionaries (selectively) noticed, deduced and interpreted only what they wanted to find in this text and ignored the rest. Al-e Ahmad's argument is severely undermined by his lack of socio-historical specificity in analysis (along with his historical errors), by his identitarian thought, by his Manichean division of the world, as well as by his functionalist conception of culture and ideology. He is right to criticize colonial ideology and imperialism, but he understands very little about the "West," which he tends to demonize, just as he also demonizes the "machine." More important for the devout supporters of Iran's Islamic regime, *Occidentosis* provides no evidence that Al-e-Ahmad believed in either Islam in particular or religion in general, or that he attached much value to Iranian "tradition." Al-e Ahmad's "often shrill and opinionated voice" (Algar, 1984, p. vii) and "exaggerated tone" (Keddie, 2006, p. 190) influenced a significant sector of the Iranian cultural workers, political activists, and Left-wing

students and academics. However, *Occidentosis* is a rhetorically flawed and deeply paradoxical document -- a critique of intellectual and spiritual homelessness and loss of authenticity (echoing Heidegger) caused by the inhuman pace of recent historical change and a call for a return to the self or self-reliance (*rah-e-sevvom*) by a writer (influenced by Leninism and socialist discourse) who gives no clear indication that he would have supported the Iranian revolution or any Islamic regime led and managed by Iran's Islamists, particularly, the Islamist *'ulamas*.

Chapter 4

The Role of the Colonized Intellectual

In *Occidentosis* and *The Wretched of the Earth*

Al-e Ahmad's (1984) *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West* and Fanon's (2004) *The Wretched of the Earth* are two seminal anti-colonial polemics that first appeared within a few months of each other: Al-e Ahmad delivered the first draft of his text as a report in Iran in November 1961, and Fanon's book was first published (in French) in Paris during the same year. Since then, these works have become inspirational texts for their many admirers. Mirsepassi (2011), for example, states that *Occidentosis* "dominated the Iranian intellectual panorama of the 1960s [and] perhaps played the founding role in the effort to articulate a local, Islamic modernity as a blueprint for revolutionary social change in Iran" (p. 120). Although Al-e Ahmad's insights are not limited to the effects of Imperialism in only Iran, *Occidentosis* remains relatively unknown outside of Iran and the so-called 'Middle East'. In contrast, *The Wretched of the Earth* has achieved much greater fame and won even more effusive praise. As Loomba (1998) notes, Fanon has been regarded "as the most important anti-colonial writer-activist" (p. 143); indeed, he has become known as "a prophet of the Third World, a romantic hero of decolonization" (Memmi, as cited in Loomba, p. 143).

Several factors can explain the different global receptions of *Occidentosis* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. First, Al-e Ahmad limited his focus to mainly Iran, and, within Iran, he addressed mainly intellectuals. In contrast, Fanon's approach was much more global: he

“addressed not only Algerians but also the African nations, and in some cases, the colonized world.” As well, in his theoretical work, he carried out a dialogue with French intellectuals (K. Sheaibani, personal communication, May 19, 2015). Second, whereas Al-e Ahmad was an “unsystemic” thinker who “had neither the time nor patience to engage in careful historical research” (Algar, 1984, p. 14), Fanon was a rigorous political and cultural analyst who, as Said (1994) noted, was also able to write in “passages of an incandescent power” (p. 274). Third, whereas Al-e Ahmad provides in his writing a “comprehensively negative” (Hillmann, 1988, p. xv) view of Iranian forms of social life under the Shah, Fanon manages to find hope in the Algerians’ suffering under French imperialism.

Al-e Ahmad, who could read French well enough to translate texts by French existentialists into Persian, probably did not read *The Wretched of the Earth* either before or during his writing of *Occidentosis*. However, in *On the Service and Betrayal of Intellectuals*, Al-e Ahmad (1978b) refers to and cites Fanon’s text to justify and explain the importance of the Shiite clergy as the preservers of traditions, and thereby as the bulwark against occidentosis, cultural aggression, and political subordination to the West (pp. 32-33). Moreover, *The Wretched of the Earth* had a powerful influence on Ali Shari’ati (1933-1977), who is now “widely regarded as the ‘Voltaire”’ of the 1979 Iranian revolution (Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 105) and one of the main theorists of Islamism (Algar, 1983; Zubaida, 1993; Boal et al, 2006). Shari’ati translated not only *The Wretched of the Earth*, but also Fanon’s *Five Years of the Algerian War* into Persian (Abrahamian, 1993, p. 47; Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 108; Keddie, 2006, p. 200) and,

according to Algar (1984), “reminisced to Al-e Ahmad about his days in Paris [as a student] with Fanon” (p. 17). As Boroujerdi (1996), Buck-Morss (2003), and Keddie (2006) suggest, Shari’ati and other like-minded cultural workers were attracted by Fanon’s critique of “Western-centric thought” or European universalism, his writing on cultural alienation, and his call for a revolt against colonial domination and for self-determination, a call that some scholars misread as a “return to the native self” (Al-e Ahmad, 1978a, b; Shari’ati, 2005) or “violent nativism” (Brumberg, 2001, p. 67) “for the resurgence, reinstatement, or continuance of a native or indigenous cultural customs, beliefs, and values” (Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 14). Shari’ati eventually developed his own version of Islamism -- “a Shi’ism impregnated with nativism,” but strongly influenced by Third Worldism, populism, and Iranian nationalism -- and also, like Fanon went beyond “Al-e Ahmad’s mere condemnation of the intelligentsia by articulating a more concrete definition of their commitment and mode of praxis” (Boroujerdi, 1996, pp. 110, 106).

In this context, Al-e Ahmad’s and Fanon’s different approaches to the role of colonized intellectuals in the struggle against colonialism and capitalist imperialism are particularly revealing of Al-e Ahmad’s limitations as a cultural critic and political analyst. Both authors believe that intellectuals in general can potentially play a crucial role in the struggle for national liberation, independence, and self-determination. However, Al-e Ahmad’s Iranian intellectuals are ‘’occidentotics,’’ or individuals so contaminated by Western influences or/and the dominant colonial ideologies that they have “no more substance than ripples on the surface of water” (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 73) and are completely unfit, i.e., ‘effete and effeminate’ (p. 96) for

contributing to any kind of anti-colonial struggle. In contrast, Fanon's (2004) colonized intellectuals (or more precisely, cultural workers) begin by adopting "the abstract, universal values of the colonizer," but are capable of personal change and intellectual development, particularly after they begin to understand the revolutionary aspirations of "oppressed/exploited masses" and to take "a hard look at the Western culture in which they risk becoming ensnared" (pp. 9, 130, 148). Then, these former dupes of the Western colonial ideologies become Gramscian "organic" intellectuals, who, as "an organic part of a community," participate actively in everyday life (Boggs, 1976, p. 76), articulate the needs and desires of the oppressed/exploited masses, and play a crucial role in the anti-colonial struggles. Our understanding of Jalal Al-e Ahmad's work can then be deepened through a comparison with Fanon's analysis of colonialism, colonial ideology, and the role of revolutionary *praxis*, especially the role of "organic" intellectuals as part of the mass movement engaging in a struggle for dignity, social justice, and self-determination in colonial contexts.

This chapter will therefore compare the role of the colonized intellectual as Al-e Ahmad and Fanon conceptualized it in *Occidentosis* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, respectively. It will be argued that Al-e Ahmad's inability to go beyond simplistic negation in his analysis of the colonized Iranian intellectual, in contrast to Fanon's much more nuanced view of the colonized intellectual in general, is typical of Al-e Ahmad's (1984) limitations as a writer-activist attempting to offer a constructive program for "how to break the spell" (p. 78) of occidentosis and to achieve positive, revolutionary social change. The remainder of this chapter is divided in

the following sections: (1) comparative overview of *Occidentosis* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, (2) the authors' views of the social classes, (3) the role of colonized intellectuals, and (4) conclusions.

Comparative Overview of *Occidentosis* and *The Wretched of the Earth*

This section compares the two works' contexts, authors, and purposes. Although Al-e Ahmad and Fanon were writing during the development of very different historical formations, moments, and conjunctures of the anti-colonial struggle and played much different roles in it, the purposes of the two works are very similar.

The Colonial Contexts

Both Al-e Ahmad and Fanon were writing in a colonial and post-colonial context: in the early 1960s, when Al-e Ahmad was creating the first draft of *Occidentosis*, Iran was firmly in the grip of Mohammad Reza Shah's "royal dictatorship" (Keddie, 2006, p. 133) and also closely interconnected with and heavily influenced by global capital and capitalist imperialism, in particular, the American politico-economic order and global strategic interests. Although Iran was never a colony of any particular Western imperialist state, Al-e Ahmad (1984) always writes of Iranians as if they were, in fact, a colonized population. For example, he asks rhetorically, "[A]re we Iranians not today a subjected province of the West?" (p. 52). Moreover, by the 1960s, countries could be "colonized'' or ''neo-colonized" by other means than military might. What can be called "informal colonies" could be created by a network of economic, cultural,

and geo-political ties and through integration into the world market and international division of labor. Fanon (2004) makes the same point when he argues, “Currently, the issue is not whether an African region is under French or Belgian sovereignty but whether the economic zones are safe guarded. Artillery shells and scorched earth policy have been replaced by an economic dependency” (p. 27). As Al-e Ahmad complains, the Shah’s regime and Iran’s political economy were closely interconnected with and heavily relied on the Western imperialist states, particularly on the United States, for machinery, technology, and scientific and technical expertise. In 1953, the US imperialist forces attempted to secure their dominance in Iran when the American and British intelligence agencies initiated a successful coup against Iran’s elected, nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh and replaced him with the autocratic/authoritarian Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979), who subscribed to the postwar U.S. neo-imperial policy in the Middle-East (Rupert & Solomon, 2006). Following this coup, American and British oil companies shared control of Iran’s oil industry. As well, the Shah’s secret police (SAVAK), whom the US military and intelligence had trained and equipped, terrorized and suppressed voices of dissent, in particular, those on the Left, and helped the Shah to impose a form of capitalist development as well as an authoritarian state-form on Iranian labor and the oppressed multitude. Along with the Gulf state of Saudi Arabia, the Iranian state became “a cornerstone of U.S. strategic dominance in the oil-rich Persian Gulf region” (Rupert & Solomon, 2006, p. 114). Thus, although Iran was never a formal “colony” of the U.S., the American forces did their best to ensure that the Iranian regime under the Shah

contained or neutralized the workers' militancy and anti-imperialist resistance movements, and nourished the growth of U.S.-dominated global capital.

When Fanon was writing *The Wretched of the Earth,* Algeria had been a formal colony of France for at least 90 years: French imperialist forces first occupied Algeria during the 1830s, "stepped-up" colonization of Algeria during the 1870s (Horne, 1985, p. 568), and re-named it as "French Algeria" in the 1950s (Fanon, 1967, p. 80). In 1961, when *The Wretched of the Earth* was first published, Algeria's bloody war for self-determination and so-called 'national liberation' (1954-1962) was approaching its conclusion. Fanon (2004) explicitly and repeatedly refers to this war as a classic struggle for "decolonization," which he describes as the process in which the "'thing' colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation" (p. 2).

The Authors

Although both Al-e Ahmad and Fanon were writing in a colonial/post-colonial context, they played very different roles in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles of Iran and Algeria, respectively. When Al-e Ahmad was writing *Occidentosis*, the Iranian revolution (1978-1979) was almost twenty years away. The Iranian regime was still firmly controlled by the Shah and SAVAK, who brutally suppressed political dissenters and writers critical of the status quo. Thus, Al-e Ahmad was a pre-revolutionary social critic engaged in discovering and analyzing the roots and symptoms of Iran's "illness" (occidentosis) and trying "to project a future based on some vivid imagining of a stable and authentic past" (Mirsepassi, 2011, p. 149), which he

believed he had discovered in the historical era beginning with the founding of Islam in the seventh century A.D. and ending with the emergence of the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722).

Fanon (2004) would have described Al-e Ahmad as one of those colonized intellectuals who, prior to the decolonization process, "work away with raging heart and furious mind to renew contact with their people's oldest inner essence, the farthest removed from colonial times" (p. 148). When, in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad reported his findings about Iran's lost Golden Age and contrasted it with Iran's present decline into Westernization, he became a key figure in positing "a new vanguardism of 'intellectual and moral leadership''' (Difazio, 2006, p. 161) that helped to produce a new identity and to articulate a framework for a sector of political activists in the Iranian revolution. He was the only contemporary writer ever to obtain Khomeini's approval (Abrahamian, 1993), and *Occidentosis* encouraged later Iranian political activists and cultural workers to return to their "authentic" Iranian selves, to re-imagine and to revive the spirit of a self-reliant Perso-Islamic past as an authentic identity in order to achieve *rah-e-sevom* or the third way, i.e., a specifically Iranian path of autarkic development and an independent, political sovereignty.

Whereas Al-e Ahmad was a pre-revolutionary figure, Fanon wrote *The Wretched of the Earth* during the heat of Algeria's anti-colonial war, in which he was deeply and directly involved. He was born in Martinique, educated in France, and lived in Algeria for only three years (1954-57); nevertheless, he refers to himself and Algerians as "we Algerians'' (Fanon, 2004, pp. 131, 138), revealing his "radical indigenization of his identity'' (Bhabha, 2004, p.

xxxii). During his relatively brief stay in Algeria, he became involved in its war against French imperialism: as a psychiatrist at Algeria's Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital, he treated the war's traumatized victims, both the Algerians and the French, and both the tortured and torturers (Gendzier, 1973). In 1955, Fanon joined the *Front de Liberation Nationale* (FLN), the main anti-imperialist political and military group in Algeria. After being expelled from there, he became "a full-time revolutionary and editor" (Gibson, 2003, p. 5), using his writing and organizing skills to promote Algeria's anti-colonial struggle. Before he died from leukemia in 1961, the Red Hand, a right-wing group of French-Algerian sympathizers, twice tried to assassinate him by blowing up cars in which he was travelling (Gendzier, 1973). According to Gibson (2003), Fanon finished *The Wretched of the Earth* after these assassination attempts and "a ten-week explosion of intellectual energy in May 1961" (p. 6). This text is best understood as an example of what Fanon (2004) calls "[c]ombat literature," or "revolutionary literature," in which colonized writers "feel the need to proclaim their nation, to portray their people and become the spokesperson of a new reality in action" (p. 159).

The Works' Purposes

This section compares Al-e Ahmad's and Fanon's goals in writing *Occidentosis* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, respectively. As Algar (1984) comments, Al-e Ahmad's text is "fundamentally a sociohistorical critique" (p. 18). At the end of his first chapter, AL-e Ahmad (1984) identifies his main goal as a historiographer: "How did we [Iranians] grow occidentotic? Let us turn to the history to find out" (p. 35). In his search to answer this question, Al-e Ahmad

journeys back in time to the seventh century A.D., or to “the dawn of Islamic civilization” (p. 36), in order to uncover the so-called ‘origin’ and reveal the development of occidentosis in Iran. Once he attempts to analyze the present time or the onset of Iran’s supposedly Westernized condition in the early 1960s, he becomes a social critic with the goal of identifying and critiquing the symptoms of occidentosis in Iran. Finally, Al-e Ahmad (1984) has the additional goal of prescribing some remedies for Iran’s social illness, its alleged oppressive dependency on the West and cultural decline or decadence. He asks, for example, “Why shouldn’t the nations of the East wake up to see what treasures they hold? Why, just because the machine is Western and we are compelled to adopt it, should we assume all the rest of the West’s standards for life, letters, and art?” (p. 128). In such a passage providing a call to action, Al-e Ahmad moves beyond the roles of historian and social critic, and also beyond the scope of “precombat literature . . . steeped in . . . anguish, malaise, death, and even nausea” (Fanon, 2004, p. 159). Instead, he briefly becomes “a galvanizer of the people” (Fanon, p. 159), inspiring his future followers to revolt against the Shah’s Westernizing of Iran, i.e., the Shah’s development strategy, the state forms of planning, the surrender of sovereignty, and the oppressive dependence on capitalist imperialism.

Unlike Al-e Ahmad, Fanon reveals no interest in carrying out any kind of historical excavation to discover either the roots of colonialism or evidence of the colonized’s glorious culture in a distant past. As Sartre (1961) remarked, “The true culture [for Fanon] is the revolution, meaning it is forged while the iron is hot” (p. xlvii). As a psychiatrist and a

revolutionary, Fanon has a double goal of analyzing the psychology of the colonized and detailing the specific forms of the decolonizing process. Fanon's background in psychiatry gave him the perspective of showing how the colonized person "has been created as, translated by colonialism, into 'a native', and inscribed with the schizoculture of colonialism as its devalued other" (Young, 2003, p. 144). Fanon's (2004) role as revolutionary enabled him to analyze the decolonization process, which begins with the colonized masses' initial awareness that "their cramped world, riddled with taboos, can only be challenged by out and out violence" (p. 3); continues with the revolutionary activities (or lack of them) of the various social classes; and concludes with the revolution's frequent betrayal in the post-colonial state. Fanon's discussion of this third topic often seems to support Lord Halifax's (1750) dictum: "When the people contend for their liberty, they seldom get anything by their victory but new masters" (as cited in Partington, 1994, p. 160). Despite his harsh criticisms of the so-called post- colonial states in African countries, however, Fanon, even more so than Al-e Ahmad, has become most known for his success in achieving his goal as a galvanizer of the oppressed masses and exploited classes. Whereas Al-e Ahmad (1984) calls upon Iranians to tear off the yoke of Westernization and oppressive dependency, without ever expressing much hope that a population wracked by the paradoxical combination of "chronic anemia" and "delusions of grandeur" (pp. 53-56) will actually be able to do so, Fanon (2004) confidently calls upon the colonized, oppressed Africans to "make a new start, develop a new way of thinking and endeavour to create a new man" (p. 39). This difference in tone expresses and reflects Al-e Ahmad's and Fanon's contrasting views

of the potential contributions of different social classes to revolutionary social change within a particular social formation. These views are compared in the next section of this chapter.

The Authors' Views of the Social Classes

Both Al-e Ahmad (1984) and Fanon (2004) devote a great deal of attention to analyzing the various social classes in Iran, Algeria, and in colonized and post-colonized states, respectively. Basically, these authors divide the population into the so-called 'subaltern classes' (the peasants, the urban workers, and lumpenproletariat), the middle class, the ruling class, and the intellectuals. Al-e Ahmad is almost unrelentingly critical of every social class in Iran, whereas Fanon (2004), focusing on African states, adores the peasants and the so-called 'lumpanproletariat', despises the "national bourgeoisie" (p. 101) and its leaders, and criticizes the intellectuals but recognizes their capacity for personal growth and political change and transformation. These differences highlight how Al-e Ahmad's class analysis often borders on misanthropy, whereas Fanon's views (except for those of the so-called "national bourgeoisie") articulate and reflect not only his optimistic and more generous view of human capabilities, but also his "project of deepening the anti-colonial revolution into humanism" (Gibson, 2003, p. 187).

The Subaltern Classes

Throughout *Occidentosis* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Al-e Ahmad and Fanon, respectively, express diametrically opposing views regarding the so-called 'subaltern oppressed

classes'. Al-e Ahmad's supporters often praise his perceived "idealization of the local folk tradition" (Gellner, as cited in Ashtiani, 1994, p. 61), an idealization that supposedly reflects his call for a "return to Islamic and Iranian traditions [as] part of a quest for a uniquely national identity" (Ashtiani, 1994, p. 61). However, an author cannot idealize a local folk tradition without also idealizing or, at least, also admiring the local "folk." Al-e Ahmad never even attempts to do so. On the contrary, he harshly criticizes Iran's peasants and their traditions and cultural forms and practices. According to Al-e Ahmad (1984), this rural class, "this superstitious and prejudiced folk" is stuck in a "primitive mode of thought" (pp. 69) and trapped in its own traditions. Far from calling for a "return" to these traditions and to local crafts, Al-e Ahmad (1984) argues that "The greatest virtue in the machine's invasion of farms and villages is not the *necessary* disruption of the relation of lord and serf or in the traditions of the tribes and nomadism, but the *abolition* of these local crafts" (p. 69, emphasis added). Here, Al-e Ahmad is referring to "*all* the local craft industries" (p. 69, emphasis added). He comments that they could be preserved if a new program were developed to support them, but he does not want them to be retained in their present (traditional) form, particularly not the carpet-making craft, which ruins "the hands and eyes and lungs of village children" (p. 69). In any case, a staunch supporter of Iran's traditional crafts would not draw attention to the "positive aspects" (p. 69) of Westernization's destruction of the local craft industries, as Al-e Ahmad does in *Occidentosis*.

Al-e Ahmad is equally critical of Iran's urbanized workers and the so-called 'lumpenproletariat' or surplus population. He portrays the former as "primitive" country yokels

who swarm into the cities, where they inevitably fail because of their “thick-headedness, languor, and fatalism” (p. 70). Al-e Ahmad (1984) describes the fate of a typical urban worker: too ignorant to “respond to and keep pace with the machine”, s/he “forgets everything, turning into a criminal, a complete cynic, or an outright opportunist” (p. 70). If s/he (Al-e Ahmad only mentions *mard,* which means man) turns into a criminal, s/he, presumably, becomes one of what Al-e Ahmad (1984) calls “the lumpens” (p. 93). These are the so-called lumpenproletariat, or a section of population, who Jary and Jary (2000), following Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, describe as “a class drawn from all classes, living on the margins of society, not in regular employment” (p. 351), and which benefits itself ‘’at the expense of the labouring nation’’ (Marx, 1968, p. 75). Al-e Ahmad describes the lumpenproletariat as “the misfits, the idle, those with no will of their own” (p. 93), expressing the conventional or elitist Marxist image and view of this impoverished, marginalized sector of labor or surplus population: its members are the “scum, offal, refuse of all classes” or an “indefinite, disintegrated mass’’ such as “ruined and adventurous off-shoots of the bourgeoisie,” vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, pickpockets, gamblers, porters, and beggars, to name a few (Marx, 1968, p. 75; Bottomore, 1996; Jary & Jary, 2000). They cannot be trusted because they do not contribute to the workers’ struggles against capital and for social revolution and socialism. In terms of contributing to any future resistance to the spread of occidentosis in Iran, Al-e Ahmad (1984) expects nothing from not only the “lumpens,” but also “the ordinary man in the street”: he is “not to blame” for Iran’s social ills, problems, and troubles, because he merely “goes any way you point him” (p. 92).

Two conclusions follow from Al-e Ahmad's lack of sympathy for Iran's oppressed classes. First, although he positions himself as opposed to Western and colonial influences, his description of Iran's exploited/oppressed multitudes actually mimics the colonial and imperialist attitude towards them. For example, when Al-e Ahmad (1984) reports that Iran's urban workers sacrifice sheep every month to try to ensure that the machine will work (p. 70), he sounds very much like Antoine Porot, the French founder of the "militantly colonialist Algiers School [in Algeria]" (Gibson, 2004, p. 86). After describing the North African as fatalistic and similar to the feudal peasant of Europe, Porot calls Algerians "a shapeless mass of primitive people, in most cases ignorant and gullible, very distant from our way of thinking and our reactions, or even the simplest of social, economic or political concerns" (as cited in Gibson, 2003, p. 85). Here, Porot, like Al-e Ahmad when writing about Iran's exploited and oppressed classes, illustrates the colonizer's tendency to perceive the indigenous population as "a blurred mass" (Fanon, 2004, p. 8) - - "ignorant of new values," "primitive," and "fatalistic" (Al-e-Ahmad, 1984, pp. 64, 69, 70).

Second, Al-e Ahmad's descriptions of Iran's subaltern classes indicate his emotional, intellectual, and social detachment from them, which, in turn, expresses and reflects "the isolation that characterized the Iranian literary intelligentsia [as a whole in the 1950s and 1960s]" (Algar, 1984, p. 20). During most of his childhood, Al-e Ahmad lived in "a relatively prosperous family" in the Pachenar district of south Tehran, where his father was an '*alem*' (Algar, 1984, p. 10). Although he later spent some time in northern Iran and wrote three

anthropological monographs about the villagers there, there is no evidence that he was ever the kind of colonized intellectual who “feels the need to return to his unknown roots and lose himself, come what may, among his barbaric people” (Fanon, 2004, p. 155). Instead, he was more like those national bourgeois politicians who, Fanon (2004) writes, “make no effort to reach out to the masses” or to “place their theoretical knowledge at the service of the people” (p. 68).

In contrast, Fanon idealizes the subaltern masses to such a degree that he has been called a “Maoist” (Timefeev, as cited in Gendzier, 1973, p. 215). Indeed, just as Mao (1967) considered that “The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history” (p. 118), Fanon (2004) states that “it is obvious that in colonial countries, only the peasantry is revolutionary” (p. 13). Moreover, the colonized masses do not claim “they represent the truth, because they are the truth in their very being” (Fanon 2004, p. 13). In other words, the oppressed classes, particularly the peasantry, understand most clearly the relations of power and exploitation and are engaged in the everyday struggle against strategies and discourses of power that mark the social bodies or life forms under colonialism. Whereas Al-e Ahmad (1984) criticizes the new urban resident for attending “initially to the wants of his stomach and then to those of the region beneath his stomach” (p. 66), Fanon (2004) praises the multitude for their similar self-interested focus on the essentials of life: “The people . . . take a global stance from the very start. ‘Bread and land: how do we go about getting bread and land?’ And this stubborn, apparently limited, narrow-minded aspect of the people is finally the

most rewarding and effective working model" (p. 14). It is "effective", according to Fanon, because the same "elemental consciousness" that tells oppressed and exploited masses to seek bread and land first, before all else *also* tells them "that colonialism is based on pure force and will respond to nothing else" (Gibson, 2003, p. 115). On the basis of their concrete historical experiences as well as with their revolutionary social imaginary, the peasants play a key role in the decolonization process along with the dissidents from the cities to create a political and military organization and to prepare the preliminary conditions for revolutionary actions, acts of insubordination, and uprising.

Although Fanon's (2004) view of the peasants -- "a generous people, prepared to make sacrifices, willing to give all they have, impatient [for revolution], with an indestructible pride" (p. 79) -- suggests Maoism, his view of the so-called lumpenproletariat deviates sharply from leftist orthodoxies. On the one hand, Fanon (like Marx) recognises the lumpenproletariat's potential to become the bribed agents of the ruling class: "[The lumpenproletariat] will also respond to the call to revolt, but if the insurrection thinks it can afford to ignore it, then this famished underclass will pitch itself into the armed struggle and take part in the conflict, this time on the side of the oppressor" (p. 87). On the other hand, Fanon (2004) differs from both Marx and Al-e Ahmad when he states that "The lumpenproletariat, this cohort of starving men, divorced from tribe and clan, constitutes one of the most spontaneously and radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people" (p. 81). Whereas Al-e Ahmad (1984) sides with Marx by describing "the lumpens" as the misfits of the Iranian social formation, Fanon (2004) asserts

that these impoverished and marginalized surplus populations "redeem themselves in their own eyes and the eyes of history" when they become "the urban spearhead" of the revolution (pp. 82, 81). According to this view, the so-called lumpenproletariat can play the same kind of electrifying revolutionary role in the cities that the peasants play in the countryside (Gendzier, 1973).

Fanon's views of the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat are much less either a nod to Mao or a rejection of Marx than a fresh interpretation and reading of his concrete practical, historical experiences and conditions during the Algerian war. As Horne (1985) explains, this war was, on the Algerian side, "from the beginning, a movement of *collectivity*: of collective leadership, of collective suffering, and collective anonymity" (p. 17). In the country side, the peasants, because of their collective efforts against the forces of French imperialism, won small victories and suffered ferocious reprisals. Meanwhile, in the pivotal Battle of Algiers, where about one-third of the workforce was unemployed (Gibson, 2003), the lumpenproletariat played a crucial role in the rebellion's success and, in Fanon's words, "[took] their vital place in the great march of a nation on the move" (p. 82).

The active role of the lumpenproletariat in Algeria's revolution explains Fanon's relational theory of class and his unorthodox view of this sector of labor or subaltern class. "A relational theory of class" recognizes both "the multiplicity of formations which sustain/disrupt social individuals" and Marx's conception of "mode of life" (Corrigan et al., 1979, p. 29). This line of thought is also congruent with Thompson's argument that "class relations and class

consciousness are cultural formations" (as cited in Corrigan et al 1979, p. 29; Thompson, 2013, p. 937). In a similar vein, for Fanon (opening up Marx's critical theory) class is related to community as the repository of memory and creative imagination and is nourished and expressed in and through popular cultural forms and practices, and through the cycle of struggles against multiple, interlinked forms of power, i.e., against class exploitation and identity-based oppression in the colonial context. In this context, one can grasp Fanon's much more unorthodox understanding of the urban workers, in that he does not conceive 'class' as a fixed, lifeless, cut and dried, and frozen sociological category, standing apart from the everyday life, from the concrete practical political activities, and from imaginations, memories, and dreams of the oppressed, or from what Wright (1991) aptly calls the "local moments of self-determination" (p. 255). Rather, class, for Fanon, is a critical category and an anti-identitarian concept (to use the words of Holloway, 2009) that constitutes itself in and through struggles in everyday practical life, and, thereby, it is organically linked to a grass-roots and mass-based movement for autonomy (self-determination), social justice, and dignity. Generally, the urban workers are considered to be what 'orthodox Marxists' called the proletariat - - "the class of propertyless labourers who live by selling their labour power to capitalists in exchange for wages" (Jar & Jary, 2000, p. 292). Fanon (2004), however, describes the "proletariat" as "tram drivers, taxi drivers, miners, dockers, interpreters, nurses, etc." (p. 64). He also believes, "[t]hese elements make up the most loyal clientele of the nationalist parties and by the privileged position they occupy in the colonial system represent the 'bourgeois' fraction of the colonized population" (p. 64). Nghe considered that Fanon was wrong to place these

sectors/groups into the same social class, and argued that he had to deny the revolutionary potential of the "true proletariat" (the industrial working class and the plantation workers) in order to justify his concept of a peasant revolution (as cited in Gendzier, 1973, p. 213). For this present thesis, however, the key point is not that Fanon's understanding of the "proletariat" is either convincing or unconvincing, but that he - - breaking with the familiar tropes and rhetoric of the 'true proletariat' celebrated by orthodox, dogmatic, and scholastic Marxism - - considered this sector of the social class to be either the bourgeoisie or lined up behind the bourgeoisie. His and Al-e Ahmad's analyses of the bourgeoisie are discussed in the following section.

The Bourgeoisie

In their analyses of the social classes, Al-e-Ahmad and Fanon most closely agree when they discuss the bourgeoisie and their leaders. Both authors heap scorn on what they perceive to be the bourgeoisie's nauseating mimicry of the West, and both authors also direct some of their most acid-tongued contempt at the bourgeois leaders in post-colonial African countries and in Iran prior to the Iranian revolution (1978-79), respectively. Al-e Ahmad's and Fanon's descriptions of the so-called 'bourgeoisie' are so similar that Mahmoodi and Jelodar (2011) refer to Al-e Ahmad's emphasis on the Iranians' unquestioned mimicry of the West as "a Fanonian notion" (p. 26). This and other similarities between Al-e Ahmad and Fanon are to be expected: as Algar (1984) mentions, much of what Al-e Ahmad analyzes is not unique to Iran, but "might be encountered almost anywhere imperialism has imposed itself in Africa or Asia"

(p. 15). However, whereas Al-e Ahmad's (1984) analysis of the so-called bourgeoisie and Iran's leaders/state managers is limited to the notion of mimicry, Fanon (2004) builds on this concept and focuses much more on the bourgeoisie's inability to act in the post-colonial masses' interests and to satisfy the needs of oppressed and exploited.

In *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad (1984) does not frequently use the term "bourgeoisie," but, in his chapter entitled "Asses in Lions' Skins, or Lions on the Flag," is clearly referring to the members of this class when he discusses Iran's "directors of culture," "bankers," "politicians," and similar figures. In his analysis, their most distinguishing feature is their occidentosis, or their slavish imitation of Western values, life-styles, and sexual morality. The seemingly congenital habit of mimicry has turned the typical occidentotic into "a man totally without belief or conviction," "a thing without authenticity," and a person "corrupted and stupefied by corporeal pleasures" (pp. 94, 95, p. 133). Such a corrupt individual "will do nothing for the sake of anyone else" and, even worse (for Al-e Ahmad), is "effete" or "effeminate" (pp. 95, 96). Thus, instead of contributing positively to Iranian social life, the typical bourgeoisie obsessively purchases Western goods, and, sometimes, "he even plucks his eyebrows" (p. 96). The leaders/state managers produced by this corrupt, "effete" class are no better than "lumpens": "the lumpens from every trade and class customarily come to power" (p. 93). Although Al-e Ahmad (1984) himself appears to be radically alienated from the Iranian oppressed multitude and their popular cultural forms and practices (folk values/cultures), and even from the Iranian clergy, who, according to him, "have drawn into their cocoons of fanaticism and paralysis" (p. 117), he

does not hesitate to condemn Iran's occidentotic leaders for severing their "ties with the depths of society, culture, and tradition" (p. 92). Overall, he expects nothing from Iran's bourgeoisie and its state managers/leaders, but more corruption, self-indulgence and indifference to the subaltern's needs.

Fanon (2004) shares Al-e Ahmad's contempt for the bourgeoisie, whom he calls the "national bourgeoisie" (p. 65), but focuses much more than Al-e Ahmad does on the economic and political consequences of their corruption. As Gibson (2003) mentions, Fanon's "abhorrence" of bourgeois society is quite unmistakable" (p. 3); in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952/1968), for example, Fanon concludes that "intellectual alienation is a creation of bourgeois society . . . a closed society in which life has no taste, in which the air is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt" (as cited in Gibson, 2003, p. 3). This passage, like many similar ones in *The Wretched of the Earth*, could have been written by Al-e Ahmad. Fanon (2004) also criticizes "the apathy of the national bourgeoisie, its mediocrity, and its deeply cosmopolitan [i.e., "Western"] mentality" (p. 98). Also, like Al-e Ahmad, Fanon finds that the bourgeoisie is "hedonistic" and "has learned by heart what it has read in the manuals of the West and subtly transformed itself not into a replica of Europe, but rather its caricature" (pp. 101, 119). Such a passage provides no insights that are not already found in *Occidentosis*.

However, whereas Al-e Ahmad's (1984) critique is closely connected to his sexual anxiety about Iranian men's lack of manly character and national manhood - - he makes particular references to issues such as the occidentotic's attention to his personal "grooming"

(p. 96) - - Fanon (2004) extends Al-e Ahmad's key criticisms by analyzing their economic and political implications for the oppressed multitudes within the post-colonial social formations. For example, Fanon argues that the national bourgeoisie "mimics the Western bourgeoisie in its negative and decadent aspects without having accomplished the initial phases of exploration and invention that are the assets of this Western bourgeoisie whatever the circumstances" (p. 101). The first criticism here duplicates Al-e Ahmad's critique, but the second one adds a new dimension.

In Fanon's analysis, the post-colonial bourgeoisie, having little money-capital, lacking sufficient materials and resources, and having even less trained personnel and technical and administrative managerial capacities, cannot carry out the Western European bourgeoisie's most important role and activity, which is to facilitate, grow, and maintain capitalist development, the conditions of existence for the accumulation process, and the long-term reproduction of capitalist relations themselves. Lacking financiers and industrialists (financial and industrial capital), the national bourgeoisie in post-colonial social formations "is not geared to production, invention, creation, or work" (Fanon, 2004, p. 98). Accordingly, the 'national bourgeoisie' is unable to accumulate the resources (money and finance capital) vital to re-orienting and re-ordering the political economy, to establishing new industries, and to supporting long term social development for the exploited/oppressed classes. Instead, this social class becomes a mere "intermediary" (Fanon, 2004, p. 100) demanding that international corporations, cartels and monopolies operate through it if they want to initiate trade, set up

production, or facilitate capital accumulation through investment in the country. Thus, the national bourgeoisie's "vocation is not to transform the nation but [to] prosaically serve as a conveyor belt for capitalism" (Fanon, 2004, p. 100). In effect, the post-colonial 'national bourgeoisie' helps the international corporations and companies and their imperialist states to maintain the colonial status quo: "Independence does not bring a change of direction. The same old groundnut harvest, cocoa harvest, and olive harvest . . . . [The post-colonial countries] continue to ship raw materials . . . to grow produce for Europe and pass for specialists of unfinished products" (Fanon, 2004, p. 100). Overall, the so-called ''national bourgeoisie,'' or, in concrete terms, local capital, becomes "imperialism's most important long-term partner" (Harman, 1994, p. 15) - - an important and significant socio-politico-economic force in the reproduction of cheap labor power (in particular, women's labor) within the new forms of "internationalized accumulation process" (Johnson, 1983, p. 238), the ''new international division of labor (NIDL)'' (Federici, 2012, pp. 65-75,) and the global sweatshops (Custers, 2012).

The Dominant Class

Both Al-e Ahmad and Fanon harshly criticize the so-called "dominant classes'' in Iran and post-colonial Africa, respectively. Initially, however, Al-e Ahmad's (1984) critique of Iran's state managers and leaders is disappointing. As he often does with other topics, he contradicts himself when he is explaining the leaders' origins. In one passage, he makes the bizarre claim that in Iran, "the lumpens of every trade and class customarily come to power", without explaining how "misfits" with "no will of their own" (p. 93) are able to do so. A few pages later,

Al-e Ahmad *also* claims that "in the occidentotic countries" (which include Iran), "politicians are generally drawn from among the literati, and the venerable ones," who "are often those who have been taken for a ride by the Western occidentotics" (p. 99). As well, Al-e Ahmad's other initial criticisms of Iran's dominant class are merely vague generalizations: for example, Iran's leaders are "standing on thin air" and are "devious" (pp. 92, 93).

Such vague statements appear to express and reflect the grave dangers of openly criticizing Iran's state managers and leaders during the early 1960s, when even mild expressions of political dissent led to arrest by the Shah's secret police. In fact, most Iranian cultural workers or intellectuals did not begin to openly criticize Iran's state managers and leaders until 1977, when the Shah, facing criticism from Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, and the American government, carried out some limited reforms in an effort to show that his government's concern for human rights was increasing (Parsa, 1989). Therefore, in the early 1960s, Al-e Ahmad was well ahead of his time when he wrote in *Occidentosis*, "From a political standpoint, we live under the banner of the government that is at once autocratic and lax for all the half-hearted displays of freedom it decks itself out with." "It is autocratic," Al-e Ahmad continues, "in that there is no refuge from it, no hope, no freedom, no justice." The government is also lax, he adds, "in that one may heave a sigh now and then or emit a harmless and ineffective yell" (p. 106). This kind of stinging attack against Iran's state managers and dominant class helps to explain why Al-e Ahmad's writings later

played a major role in “fortifying, inspiring and galvanizing [a sector of Iranian masses] for the final assault on Shah’s regime”(Hanson, 1983, p. 1).

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon’s harsh criticisms of the dominant class in the post-colonial Africa helped to make his critique similarly galvanizing. He explains that after a former African colony gains its independence, the national bourgeoisie establishes a single-party state, which, he argues, “is the modern form of the bourgeois dictatorship - - stripped of mask, make up, and scruples, cynical in every respect” (Fanon, 2004, p. 111). The party appoints a popular leader, who in colonial times, embodied the aspiration of the colonized masses. Now, like the class he represents and helps to perpetuate, he becomes detached from the popular masses and turns into “the CEO of a company of profiteers composed out of a national bourgeoisie intent only on getting the most out of the situation” (Fanon, 2004, p. 112). This class, in turn, works actively with Western companies to further its (and not the masses’) own interests and desires, just as it did during the colonial times. Said (1994) sums up the contribution of this analysis: “Fanon was the first major theorist of anti-imperialism to realize that orthodox [bourgeois] nationalism followed along the same track hewn out by imperialism, which, while it appeared to be conceding authority to the nationalist bourgeoisie, was really extending its hegemony” (p. 273). Fanon (2004) concludes that the national bourgeoisie must be “resolutely opposed because literally it serves no purpose.” It and its leaders merely “prolong the heritage of the colonial economy, thinking, and institutions” (p. 120), instead of supporting and defending the oppressed masses’ revolutionary aspirations.

The Intellectuals

Fanon and Al-e Ahmad were critics who were deeply concerned with the social and political roles of intellectuals in colonial and post-colonial African countries and Iran prior to the Iranian revolution (1978-1979), respectively. For Al-e Ahmad, the solution to all the woes of Iran was its emancipation from Western politico-economic and cultural domination. In his writing beginning with *Occidentosis*, his desire for such emancipation led to "a relentless attack on the secular intellectuals who [were] the bearer of Western culture in Iran" (Moaddel, 1993, p. 149). He introduced this attack "cursorily, even impressionistically" in *Occidentosis* (Algar, 1984, p. 17), and then provided a much more careful and detailed elaboration of it in *On the Service and Betrayal of Intellectuals* (Al-e Ahmad, 1978). Just as he conceptualizes the "West" as "some monolithic whole intent on the domination of Iran, differentiating between Western nations only in relation to specific historical events inside Iran" (Hanson, 1983, p. 5), he also, in *Occidentosis* and in his *On the Service and Betrayal of Intellectuals* essentializes Iranian cultural workers or intellectuals, tarring them all with the same broad strokes. In contrast, in *The Wretched of the Earth,* Fanon (2004) traces the "various phases of development in the works [and degrees of political involvement] of colonized writers" (p. 158), showing how some emerge and develop from being what Al-e Ahmad would call "occidentotic" to become politically and socially engaged activists in Fanon's own mould. This section will begin by discussing the Gramscian and Fanonian concepts of the "intellectual" and will conclude by comparing Al-e Ahmad's and Fanon's analyses of intellectuals and their relation to the specific

forms of local development, reproduction of power, and resistance to strategies and discourses of power in Iranian and colonial and post-colonial African social formations.

The Gramscian Intellectual

As Bellamy (1997) comments, "Gramsci's writings have long had a special place in the hearts of Western left-wing intellectuals . . ." (p. 27) because he assigns them an all-important role in revolutionary struggles. Essentially, he argues that the extreme of Olympian detachment, on the one hand, and of autocratic rule by an intellectual elite, on the other hand, can best be prevented through "a form of immanent critique that evolves out of the prevailing views and practices of ordinary people" (Bellamy, 1997, p. 26). Furthermore, Gramsci rejects the idealist concept of "great intellectuals," believing that "all men are intellectuals," for all individuals have a kind of "spontaneous philosophy" (as cited in Bellamy, 1997, p. 35). However, he adds that "not all men in society have the function of intellectuals" (as cited in Swingewood, 1991, p. 210) which, in his view, is to help the masses to think beyond their own common sense understanding of their existing "social reality" and social relations.

Not all intellectuals carry out this social-historical practice and role, however, for Gramsci distinguishes between "traditional" and "organic" intellectuals. The first group have what Gramsci calls a "speculative" and "metaphysical" point of view. Generally, traditional intellectuals adopt a detached social stance and "put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group" (Gramsci, as cited in Bellamy, 1997, p. 34). In their

detachment, they perceive themselves as practicing and playing a role in a kind of platonic, eternal realm of truth independent of the rest of the world. In contrast, “organic” intellectuals are socially engaged and “discover the truth through examining the thought of the common people” (Bellamy, 1997, p. 34). Swingewood (1991) explains that organic intellectuals “express the aspirations of a class without themselves constituting a class” (p. 211). They are found among all “social forces or movements” (Boggs, 1993, p. 194); however, according to the Gramscian view of intellectuals, they must be linked with “the very fabric of proletarian life” and “the proletarian milieu (factories, community life, culture).” That is to say, they must become a popular social force that is fully engaged in the changing ensemble of “social relations, culture, and language” transcending the gap between the “intellectual and popular realms” and linking “theory and practice, the organized and the spontaneous, the political and the social” (Boggs, 1994, pp. 57-8).

The most famous recent example of the so-called “organic” intellectual is Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), who, for around 30 years after World War Two, “epitomized the committed intellectual” (Drake, 2002, p. 4). Before serving in the French army in this war, he resembled one of Gramsci’s “transcendental” intellectuals - - committed only to himself and disengaged from political events of his time. The war, however, “destroyed Sartre’s illusions about isolated, self-determining individuals and made clear his own personal stake in the events of the time” (Aronson, 1980, p. 108). After being a prisoner of war for nine months, he formed a resistance group in Paris, joined a writers’ resistance group, and called for writers to express their political

commitment (Aronson, 1980). Later, his public support of Algerian independence made him the target of a right-wing campaign of terror (Aronson, 1980) and led him to write the preface for *The Wretched of the Earth*. During the post-war years, Sartre had a remarkable appeal among other left-wing intellectuals. As Martin (2000) memorably comments, Sartre was one of those rare intellectuals "who can speak the truth to power with a power of their own" (p. 49).

The Fanonian Intellectual

Fanon must be considered as a similar figure. Like Sartre, Fanon served in the French army during World War Two. Also like Sartre, Fanon was radicalized by the war: "He had fought, he had been injured, he had been decorated, but more importantly he had realized that it was not only Vichy France that was racist, but French civilization" (Gibson, 2003, p. 5). After studying philosophy, Fanon obtained a medical degree in psychiatry and became involved in the Algerian war. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, Fanon "identified himself as an Algerian and constructed himself as an Algerian revolutionary" (Gibson, 2003, p. 11). In effect, he became, like Sartre, an embodiment of Gramsci's "organic" intellectual.

Fanon's understanding of colonized intellectuals reflects Gramsci's theories. Fanon (2004) identifies three stages of development in the works of colonized writers. He writes, "First, the colonized intellectual proves he has assimilated the colonizer's culture. His works correspond point by point with those of his metropolitan ["European"] counterparts" (pp. 158-159). Gramsci would describe this type of intellectual as "transcendental": he or she has

adopted “the abstract, universal values of the colonizer” (Fanon, 2004, p. 9) and cut himself/herself off from the “masses.” Al-e Ahmad (1984) would describe him (he never considered women as intellectuals) as “occidentotic”: he has adopted European values, lifestyles and cultures without modifying or altering or accommodating them to his own country’s circumstances, to the indigenous/local culture and to the existing social relations. Finally, Said (1979) would say that Fanon’s first-stage colonized intellectual has “orientalized” himself/herself from within. Said (1979) understands “orientalism” as “a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought”; it is “the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (p. 42). Because “colonialism and all its modes of thought have seeped into [the colonized intellectuals]” (Fanon, 2004, p. 9), they perceive themselves and their culture as inferior to their colonizers and their culture, respectively.

In Fanon’s (2004) analysis, the second-stage colonized writer “has his convictions shaken and decides to cast his mind back” (p. 159). The second-stage intellectuals, seeking a cultural stimulus comparable to the glorious panorama flaunted by the colonizer, immerse themselves in their own culture and history. When they return from this mental journey, they extol the virtues of their own culture in the distant past and also decide “to draw up a list of the bad old ways characteristic of the colonial world” (Fanon, 2004, p. 159). However, because he “is not integrated with his people, since he maintains an outsider’s relationship with them” (Fanon, 2004, p. 159), he is not yet a fully politically engaged intellectual. This individual writes what Fanon (2004) calls “pre-combat literature” (p. 159), which praises the indigenous culture and

describes the colonial malaise, without calling for revolutionary change. In Gramscian terms, Fanon's second stage of the colonized intellectual's development is a 'transitional stage' in which some "transcendental" intellectuals begin to move towards becoming "organic" ones.

In Fanon's third-stage, the colonized intellectuals become fully developed "organic" intellectuals. The turning point in this development process occurs after the intellectuals make contact with the peasants and recognise their (the intellectuals) estrangement from them. Now, instead of perceiving them as "backward" and mired in unchanging traditions, the intellectuals are "constantly awe struck" and "literally disarmed by [the peasants'] good faith and integrity" (Fanon, 2004, p. 13). Moreover, instead of writing "precombat literature" idealizing the indigenous past and "every last particular of the indigenous landscape," these intellectuals now write "combat literature" and become "a galvanizer[s] of the people" (Fanon, 2004, p. 159). Gibson (2003) summarizes this stage of the colonized intellectual's development as "a stage where intellectuals, instead of merely losing themselves in an abstraction of the people, act as catalysts in the people's 'awakening'" (p. 169).

Al-e Ahmad and his View of the Iranian intellectuals

Al-e Ahmad does not fit easily into either one of Gramsci's types or one of Fanon's stages. He is not a completely detached "traditional" intellectual, for he is deeply concerned about Iran's occidentosis and all its related social, cultural, economic and political problems. However, he is also not, in Gramsci's terms, a completely engaged "organic" intellectual, because he

remains detached from the Iranian masses, particularly the subaltern classes. In fact, by emphasising their "inertia and sterility," he passes "the same pejorative judgement on the peasantry as the colonists" (Fanon, 2004, p. 65). Al-e Ahmad is also not in either of Fanon's first and third stages, but does not fit comfortably into his second stage. Like other stage-two colonized intellectuals, Al-e Ahmad rejects the endeavour of stage-one intellectuals to make European culture their own, and he also turns to his country's imagined ancestral past, the mythological ancestral land, and the legacy of the dead or the undead, where he discovers Perso-Islamic political and cultural authenticity or authentic sovereign self/identity as well as evidence of glory and power, embodied in the figures of the glorious heroes and warriors. In addition, Al-e Ahmad writes in the kind of style that Fanon (2004) attributes to the typical stage-two intellectual: "A jagged style, full of imagery, for the image is the drawbridge that lets out the unconscious forces in to the surrounding meadows. An energetic style, alive with rhythms and bursting with life" (p. 157). However, far from praising all the details of the indigenous landscape and the local culture or popular cultural forms and practices, Al-e Ahmad harshly criticizes them. Thus, he shares some characteristics of the "organic" and stage-two intellectuals, but without falling decisively into either category.

Finally, Al-e Ahmad does not, like the so-called phase or stage-three intellectuals, call for a revolution by and for the oppressed/exploited classes. He expects nothing positive from Iran's oppressed classes and popular masses, but claims (after relentlessly criticising them) that he does not blame them for all of Iran's social ills, problems, and "setbacks." Rather, he argues

that “it is the incorrect leadership of [Iran’s] struggles that has led to such outcomes” (p. 93). Al-e Ahmad feels that he has a mission to solve Iran’s problems, but he appears to be the kind of intellectual “who hopes for reform from above and would dearly love to hand the new world over to a grateful people, rather than see the liberating struggle of a self-conscious and freely associated people in a new world for themselves”; furthermore, he “[cares] a lot for measures to drag [his] nation out of stagnation, but very little for democracy” (Cliff, as cited in Harman, 1994, p. 30). Al-e Ahmad (1984) argues, for example, that Iran’s “best interest” does not lie in imitating “Western-style democracy”(p. 110), and his writing helped to contribute to the emergence of Islamism and inspired the creation of an anti-democratic political system - - a new type of authoritarian, patriarchal regime managed by Islamists, in particular, the (male) Shi’a clergy as the embodiment of God and the ultimate arbiter of truth or the possessor of ‘’eternal truths’’ and the correct knowledge of the world.

When Al-e Ahmad turns away from Iran’s subaltern or oppressed classes and the popular masses to consider its intellectuals, he continues to be highly critical and pessimistic. Although he deals with them only intermittently and unsystematically in *Occidentosis*, the “destructive influence of Westerners in the creation of mentally orientalized native intellectuals is the pivotal point around which [the argument in this text] hinges” (Mahmoodi & Jelodar, 2011, p. 27). Al-e Ahmad has contempt for the subaltern classes and the popular masses and dislikes and criticizes the bourgeoisie, but he reserves “his most caustic criticism for Iran’s secular intellectuals” (Vahdat, 2000, p. 65). He believes that they are the main carriers and transmitters

of occidentosis in Iran and, hence, are the group most responsible for all of Iran's social ills. He presents them as being completely selfish and apathetic. As a result, they lack the stature of Gramsci's "transcendental" intellectuals, who are at least interested in "metaphysical" truths beyond themselves. As well, Al-e Ahmad presents Iran's intellectuals as inescapably trapped in occidentosis, so that they have no hope of becoming stage-two or stage-three intellectuals. As Al-e Ahmad (1984) bluntly states, he expects nothing from Iran's intellectuals "besides a deeper plunge into occidentosis" (p. 117).

In Al-e Ahmad's (1984) functionalist analysis, Iran's intellectuals' descent into occidentosis occurs in three stages. First, the intellectuals become orientalized from within when they internalize the West's view of the East's "inferiority." For Al-e Ahmad (1984), such internalization "is the ugliest symptom of occidentosis: to regard yourself as nothing, not to think at all, to give up all reliance on your own self, your own eyes and ears, to give over the authority of your own senses to any pen held by any wretch who has said or written a word as an orientalist" (pp. 98-99). In this enervated condition, the intellectuals become "the pawns, if not the direct agents, of cultural imperialism" (Vahdat, 2000, p. 66). 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" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 92). Thus, he colludes with Westerners to turn himself into "a thing with no ties to the past and no perception of the future" (p. 92).

Al-e Ahmad's essentializing of Iranian intellectuals includes two of the many "contradictory and controversial positions in [his] discourse" (Vahdat, 2000, p. 65). One of his main criticisms of the intellectuals is that they have no interests in or ties with Iran's culture and traditions. Consequently, they, for example, no longer go to the mosques, and they seek revelation "not in scriptures but in European books" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 98). However, Al-e Ahmad (1984) earlier comments that 90 percent of Iranians "still live according to religious criteria" and that the "poorer these people are, the more they must rely on religious beliefs as the sole means of making life bearable" (p. 71). Therefore, he needs to explain why the intellectuals should join the "primitive" (his word) masses by also seeking comfort and meaning in religion. As well, by criticising the intellectuals for their lack of faith in Islam, Al-e Ahmad (1984), implies that it would give them a defence against occidentosis and the oppressive dependency on the Western imperialist powers, yet he argues that "the more influential the commandments and prohibitions of religion, the deeper grows the dungeon of nations and peoples" (p. 75).

Finally, as *Occidentosis* reveals, Al-e Ahmad repeatedly criticizes the clergy -- the group of Iranian men who are most likely to "seek revelation in scriptures" -- and he himself consistently refers to "European books" to support and illustrate his main points. In fact, he "translated numerous works into Persian from French" (Hanson, 1983, p. 8). This activity reflected his own interests and also made Western points of view accessible to the Iranian public. As Mirsepassi (2011) notes, not only Al-e Ahmad, but also other Iranian social critics and cultural workers, such as Ali Shariati, found inspiration in the writings of "the cream of the West's own intellectual literati, including Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, Beckett, and others" (p. 117). Throughout *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad cites Western authors and sources, including *Time* magazine, and except for one line from the Qur'an in the last sentence of his book, never uses the scriptures as an authority. Moreover, according to Algar (1984), Al-e Ahmad's interpretation of this verse from the Qur'an "is unacceptable to the '*ulama*" and also "is a further indication that Al-i Ahmad was not immune from the disease he describes" (p. 150). Overall, his criticism of Iranian intellectuals is self-contradictory and hypocritical.

Unlike Fanon, Al-e Ahmad does not indicate that self-orientalised intellectuals can develop into second-or third-stage intellectuals. His pessimism is based partly on his intellectual elitism and functionalist political and social thought, in particular, his elitist conception of intellectuals -- as the 'great men of culture', the vanguards of Reason, and the bearers of correct knowledge of the world -- and partly on his limited understanding of the intellectual realm (which he reduces to a set of mental activities) as well as the lack of (direct) political

engagement of a significant segment of Iranian cultural workers or intellectuals during the 1950s and 1960s. Keddie (2006) reports that the Shah's regime created and fostered "an official nationalist ideology" in an effort to respond to the problems created by the authoritarian state and by the violent process of capitalist development, or the so-called "modernization" of Iran: "In order to soften cultural resistance, institutions patronized by the Queen and honoring Iranian traditions were created. Some intellectuals found in them an aseptic place to express themselves and to write reports that were put aside. In these institutions no one could discuss religion or politics" (p. 190). Keddie is over-generalizing, for in some of the Queen's institutions, "the Leftist intellectuals found a niche to 'publish' artistic works that were not necessarily in line with [the] Shah's policies," with most of them "adopting a metaphorical language to evade censorship" (K. Sheibani, personal communication, May 19, 2015). Examples include films such as Bahram Beyzai's *Downpour* (1971) and books such as Ahmad Shamlu's children's books, which were produced and distributed by The Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (K. Sheibani, personal communication, May 19, 2015). Overall, however, the Leftist intellectuals had to be very cautious and indirect in their publication about religion and politics.

In *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad articulates and reflects on this dismal 'social reality' when he explains how "the cream of [Iran's] intellectuals -- the cream of its occidentotics" (p. 90) participates in seminars and planning commissions led by Western advisors. Instead of asserting themselves in Iran's interests, these intellectuals "see it as their moral duty to serve

ultimately as interpreters for the Western advisors, [and] as administrators and executers of their decisions and goals" (p. 90). Much evidence indicates that many or even most of Iran's cultural workers or intellectuals were apathetic politically during the 1950s and 1960s and that Al-e Ahmad's critique of politico-economic subordination (the alleged dependency and surrender of sovereignty) to imperialism and cultural imitation, particularly, of the Western sexual morality, influenced the political imaginary of many Iranian intellectuals (Keddie, 2006).

Al-e Ahmad's hostility towards other Iranian intellectuals reveals not only the socio-cultural and political relations or "realities" of the 1950s and 1960s, but also his isolation from his Iranian intellectual peers. Algar (1984) mentions that "Al-i-Ahmad was probably alone among the literary intelligentsia of Iran in correctly perceiving the uprising of 15 Khurdad 1342/6 June 1963 as a new and decisive stage in the struggle between 'the secret government of religion' and the Iranian state" (p. 19). June 1963 was also about the same time ("early 1963") when Al-e Ahmad (1984) was writing the second edition of *Occidentosis* (p. 26). In this work, his sense of estrangement from not only other Iranian intellectuals in particular, but also other Iranians in general is obvious. Algar (1984) reports that the Iranian intellectuals of the 1960s were isolated from the masses. Al-e Ahmad was, in fact, doubly isolated as a solitary voice of revolt in the isolated group of his peers.

Fanon and his View of Colonized and Post-Colonized Intellectuals

Whereas Al-e Ahmad defies straightforward categorization as an “intellectual”, Fanon is clearly a Gramscian “organic” and Fanonian “stage-three” intellectual. For Gramsci, “it was possible for a certain kind of intellectual to represent the interest of oppressed groups and encourage them to liberate themselves by developing a critical consciousness of their situation from within their own current thinking and acting” (Bellamy, 1997, p. 35). The accounts of Fanon’s life reveal a long record of this type of critical pedagogy (Freire), dialogical struggle (Bakhtin), the concrete practice of deconstruction or ideology critique (Derrida/Adorno), and the transformative and active participation in everyday life as a practical materialist and revolutionary. At medical school, Fanon helped to organize the union of students from overseas and edited their mimeographed newspaper; at the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in Algeria, he tried to help his patients to understand the influence of the Algerian war on their attitudes and behaviours; after joining the FLN and being expelled from Algeria, he went to Tunisia, where he edited a pro-FLN newspaper (Gendzier, 1973); in 1960, he went to Mali, “with the intention of opening up of a third front and developing anti colonial solidarity across the Sahara” (Gibson, 2003, p. 5). Moreover, his writing style is nothing like the “jagged style” that he believed characterizes “pre-combat literature” (Fanon, 2004, p. 159). Rather, he has an eloquent, literary, yet still energetic style with Biblical echoes and cadences. As a practical materialist or a so-called “engaged intellectual,” he “demonstrated how important political interventions could be achieved by developing the connections [among] his intellectual work, his medical practice, and his collective political activism” (Young, 2003, p. 147).

Moreover, unlike Al-e Ahmad, Fanon speaks of revolution as being carried out by and for the oppressed/exploited classes and the popular masses. Whereas Al-e Ahmad finds nothing in Iran's oppressed classes and expects nothing but more "backwardness" from them, Fanon celebrates the virtue and dignity of the African peasants and even praises the lumpenproletariat or the surplus population. Al-e Ahmad's oppressed classes need a strong leader to guide them or they will continue to sink into their centuries-long stupor. In contrast, Fanon (2004) emphasizes that "we must first and foremost rid ourselves of the very Western, very bourgeois, and hence very disparaging, idea that the masses are incapable of governing themselves" and also of beginning "the heroic saga of people hacking their way into history" (pp. 130, 162). Nevertheless, like Al-e Ahmad, Fanon (2004) does not desire or want a revolution that ends in Western-style democracy: he writes, "Let us not decide to imitate Europe and let us tense our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us endeavor to invent a man in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving" (p. 236). However, unlike Al-e Ahmad, Fanon recognizes the oppressed masses' ability to create grass-roots movements for autonomy and to fully participate in the socio-historical processes of building novel forms of community, culture, and popular or revolutionary democracy following decolonization.

Fanon also believes that previously colonized ("occidentotic") intellectuals both have played and are playing an active role in the decolonizing struggles in Africa. In his analysis, the "national bourgeoisie," and not the intellectuals, is the social class most responsible for the

oppressed popular classes' problems during the colonial and post-colonial times. The "useless and harmful bourgeoisie" lacks "vision and inventiveness" (Fanon, 2004, p. 119) and, hence, also lacks the ability to reinvent itself, whereas Fanon's intellectuals are capable of revolutionary change and development. They are not hopelessly trapped in occidentosis, but can play a key role in inspiring and nurturing revolutionary social change.

Despite the above differences, Al-e Ahmad and Fanon, in effect, both divide the intellectual's fall into occidentosis into the same three stages. In Fanon's analysis, as in Al-e-Ahmad's, the colonized intellectual is first orientalized from within: under the influence of the colonizers, he "rejects his accomplishments, suddenly feeling them to be alienating" and then "[throws himself] headlong into Western culture" (p. 156). Like "adopted children" who try too hard to please their foster parents, colonized intellectuals in this condition "will endeavour to make European culture [their] own" (p. 156). Next, the self-orientalized (African) intellectuals forget their national identities. As a result, these individuals become "colourless, stateless, rootless" (Fanon, 2004, p. 154), like Al-e-Ahmad's (1984) Iranian intellectuals, who become things "without authenticity" and are "at home nowhere rather than everywhere" (p. 95). Finally, Fanon's colonized intellectuals complete their descent into occidentosis when they fail to remember the importance of cultural differences. After accepting the "cogency" of the colonizer's culture, they become "[sentinels] on duty guarding the Greco-Roman pedestal" (Fanon, 2004, p. 11), assuming its universality and its relevance to their own cultures. In this "occidentotic" stage of their development, Fanon's stage-one intellectuals do not realize that all

the European values, which seem "to ennoble the soul, [are] worthless because they have nothing in common with the real-life struggle in which the people are engaged" (Fanon, 2004, p. 11).

Unlike Al-e Ahmad, Fanon provides a coherent analysis of the occidentotic intellectual. First, Al-e-Ahmad attacks Iran's intellectuals for cutting themselves off from the masses, yet harshly criticizes the masses himself. In contrast, Fanon (2004) leaves no doubt of his close emotional identification with and endless admiration for the oppressed popular classes. For example, he comments, "During the course of recent years, I have had the opportunity to witness the extra ordinary examples of honour, self-sacrifice, love of life, and disregard for death in an Algeria at war" (p. 221). Second, religion is not an issue for Fanon, and he does not condemn other intellectuals for their lack of religious faith while *also* criticizing the clergy, who are widely perceived to be their religions' most devout followers. Third, Fanon does not repeatedly criticize colonized intellectuals for admiring Western authors, while also frequently citing them as authorities in support of his own argument. His range of sources reveals that although he knows French philosophy and literature well (his sources include Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*), he feels the deepest affinity to African writers such as Sèkou Tourè and Keita Fodeba, and to the Martinique writer Aime Cesaire. All three of these authors were "engaged intellectuals" who became involved in the governance of their countries: Torè and Fodeba were the president and the minister of internal affairs, respectively, of the Republic of Guinea (Fanon, 2004); Cesaire became a deputy for the Revolutionary Party of Martinique and

also mayor of Fort-De-France, the capital city of this country (Rosello, 1995). Thus, Fanon's supporting sources are consistent with his anti-colonial, anti-imperialist criticisms.

More importantly, Fanon also differs from Al-e Ahmad by avoiding the kind of denunciatory approach "that still takes colonialism as its point of reference" (Gibson, 2003, p. 171). Al-e Ahmad's Iranian intellectuals are forever floundering in the muck of occidentosis, so he cannot do anything but criticize them. In contrast, Fanon conceptualizes two further stages in the development of colonized intellectuals, so he is able to celebrate their capacity for positive change. As Gibson (2003) explains, these next two stages or phases "express reactions to, or negations of the first phase" (p. 169). Two factors provoke the colonized intellectuals to move into Fanon's second phase or stage. First, they become dissatisfied with their country's nationalist parties, whose activities "are purely for electioneering purposes and amount to no more than a series of philosophic-political discourses on the rights of peoples to self-determination" (Fanon, 2004, p. 21), instead of actions that would actually confront the colonizers. Second, the colonized intellectuals also begin to question the colonizers' image and perception of the colony's "barbaric" past. These two factors' combined effect is to encourage the colonized intellectual to criticize "the ideological vacuum" and "dearth of strategy and tactics" of the nationalist parties and also to try "to renew contact with [his] people's oldest, inner essence, the farthest removed from colonial times" (Fanon, 2004, pp. 77, 148). Together, these activities lead to the rejection of the colonizers' ''civilizing" mission and the nationalists' parties' *de facto* support of it and also to "a rediscovery and even reinvention of the [pre-

colonial] past" (Gibson, 2003, p. 170). Eventually, the intellectual's increasing rejection of his or her party's ineffectiveness and the colonizers' rule draws unwelcome attention from the colonial authorities and forces him or her to flee to the relative safety of the countryside.

In the countryside, where the colonized intellectual finally meets the masses, from whom he has previously been estranged, Fanon's third phase or stage of the intellectual's development begins. For Fanon (2004), this encounter with the masses is the decisive factor in the intellectual's transformation into a fully engaged, politically committed individual: "One of the greatest services the Algerian revolution has rendered to Algerian intellectuals was to put them in contact with the masses, to allow them to perceive the extreme, unspeakable poverty of the people and at the same time to witness the awakening of their intelligence and the development of their consciousness" (p. 30). Inspired by the rural masses, who have always "stood firm in spite of the weak-minded, the fence-sitters, and the would-be dictators" (p. 130), the intellectual, in turn, helps them in their everyday resistance to power and exploitation in the messy world of production and reproduction, in their empirically acute analysis of the contradictions and relations of forces, and in their historically specific struggles for dignity and autonomy or self-determination. During this process, the recognition of the "people's staying power stimulates the intellectual to transcend the lament" (Fanon, 2004, p. 173), or stage-two "precombat" writing. Now, instead of "producing work exclusively with the oppressor in mind -- either to charm him or to denounce him" -- the colonized intellectual "gradually switches over to addressing himself to his people" and to making "the call for revolt" (p. 173).

Like Al-e Ahmad's analysis of the intellectual, Fanon's reflects and expresses both the political and social-cultural life or "social realities" of the 1950s and 1960s and also his own relationship to other intellectuals. In Algeria, Fanon witnessed first-hand the role of intellectuals in the revolution, and, as Philcox (2004) comments, for Fanon, "Algeria was the constant point of reference" (p. 247). Whereas Al-e Ahmad observed a significant segment of spoiled, disengaged intellectuals living during a pre-revolutionary time and situation, Fanon witnessed a persecuted, engaged or revolutionary intellectuals participating in everyday life, in anti-colonial mass struggles, and in the making of concrete popular forms of democracy. Furthermore, as Algar (1984) comments, "Al-i Ahmad's political and intellectual commitments had an unstable quality" (p. 11). For example, he was born into a devoutly religious family; later made a break with Islam by joining the Tudeh Party, Iran's most powerful Leninist organization; quit this party three years later; joined the socialist "Third Force" party in 1952; quit in 1953; criticized religion in general in 1961 (in *Occidentosis*); and then at least partly recognized the potential usefulness of religion -- especially the role of Islamic discourses as a mobilizing socio-political force against colonial ideology, corporate capital, and Western imperialist powers -- after making a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964 (Algar, 1984). During his "long series of intellectual and spiritual peregrinations" (Algar, 1984, p. 17), Al-e-Ahmad did not appear to form many lasting ties with Iran's cultural workers and writer-activists. In *Occidentosis*, his voice is the cry of an isolated outsider angrily denouncing the members of his own social group.

In contrast, after serving in World War Two, Fanon's activities and attitudes demonstrated his unchanging loyalty to the cause of the world's oppressed colonized masses and his fidelity to the movement for autonomy or self-determination. He formed close professional and personal bonds with other members of Algeria's FLN (Gendzier, 1973), and he concludes *The Wretched of the Earth* by repeatedly addressing his readers as his "comrades." He felt a deep sense of solidarity with the oppressed popular classes of Algeria, particularly after he had provided psychiatric treatment to the victims of French torture (see *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 181-233). When Fanon (2004) makes statements such as "We believe that the future of culture and the richness of a national culture . . . are based on the values that inspired the struggle for freedom" (p. 179), his voice expresses the assurance of a writer-activist who perceives himself as a member of a community of like-minded individuals.

The Role of the Intellectuals

In his study of intellectuals, Said (1994 b) provides a useful (theoretical) definition of the role of the so-called 'engaged' intellectual, or what Gramsci and Fanon would call the "organic" and the "stage-three" intellectual, respectively:

> The intellectual is an individual with a specific public role in society that cannot be reduced simply to being a faceless professional, a competent member of a class just going about her/his business. The central fact for me is, I think, that the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-

> opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'etre* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug (p. 11).

In the above passage, Said begins and ends by emphasizing that he is not, in effect, speaking of Gramsci's "transcendental" intellectuals, or the intellectuals who perceive themselves as detached from their everyday lives and are preoccupied with the search for "truth" for its own sake. Rather, Said's intellectual as "cultural worker" (to borrow Giroux's expressions, 1993), fully participates in the everyday struggles of the multitude against forms of power/ideology, articulates a message, "to, as well as for, a public" and has the *raison d'etre* of calling attention to "all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug." The key elements here are "a public" and "those people": the 'engaged' intellectual is fully engaged in the everyday resistance to historically specific forms of power and domination and is clearly involved in opening up autonomous democratic spaces not only for himself/herself or other intellectuals, but by and for the 'public' -- all the subaltern classes, the marginalized and impoverished surplus populations, and individuals who have been oppressed, denied a voice, and who need "a politics of dialogue" (not a politics of representation or "a movement on behalf of others" by the intervention of an "external force") or "politics of dignity" (Holloway, 2010, pp. 44-45, 58-63, 117) through which to speak. Said's intellectual ceases to be a "professional revolutionary" or an "outsider," and does not make revolution on behalf of the downtrodden masses or bring to them consciousness or political identity from *without*, as formulated and expressed by Lenin (1969, p. 31) in *What Is to Be Done?*. Rather, like Subcomandante Marcos, Said's intellectuals attempt to learn to listen to the persecuted, the

exiled, the unemployed, and the downtrodden masses (Marcos, 2007). His/her objective or task is neither to 'take power' nor to employ a method that "musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time" (Benjamin, 1969, p. 262) but "to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history" (p. 263). According to Said's definition, Al-e Ahmad is not a fully "engaged" intellectual: he does "raise embarrassing questions" and "confront orthodoxy and dogma," but he is never an organic part of "the movement of community-based struggle from below" (Holloway, 2010, p. 61) embracing *the other* (Marcos, 2007, p. 344) and speaking truth to power. In contrast, Fanon (2004), who writes that intellectuals "must work and struggle in step with the people so as to shape the future and prepare the ground where vigorous shoots are already sprouting" (p. 168), always has the needs and desires, aspirations, and capabilities of the colonized multitude firmly in mind.

Al-e Ahmad's and Fanon's different views towards the masses necessarily shape their conceptions of the role of the intellectual in liberation struggles. In *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad (1984) asserts vaguely that "the spread of education and intellectualism will take the decisive role away [from both Iran's state and religious institutions]" (p. 74), whereas in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon provides detailed instructions for how the engaged intellectual can become a kind of "social movement actor" (Sitrin, 2012, p. 113) or "political educator" (Gibson, 2003, p. 65) who stirs "the passions and dignities" and encourages the colonized masses - - who already knew the existing state of affairs and were participating in political activities - - to depend on themselves and "think for themselves'' in their fight for freedom, dignity, and self-

determination (Gibson, 2003, pp. 163-67; Holloway, 2010, p. 226). The remainder of this section will compare the two views of the role of the intellectual.

The Role of the Intellectual in *Occidentosis*

In *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad's (1984) analysis creates a contrast between the masses and the "outstanding personalities" (p. 131), who offer Iran its only cure for the disease of occidentosis. To represent the masses, Al-e Ahmad uses the abstraction of "the ordinary man in the street," who "goes any way you point him" (p. 92). Al-e Ahmad adds, "In fact, we're in such a mess essentially because this man in the street cannot affect his own destiny, meaning we [who?] don't seek out his views as to how his destiny is to be determined" (p. 92). Here, Al-e Ahmad sounds rather like Fanon, who continually emphasizes the need for intellectuals to do things *with* and not to the "masses". Al-e Ahmad never returns to this idea again in *Occidentosis*, but he does repeat his belief that the masses need "correct" leaders to "train" and "lead" them. These "correct" leaders are the "outstanding personalities" who would be "disclosed" by an improved educational institution (p. 131). Al-e Ahmad explains that "it is *only* with the help of [these] self-sacrificing, self-surpassing, and principled people (who in the usage of pop psychology are termed antisocial, rigid, and unbalanced) that the weight of [Iran's] transformation and crisis may be borne and that the social disorder described in this work may be remedied" (p. 131, emphasis added). "Antisocial, rigid, and unbalanced"? Actually, Al-e Ahmad is describing himself, as he appears throughout *Occidentosis*. In other words, the Iranian popular masses need leaders like *him*, and the role of the other intellectuals is, presumably, to

become like him as well. Together, they will “train” and “lead” the masses and “save” or “liberate” Iran from the Western politico-economic and cultural domination.

Almost immediately after introducing his concept of “outstanding personalities,” Al-e Ahmad makes clear that he means “intellectuals”: he states, “The ranks are growing by the day of those [Iranians] educated in the schools, the universities, and Europe. The means to create a broadened intellectual environment are expanding . . . ” (p. 132). These comments suggest that such an environment will create the kind of intellectuals that are needed to lead Iran in the pursuit of *rah-e-svvom* or self-reliant/autarkic development and to liberate the Iranians from the influence of colonial ideology, the culture of inauthenticity (vulgarization and decadence), and moral decay. However, when Al-e Ahmad tries to explain this point in more detail, he once again contradicts himself. First, he comments earlier, “If I have hope for the future of intellectuals in Iran . . . one reason is [the] very diversity of methods by which our European-educated have studied, of their fields of study and places o f study. This is the wellspring of the wealth of Iran’s intellectual environments”(p. 118). Apparently, the European educational institutions -- integral components of the field of power and the reproduction of capitalist domination -- are producing and also will continue to produce the kind of intellectual leaders who can save Iran from occidentosis, cultural decline and oppressive dependence on imperialism, even though spending three or four years at university in Europe would only increase the likelihood of Iranian students becoming occidentotic. As well, if Western culture, thought, and values are like a disease that “closely resembles an infestation of weevils” (Al-e

Ahmad, 1984, p. 27), then the European educational institutions and pedagogical practices could not possibly *also* be "the wellspring of the wealth of Iran's intellectual environment."

In any case, Al-e Ahmad contradicts this contradiction when he proposes that, in order to prevent male Iranian students from returning to Iran with European and American wives, Iranian students should be allowed to study abroad only in India and Japan for the next twenty years. Finally, he deplores "the twisted thinking of those returning from Europe "(p. 133), just as he also deplores all Western influences on Iran. Overall, Al-e Ahmad's concept of the roles of "outstanding personalities" ignores the role of the exploited/oppressed classes in their fight for popular forms of democracy and their day-to-day needs and glorifies the cult of the "Great Leader." As well, his explanation of where and how Iranians will get this kind of education they need to become intellectuals and leaders is incoherent and even unintelligible.

The Role of the Intellectual in *The Wretched of the Earth*

After being expelled from Algeria, Fanon became a writer and editor for *El Moudjahid*, the FLN's newspaper in Tunisia (Gendzier, 1973). In December, 1957, he wrote three articles for this paper that briefly express his view of the role of French intellectuals in the Algerian revolution. Fanon (1969) begins the first of these articles by declaring, "One of the first duties of intellectuals and democrats in colonialist countries is unreservedly to support the national aspirations of colonized peoples" (p. 76). Throughout the remainder of his three articles, Fanon criticizes French intellectuals for not demonstrating the kind of complete "support" and

“solidarity” that he believes are their duty to provide. In *The Wrenched of the Earth*, Fanon develops this essential point by applying it to the intellectuals in colonized and post-colonized countries. Here, by emphasizing the solidarity between phase-or stage-three intellectuals and the oppressed classes, Fanon avoids the kind of sharp division that Al-e Ahmad creates by contrasting “outstanding personalities” and “the ordinary man in the street.” In Fanon’s (2004) view, the colonized intellectuals must understand that so-called “ordinary masses” are actually extraordinary. Hence, the first duty of the colonized intellectual is “to clearly define the people” (p. 163).

In order to fulfil this duty, the intellectual must begin with rigorous self-reflections. “We cannot go resolutely forward unless we first realize our alienation,” Fanon (2004) writes (p. 163). Colonized intellectuals must recognize that by accepting the colonizers’ view of their culture and their country’s masses, intellectuals have become alienated from them. Disengaging from the colonizers, however, requires the intellectual’s total commitment to the colonized multitude and its struggles. Fanon insists, “It is not enough to reunite with the people in a past where they no longer exist. We must rather reunite with them in their recent counter move which will suddenly call everything into question . . . ” (p. 163). The focus here is not only on the “popular masses” and their struggles, but also on reuniting *with* them rather than on “leading” or “training” them, as Al-e Ahmad proposes. In this context, the intellectual cannot possibly succeed by being, in Al-e Ahmad’s words, “antisocial, rigid, and unbalanced,” but must be sociable, flexible, and balanced.

After ridding themselves of their colonial assumptions and reuniting with the subaltern, intellectuals have three more roles to play in the struggle for self-determination and dignity. First, the intellectual must carry out the role of Gramsci's "organic intellectual" by "defining the place of action and the ideas around which the will of the people will crystallize" (Fanon, 2004, p. 163). To learn what these "ideas" and "place of action" are, the intellectual does not need to go to Europe, India, or Japan to study. Instead, s/he participates in the everyday experiences of the colonized struggle, attempts to investigate the emergence and production of the subjectivities of the colonized participants in the "multilayered struggle for *self*-determination" (Gibson, 2003, p. 40), and unmasks the reified forms of social relation and subtle forms of identity-based oppression generated and imposed by local relations of power and imperialism (Fanon, 2004). The colonized masses teach intellectuals what they need to know in order to help them to "allow initiatives to rise from below and attain maximum effective solidarity" (Graeber, as cited in Holloway, 2010, p. 269) and "to produce a radical opening towards the future" (Mentinis, 2006, p. 181). Fanon emphasizes, "Our [intellectuals'] greatest task is to constantly understand what is happening in our own countries. We must not cultivate the spirit of the exceptional or look for the hero, another form of leader. We must elevate the people, expand their minds, equip them, differentiate them, and humanize them" (p. 137). For Fanon, the intellectual-as-cultural worker is far from being a professional revolutionary or a Leninist vanguard, who stands outside the community and the daily struggles of the colonized subaltern for freedom and against multiple forms of oppression and subtle discourses of power. Nor is the intellectual a "leader," or "a person who is in charge and in control of others" (Lopez, 1995,

p. 113). Rather, Fanon's stage-three intellectual corresponds to the indigeneous concept or principle of "command obeying," i.e., a form of "pre-figurative or 'other' politics" expressed in the Zapatistas' "politics of listening" or "talking-listening" (Holloway, 2010, pp. 45, 225; Mentinis, 2006; Sitrin, 2012) that informs much of the current literature of the autonomous social movements and political groups. According to this democratic form of politics or anti-politics, the autonomous social movement actor or participant expresses unlimited concern for others (Sitrin, 2012), participates in the dialogism of the everyday life, and (re)incites and (re)activates "the revolutionary imaginary of the project of autonomy"(Mentinis, 2006, pp. 102-103) to support and build a world which embodies many worlds where the individual lives with autonomy and dignity (Holloway, 2010; Sitrin, 2012; Mentinis, 2006). Fanon (2004) suggests this kind of intellectual when he writes, for example, that the colonized intellectual must work with the oppressed masses "with the intention of opening up the future, of spurring them into action and fostering hope" (p. 167).

In Fanon's analysis, the colonized intellectual must carry out two other roles in addition to encouraging the subalterns to depend on their own self-activities and think for themselves (Gibson, 2003) in their fight for freedom and to move towards social self-determination. During the war for independence and social self-determination, the colonized intellectual must also become an active freedom fighter or mass movement participant. Fanon (2004) emphasizes that "in order to secure hope [for the colonized masses], in order to give it substance, [the colonized intellectual] must take part in the action and commit himself body and soul to the

national struggles" (p. 167). Thus, the colonized intellectual must have not only mental and rhetorical capabilities, because "muscle power is [also] required" (p. 167). Finally, during the postcolonial era, the intellectual still has yet another crucial role to play: "in undeveloped countries that acquire independence, there is almost always a small number of upstanding intellectuals, without set political ideas, who distinctively distrust the race for jobs and handouts that is symptomatic of the aftermath of independence" (Fanon, 2004, p. 121). Fanon's expression "upstanding intellectuals" is very similar to Al-e Ahmad's "outstanding personalities." However, as Gibson (2003) points out, Fanon always insists that the colonized intellectual must engage in dialogical struggles and interact with the oppressed multitude or toiling masses "in a non-elitist way" (p. 174). This requirement is as essential during the post-colonial era as it is during the struggle for independence and self-determination. Fanon (2004) implies this point when he writes, "the historical vocation of an authentic national bourgeoisie in an undeveloped country is to repudiate its status as bourgeois and an instrument of capital and to become entirely subservient to the revolutionary capital which the people represent" (pp. 98-99). The "upstanding intellectuals," who have *always* made themselves "subservient to the people,'' must continue to do so "in the decisive struggle to steer the nation in a healthy direction [during the post-colonial era]" (Fanon, 2004, p. 121).

Conclusion

Many scholars have given Al-e Ahmad's *Occidentosis* a prophetic and/or pioneering role in the history of post-colonial, anti-imperialist writing. For example, Mahmoodi and Jelodar

(2011) remark that parts of *Occidentosis* "anticipate with remarkable precision points made by Frantz Fanon and Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (1978)." However, Fanon wrote *The Wretched Of the Earth* between April and July of 1961 (Bhabha, 2004), or *before* Al-e Ahmad (1984) presented the first drafts of *Occidentosis* to a conference in Iran in November 1961 and January 1962. Thus, neither author's ideas can be said to "anticipate" the other's. More importantly, this chapter's comparison of Al-e Ahmad's and Fanon's concepts of the "intellectual" revealed that Fanon's writing, critical analysis, and rhetorical skills, along with his understanding of colonialism in particular and history in general, were far superior to Al-e Ahmad's much more limited critical skills and limited understanding. In terms of the topic of intellectuals, both authors shared the same goals of explaining the attitudes and behaviors of intellectuals in a "colonial" context and of recommending appropriate roles for them to follow. As well, both authors shared the same harshly critical view of the bourgeoisie, and both authors wrote as if they had a sense of mission to confront orthodoxy and to solve all the problems created by colonialism as a whole.

The similarities between the analyses in *Occidentosis* and *The Wretched of the Earth* end here, however. Al-e Ahmad represents himself as and is usually perceived to be the fervent defender of the Iranian traditions, local culture, and folk values, but, living in a profoundly contradictory social formation where the old order or social form appears to be disintegrating under the assault of Westernization and capitalist development, he reveals himself to be alienated from his fellow Iranians and lacking in firm values. Thus, he condemns the rural

oppressed classes and the clergy, who are the main practitioners and supporters of the local culture and 'traditions' he thinks he is defending, and he praises European education, which is one of the main sources of the occidentosis he is attacking. As an intellectual, he demonstrates none of the capacity for the kind of rigorous self-reflection that Fanon believes is the intellectual's first duty, and also none of the capacity for creating autonomous public spaces for the forgotten and dissenting voices, which Said (1994) argues is the engaged intellectual's main "public role" (p. 11). Finally, he is able to articulate the reductive metaphor of "occidentosis" as the causes of all Iran's problems, but fails completely to provide a coherent analysis of even this concept or abstraction. Fanon, although born in Martinique and educated in France, represents himself as an "Algerian" totally committed to the cause of the Algerian revolution and of colonized masses everywhere. He is accurately perceived as one of the great defenders of the oppressed (even the title of his most famous book refers to them), and he expresses his intense commitment to them in a well-analyzed, consistent argument free of these kinds of inconsistencies that plague Al-e Ahmad's writing. As a critical theorist or revolutionary, Fanon is self-reflective (he is aware of the challenges facing revolutionaries after their countries achieve independence), devoted to the exploited/oppressed ''masses" (he wrote *The Wretched of the Earth* while he was dying of leukemia), and critical without being intolerant. Fanon (1984) wrote, "Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity" (p. 145)). Fanon's ideas remain as vital today as they were when he first expressed them fifty years ago, and his life and writings continue to represent all the best qualities of the practical materialist or critical theorist.

Chapter 5

Lost in the Crowd

In 1943, when Al-e Ahmad was a twenty-year-old Tehran high-school graduate, he travelled outside of Iran for the first time, in order to visit the shrine of the Shi'i third imam Hosayn at Karbala in Iraq. Two years later, his first published short story, "The Pilgrimage," appeared in the March 1945 issue of the Iranian literary journal *Sokhan*, presenting the narrator's reflections on this "most important traditional Shi'i Moslem experience" (Hillmann, 1982, p. 34). In 1964, when Al-e Ahmad was one of Iran's most important social critics and writers of fiction, he completed a pilgrimage to Mecca in order to carry out "a duty which every Muslim is required to fulfil at least once in a lifetime, unless in poor health or in poverty" (Cover blurb, *Lost in the Crowd*). Two years later, his travel diary *Lost in the Crowd* was published, presenting his immediate observations and reflections during his pilgrimage.

Lost in the Crowd has become the key document in the ongoing debate about what Mirsepassi (2000) refers to as "the issue of [Al-e Ahmad's] personal faith" (p. 110), or his alleged "return to Islam" during the last years of his life. Some of his previous works, such as his short stories and novel *The School Principal*, represent Shi'i Islam as perpetuating ignorance and superstition upon the common people. In contrast, in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad (1984) presents Shi'i Islam as a powerful oppositional force to Westernization, yet also harshly

criticizes the Iranian clergy and asserts that those "enjoying no success in the present necessarily seek it in heaven" (p. 71). In any case, as Algar (1984) argues,

> It is, perhaps, a mistake to look for signs of the recovery of personal faith in [*Occidentosis*], which is fundamentally a socio-historical critique. [*Lost in the Crowd*], however, is a different matter, being an account of the *Hajj* [the pilgrimage to Mecca], a key experience in the life of every believing Muslim. If Jalal Al-i Ahmad had experienced a return to Islam as belief and practice, there surely would be evidence of it in this work (p. 18).

Algar (1984) concludes that "Such evidence is not entirely lacking," but notes that Al-e Ahmad does not represent himself as "an enthusiastic participant in the pilgrimage" (pp.18, 19). In contrast, Mirseppassi (2000) finds that Al-e Ahmad "views the *Hajj* in almost completely human (non-religious) terms," but also symbolizes Mecca as "the possibility of Muslim renewal in the modern world, the final commitment of [his] unsettled life" (pp. 114, 115). In fact, both critics are only partly correct: in *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad does not represent himself as an enthusiastic pilgrim, and he does view his whole experience in Mecca in almost completely human terms.

Lost in the Crowd expresses ambivalent and contradictory feelings about religion. On the one hand, Al-e Ahmad (1985) refers to himself as an "atheist" (p. 58) and repeatedly deplores the contemporary commercialization of the pilgrimage to Mecca, even declaring that "Pilgrimage and business are twins" (p. 114). On the other hand, when another pilgrim asks Al-e Ahmad (1985), "What is your religious school?", he replies, "I [want] to be of the same school as the Muslims at the dawn of time" (p. 114). As well, he often uses expressions such as "the

splendour of the dawn of Islam" (p. 67), and he seems to have undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca at least partly because he wanted to answer "the primal call of a desert religion," and to experience what he believes was its original "supernatural magnificence" (pp. 7, 40). Just as in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad (1984) idealizes pre-Safavid Shi'i Islam and Muslims' collective "sweet memories of open roads and caravans loaded with goods" (p. 47), he also, in *Lost in the Crowd,* romanticizes the earliest years of Islam, apparently forgetting that, in *Occidentosis*, he made the bizarre claims that the Prophet was able to create Islam because of his childhood encounter with Christian monks in Syria and that, therefore, Muslims "turn to the West in turning to Islam" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 41). In *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad constructs the kind of unsullied, pre-colonial Muslim essence that Said (1994) describes as" [standing] free from worldly time itself" (p. 228), and then measures his modern experience in Mecca against it. Inevitably, the real Mecca fails his test and leaves him with a profound feeling of "skepticism" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 123) about the spiritual significance of the pilgrimage.

This chapter will discuss Al-e Ahmad's ambivalence towards Islam in particular and religion in general in *Lost in the Crowd*. It will be argued that his detachment as a writer, his insistence on preserving his rational "self" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 58) and what he represents as the pervasive corruption engulfing the pilgrimage prevents him from surrendering himself to it and leads him to repeatedly characterize it as "mechanized primitivity" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, pp.78). In order to present this argument, the remainder of this chapter is divided into the

following sections: (1) background; (2) the title, epigraph, and narrative; (3) genre; (4) character; (5) techniques; (6) themes; and (7) conclusion.

Background

Hajj is the "Arabic-Persian term for the pilgrimage to Mecca", while *hajji* is the "title given to any Muslim who has made [this] pilgrimage" (Green, 1985a, p.127) and is also often used to refer to a Muslim who is currently making it. The *hajj*, which devoted Muslims perceive as their sacred duty to complete, involves a kind of "loaning of [one's] body... to a temporal ritual of the masses which has reproduced itself for centuries" (Mirsepassi, 2000, p.110). During the *hajj* season, huge numbers of Muslims - - 1,066,555 pilgrims participated in 1964, when Al-e Ahmad (1985) made his pilgrimage (p. 110) - - journey to Mecca in Saudi Arabia in order to visit nearby shrines and participate in three main rituals: the mass circumambulation of the *Kaaba*, the massive stone monument located in the courtyard of the Grand Mosque at Mecca; the *sa'y*, the ritual run performed by the *hajji* to commemorate Hagar's search for water (Green, 1985 a); and the *qurbani*, the ritual slaughter of animals.

In order to understand the significance of Ale-Ahmad's lack of belief in and critique of the *hajj*, one must appreciate its awesome importance in Islam and in the minds of devout Muslims. They consider the *hajj* to be one of the *arkan* (literally, "supports"; metaphorically, "basic elements") of Islam (Netton, 1997, p. 39). This word is used in Arabic to refer to "the five pillars of Islam," or to the five essential elements of the Islamic faith. In alphabetical order,

these five elements are *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca), *salat* (the five daily prayers), *sawm* (fasting during Ramadan, the most sacred month of the year for Muslims), *shahada* (the profession of faith in Allah and Muhammad, Allah's messenger), and *zakat* (almsgiving) (Netton, 1997, p. 39).

Devout Muslims believe that a person cannot reject or even criticize any of the five pillars without also rejecting Islam. The *Qur'an*, Islam's holiest book and the perceived word of God revealed through Jibril (the angel Gabriel), is very clear on this point. For example, in *sura* (Chapter) 2 of the *Qur'an*, Ibraaheem (Abraham) and Allah have a conversation after the former finishes the construction of the *Kaaba* (the cube-shaped structure in the courtyard of the Grand Mosque at Mecca) and then call upon the first Muslims to perform the *hajj*:

- Ibraheem: "My Lord, make this city (Makkah) a place of security and provide its people with fruits, such of them as believe in Allah and the Last Day."

- Allah: "As for him who disbelieves, I shall leave him in contentment for a while, then I shall compel him to the torment of the Fire, and worst indeed is that destination!" (2:126).

In *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad (1985) "rejects faith" in two ways: (1) he reveals that he "probably quit praying during [his] first year at the University" (p. 5), which would have been sometime between 1943, when he graduated from high school, and 1946, or when he graduated from the Teachers' Training College in Tehran (Algar, 1984), or around 20 years before he made his *hajj*; and (2) he also repeatedly describes the *hajj* as "mechanized barbarism" (p. 91). Given the importance of prayer and the *hajj* as two of the five pillars of

Islam, Ale-Ahmad could not abstain from the former and criticized the latter without also criticizing Islam writ large.

Some further information about the central role of the *hajj* in Islam will help to support this crucial argument. The *Kaaba* is the centre point not only of the *hajj* but also for Muslims all over the world ("Importance of Hajj," 2000). Muslims believe that the *Kaaba* was built first by Adam and then reconstructed by Ibraheem after the flood (Green, 1985a). Ibraheem, who was the first person to use the term "Islam," named everyone holding the same faith as he did a "Muslim," meaning someone who "surrenders and submits to the will of the Creator, Allah" ("Importance of Hajj," 2000). This total submission to Allah was closely related to Ibraheem's establishment of the *hajj*: he called upon Muslims, as a sign of their submission to Allah, to make at least one *hajj* during their lifetimes. The *hajj* cannot be performed anywhere but in Mecca, where the *Kaaba* is located, just as Muslims must face the direction towards Mecca during their prayers. (According to some *hadiths* (sacred Islamic texts), one prayer in the Great Mosque in Mecca (the first mosque built in the world) is equal to one hundred thousand prayers made elsewhere ("Importance of Hajj," 2000).) As the perceived origins of the *hajj* indicate, it was practiced for several thousand years before the time of the Prophet Mohammed (c.570-c.632 A.D.), who confirmed its sanctity and "showed his companions with every detail how to perform the best pilgrimage" ("importance of Hajj," 2000).

Since the time of Mohammed, Muslims have perceived the *hajj* as "a station of commemorations," relating its rituals to not only Ibraheem, Muhammad, and the first

generations of Muslims, but also to "the angels who circumambulate around al-bayt al-ma'amour . . . above in the seven Heavens as reported in many authentic hadiths" ("Importance of Hajj, 2000). The author of "Importance of Hajj" concludes his introduction to the *hajj* by explaining, "In commemorating [our ancestor], the pilgrim should think whether he, or she, is ready to offer the dearest thing to his, or her, heart for the sake of Allah. This religion [Islam] cannot survive in the hearts of people without sacrifices, devotion, sincere love, commitment, and dedication" ("Importance of Hajj," 2000). As the following sections of this chapter will make clear, Al-e Ahmad was not willing to offer anything to Allah during his *hajj* and was, in fact, nauseated by its most important rituals and other activities. His memoir does not demonstrate any significant "sacrifices," or anything that could be interpreted as an attitude of "devotion, sincere love, commitment, and dedication" towards the *hajj*. Therefore, according to Islamic teachings, which, as the son of an *alim* (a Msulim cleric), Al-e Ahmad would have been well aware of, he could not have rejected the *hajj* without also rejecting Islam.

Finally, if Al-e Ahmad's hostility towards the *hajj* had become common knowledge during his lifetime, he almost certainly would have been excluded from the Islamic community in Iran. As Elsaie (2012) explains,

> The community (*ummah*) in Islam is not founded on race, nationality, locality, occupation, kinship, or special interests. . . . The foundation of the community in Islam is the attitude that designates submission to the will of Allah, obedience to this Law, and commitment to his cause. . . . *What is required from the community is likewise required from every individual member.* This is because the whole community is an entity with every member accountable to Allah (emphasis added).

By rejecting the *hajj*, Al-e Ahmad, in effect, positioned himself as *un*accountable to Allah and, thereby, also signalled his rejection of his place in Iran's national imagined community. Having rejected, first, Islam, and then communism, and then having failed to regenerate his lost faith during his *hajj,* he finally (in *A Stone on a Grave*), embraced nihilism and "nothingness" during the final years of his life (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 95).

Al-e Ahmad carried out his *hajj* between April 10, 1964, when he left Tehran for Mecca, and May3, 1964, when he returned to the Tehran airport. During his pilgrimage, he was in a party of 85 other *hajjis* and, within this group, was also in a smaller group consisting of his sister and her husband, Javad; Mohaddes, the husband of another one of Al-e Ahmad's sisters; his father's uncle; and a guide, who used to be one of the followers of Al-e Ahmad's father, a Shi'i clergyman (Al-e Ahmad, 1985). After introducing the members of his group of pilgrims early in his diary, Al-e Ahmad rarely mentions them again, but not because he wishes to focus all his attention on the spiritual significance of his pilgrimage. As Hillmann (1985) comments, "Even in his reports of *hajj* events and ceremonies, Al-e Ahmad's focus is far different from that one would expect from most pilgrims; his primary interest seems to lie in presenting ironies and conflicts that the fact of the pilgrimage and its events raise in his mind" (p. xxxi). One could further comment that Al-e Ahmad's mind and the threat that the *hajj* becomes to his sense of his individuality are the main subjects of *Lost in the Crowd*.

The Title, the Epigraph, and the Narrative

This threat is implied or foreshadowed by Al-e Ahmad's title, then reflected in his diary's epigraph, and then dramatized by his narrative. The Persian title of *Lost in the Crowd* is *Khasi dar Miqat*. Green (1985b), who translated the diary into English, explains:

> No English word has the connotations of the term *Miqat*, designating the area containing the shrines at Mecca which are the goal of the Muslim pilgrimage. The term *khasi* means "a chip of wood" or "a piece of straw". A literal rendition might be "A Chip of Wood among the Muslim Shrines," but explanation would still be needed for many readers. The translation we have chosen emphasizes Al-e Ahmad's sense of anonymity among the 266,000 pilgrims who were in Mecca when he was. The rest we leave out of the title (no page number).

Actually, Green's translation of the title proves to be ironic because Al-e Ahmad never does allow himself to become "lost in the crowd" at Mecca. Throughout his pilgrimage, his greatest fear is that his self will be engulfed by the huge crowd of pilgrims. Early in his diary, he admits, "Again I'm preoccupied with myself!" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 21), and many of his diary entries reveal his almost morbid fear of losing his self during the *hajj.* His belief "that individualism has no meaning on the Hajj (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 43) deeply disturbs him. During his journey to Mecca, he writes that he has never before been "so mindful of nothingness" and, he continues, "I saw that I was just a 'piece of straw' that had come to the '*Miqat*', not a 'person' coming to a 'rendezvous'" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, pp. 57-58). Overall, however, Al-e Ahmad (1985) convinces himself that "It's easy to be among the people and not be a part of them" (p. 42), and he is too self-conscious and fearful to ever allow himself to surrender to what he calls the "great engulfing of the individual in the crowd" (p. 61).

Al-e Ahmad 's choice of epigraph for *Lost in the Crowd* reflects his overriding concern with his need to feel significant as an individual while *also* "being asked by [his] historical religion to be no more than a chip in the wood pile, a Moslem believer lost in the Moslem crowd" (Hillmann, 1985. P. xxxii). This epigraph is a passage from Ali ibn 'Usman Hujwiri's *Kashf al-Mahjub*, the oldest Persian treatise on Sufism (Green, 1985c). In this passage, a person named Abu Yazid reports that he went to Mecca but did not experience "real unification," with, presumably, the other pilgrims and/or God. Then, he continues, a "voice in [his] heart" told him, "O Bayazid, if thou didst not see thyself, thou wouldst not be a polytheist *(mushrik*) though thou sawest the whole universe; and since thou seest thyself, thou art a polytheist though blind to the whole universe" (as cited in Al-e Ahmad, 1985, no page number). This passage suggests that as long as Abu Yazid continues to be preoccupied with himself, he will never experience "real unification" and will never be a "true" Muslim (a monotheist). The passage ends ambiguously, with Abu Yazid explaining, "Thereupon I repented, and once more I repented of my repentance, and yet once more I repented of seeing my own existence" (as cited in Al-e Ahmad, 1985, no page number).

Similarly, in *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad fluctuates between focusing on himself and scolding himself for self-preoccupation. For example, after explaining in great detail how and why his feet became swollen during the bus ride from Medina to Mecca, and also after identifying the prescription drug that he is taking for his colic, he comments, "Oh! Look at you! You've come on the Hajj, and you're preoccupied with yourself? You really must forget these

old traveling pharmacies. And definitely yourself as well" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 13). Al-e Ahmad, however, never does manage to "forget" himself and, unlike Abu Yazid in the epigraph, never actually "repents" for "seeing [his] own existence." He remains a detached observer during his pilgrimage, almost continually taking notes and recording his feelings. At one point, when he runs out of notebooks, he even uses the margins of his *Qur'an* to make notes "on [his] problems," until he realizes that "[his] companions [can't] stand to see it" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 83), probably because, as Green (1985c) suggests, they view "his note-taking in a copy of the Qur'an as a sacrilege" (p. 83).

Al-e Ahmad describes his *Hajj* by presenting a narrative divided into 57 diary entries covering the 25 days from Friday, 10 April 1964 to Sunday, 3 May 1964 (Hillmann, 1985). Almost the entire first half of the diary deals with Al-e Ahmad's impressions and reflections before his arrival in Mecca on April 18: he reveals his sense of his own hypocrisy as a *hajji* who has not prayed for over 20 years; his mixed motivations for making the pilgrimage; his intense dislike of the Saudi Arabian government, Arabs, and non-Iranians in general; and what he perceives to be the harsh and "primitive" conditions (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 16) of life in Saudi Arabia. In the second half of his diary, Al-e Ahmad focuses on his impressions of Mecca, its shrines, and the rituals of the *hajj*. In this section, the narrative gradually builds in intensity and reaches its emotional peak with Al-e Ahmad's (1985) graphic and horrifying description of the ritual sacrifice of thousands of animals in Mina, a small town near Mecca, where "[a]ll the ground is covered with carcasses, goats, sheep, and camels", and "[c]hildren, knives in hand,

play with their remains" (p. 88). Already feeling unsettled by the "great engulfing" that occurred, first, during the circumambulation of the *Kaaba* and then, again, during the *Sa'y*, Al-e Ahmad is nauseated by the slaughter of animals and writes that "This [slaughter] is the most terrifying facet of [the *hajj's*] motorized primitivity. I almost passed out two or three times" (p. 88).

Al-e Ahmad devotes more than ten pages to describing the slaughter and his horrified response to it. Its details and lingering effects darken the tone of the last quarter of his narrative, which describes more *hajj* rituals, including the stoning of a pillar representing Satan, and the return journey back to Iran. Nothing in this final section or, indeed, in the entire diary supports Hanson's (1983) claim that "From the account of his pilgrimage, one may infer that Al-e Ahmad is on the verge of embracing Islam wholeheartedly- - perhaps on his own terms - - if the conversion has not already taken place" (p. 12). On the contrary, Al-e Ahmad concludes, "[A]s it stands now, the hajj is mechanized barbarism. That's all" (p. 91). The diary ends with him arriving, "frayed, coughing, and exhausted," in Tehran, and his brother telling him, "you really burned your feet!" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 124). This deliberate anti-climax does not suggest a man who is about to wholeheartedly embrace Islam.

Genre

In terms of genre, *Lost in the Crowd* falls into two categories: it is an example of the Persian *Safarnameh*, or travel diary (Hillmann, 1985), and also of what Howarth (1980)

describes as “autobiography as poetry” (p. 104). Both these genres, as well as Derrida’s ideas about autobiography, will be discussed in this section.

The travel diary “has remained a major genre in Persian literature since the 11th century” (Raffat, 1986). Hillmann (1985) traces the roots of this traditional Persian literary form back to the *Safarnameh* by Naser Khosrow (1004-ca. 1088). This text, “which describes its author’s seven-year travels begun in 1045 and including five pilgrimages to Mecca, has served as a model for Persian *Safarnamehs* for nearly a thousand years” (Hillmann, 1985, p. xxx). In *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad mentions Naser Khosrow several times and also refers to the titles and authors of other Persian travel diaries that he is reading during his pilgrimage, revealing his awareness of his place in an important on-going Persian literary tradition.

In one passage, he mentions that he is reading “*Hedayat al-Sabil*, a travel diary by Haj Farhad Mirza Qajar” (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 47). Al-e Ahmad (1985) comments that “The prose isn’t irritating, but pomposity is another matter. [Qajar] knows something about everything and rambles a lot” (p. 47). As well, Qajar explains “the rituals of the Hajj from A to Z, just like a Hajj ceremonial manual” (p. 47). Comments like these give *Lost in the Crowd* a self-reflexive quality. They not only locate Al-e Ahmad‘s travel diary within a specific tradition but also suggest how his text deviates from this tradition’s generic conventions. No one, for example, could ever mistake Al-e Ahmad’s diary for “a Hajj ceremonial manual.” Instead of providing a reverent description of *hajj*, Al-e Ahmad presents his impressions of every beautiful woman he sees,

including her anatomical details. When Al-e Ahmad (1985) visits the Prophet's Mosque in *Uhud*, he notices a young woman begging. Later, he devotes half a page to her and her effect on him.

> There was a beautiful young woman begging, wearing a cloth mask over her nose and throat. As I approached, I saw a glint in her eye that ought not to be seen during the Hajj season. And such eyes! Just like the eyes of a deer, of which you have read in so much . . . . Her small, erect breasts did not move beneath her shirt . . . . Too early in the morning face to face with a woman like that . . . I walked on quickly (p. 36).

Passage the above occurs frequently in *Lost in the Crowd*. They suggest a determined effort to violate generic conventions and would probably surprise or even shock devoted Muslims expecting to read a conventional *hajj d*iary.

Accordingly, *Lost in the Crowd* can be more accurately placed within the genre of "autobiography as poetry." This expression comes from Howarth (1980), who divides autobiographical writing into three categories. The first is "autobiography as oratory," which is mainly didactic in intent and seeks "to represent in a single life an idealized pattern of human behaviour" (pp. 88-89). The second type is "autobiography as drama," which instead of preaching an obvious sermon, presents life "as a staged performance that [the author] may attend, applaud, or attack just as he pleases" (Howarth, 1980, pp. 95, 96-97). *Lost in the Crowd* has some affinities with these two sub-genres of autobiography. For example, Al-e Ahmad often interrupts his descriptions of the *hajj* to "preach" against the Saudi Arabian government, Westernization, and the behaviours of his fellow pilgrims. He also tends to view life as a "performance" or spectacle being staged for his benefit. In a typical passage, he explains that

he is unable to find an ankle ring to buy as a gift for one of his sister's children. Then he reports, "On the way, however, I passed by a store where a number of people were squatting around the entrance. The proprietor of the shop was behind them bleeding them. There was a sign above the door that read 'Salim ibn Muhammad Basay F, Bleeding Doctor, Number 1.' I Stood there watching" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 118), Al-e Ahmad loves to watch others, as if they are performing on the "stage" of life for him. His curiosity as an observer provides him with an endless supply of vivid details and brief "scenes" for his diary, but also prevents him from fully participating in the *hajj*.

Howarth's (1980) third category - - "autobiography as poetry" - - most accurately describes *Lost in the Crowd.* Howarth (1980) explains that for poetic autobiographers, "the important element is uncertainty - - they ask themselves no consistent questions, find no clear answers, and so continue to revise their self-portraits. . . . [These writers] have neither preached or performed. Theirs is the *poetic* act of continuing self-study" (p. 105). In *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad often admits that he is preoccupied with himself, but never tries to stop focusing on what for him is most fascinating subject for study. After he arrives in Mecca, he writes, "I realized that traveling is another way of knowing the self, of evaluating it and coming to grips with its limitations and how narrow, insignificant and empty it is, in the proving ground of changing climes by means of encounters and human assessments" (p. 58). For Al-e Ahmad, his self is fascinating because for the poetic autobiographer, "identity is an acutely puzzling problem" (Howarth, 1980, p. 105). Thus, for example, Al-e Ahmad (1985) often wonders why he

is making the *hajj*, and provides different answers to this question: "Again I asked myself, what did I come on this journey to do? Visit shrines? Worship? Observe? Go sight-seeing? Make discoveries?" (pp. 54-55).

Even at the end of his diary, Al-e Ahmad (1985) continues to revise his self-portrait. At first, he seems to arrive at a form of closure, concluding, "The way I see it, I've come on this trip mostly out of curiosity, the same way I poke my nose into everything, to look without expectations" (p. 123). This conclusion, however, immediately turns into a long reflection about uncertainty:

> . . . I am smashing the steps of the world of certainty one by one with the pressure of experience, beneath my feet. And what is the result of a lifetime? That you come to doubt the truth, solidity, and reality of the primary axioms that bring certainty [including the axioms of Islam?], give cause for reflection, or incite action, give them up one by one, and change each one to a question mark (p. 123).

This passage, with its emphasis on "doubt" and its repeated rejection of "certainty" (which all religions insist upon in their dogmas and proscriptions), does not support "the popular view . . . that [Al-e Ahmad] found answers in his last years, answers to personal, cultural, social, and political questions and dilemmas" (Hillmann, 1985, p. xxx). Rather, the above passage suggests someone who rejects the certainty that comes with religious faith and is still searching for his own personal "truths." Perhaps for this reason, Raffat (1986), who reviewed *Lost in the Crowd* in the *New York Times,* gave his review the title "Jalal Al-e Ahmad: An Existentialist in Mecca."

Derrida (1988b) problematizes the above discussion of autobiography by insisting that an autobiography "is not to be confused with the so-called life of the author, with the corpus of empirical accidents making up the life of an empirically real person" (Gasche, 1988, p. 41). He refers to "autobiographies" as "otobiographies" in order to emphasize his view that the autobiographer is, in effect, speaking to another self, who is "listening" to him. (Derrida (1998b) explains, "I won't say the word author because that word immediately destroys everything" (p. 79).). The autobiographer/speaker signs his or her name on the finished autobiography, but this name is "[a]lready a false name, a pseudonym, an homonym" because the autobiographer "dissimulates, perhaps, behind the impostor, the other [self who appears in the autobiography]" (Derrida, 1988 b, p. 8). This pseudonym, Derrida (1988 b) explains, "induces us to be immeasurably wary whenever we think we are reading [the autobiographer's] signature or 'autograph,'" because the autobiographer "advances behind a plurality of masks or names, that like any mask and even any theory of the simulacrum, can propose and produce themselves only by returning a constant yield of protection" (pp. 8-9, 7). It appears that even though the autobiographer is "speaking" to another self, he or she is dissimulating to even this self, as well as to his or her eventual readers. Thus, we would be mistaken "if we understood [an autobiography] as a simple presentation of identity, assuming that we already know what is involved in self-presentation and a statement of identity" (Derrida, 1988 b, p. 10).

Derrida's description of the autobiographer as someone who hides behind a variety of masks and names is similar to Howarth's (1980) view of "dramatic biographers," who are

“shameless liars and impersonators” (p. 100). However, whereas Howarth (1980) remarks, “A puzzling mixture of fakery and truth, the dramatic biographer is equally divided between personal and cultural motives” (p. 99), Derrida (1988b) implies that autobiographers are all “fakery” and have only “personal” motives for writing - - so that an autobiography is essentially, or even only, “an account of self to self” (Gasche, 1988 b, p. 41). Derrida bases his discussion of autobiography on Nietzsche’s statement in *Ecce Homo* (1908) that “I tell my life to myself” (as cited in Derrida, 1988b, p. 12). However, Nietzsche *also* tells his reader, “Above all, do not mistake me for someone else,” and his final words in *Ecce Homo* are “Have I been understood?” (as cited in Derrida, 1988b, pp. 10, 11), just as, towards the end of *Lost in the Crowd,* Al-e Ahmad (1985) wonders about what kind of “image” he has presented of himself. Although some autobiographers may have purely “personal” motives for writing, Derrida (1988b) fails to account for the “cultural,” or “public,” motives that are evident in many autobiographical writings including *Lost in the Crowd.*

Al-e Ahmad as a “Character” in *Lost in the Crowd*

Howarth (1980) explains that “Standing foremost in an autobiographer’s strategy is the element of character, the image or self-portrait his book presents. Various factors determine that character: his sense of self, of place, of history, of his motives for writing” (p. 87). The section will use these four topics to analyze Al-e Ahmad’s self-portrait, as he presents it in *Lost in the Crowd*. However, as Al-e Ahmad’s sense of self is inextricably linked to his sense of himself as a *writer*, his sense of self and his reasons for writhing will be discussed together.

Al-e Ahmad's Sense of Self and His Motives for Writing

Hillmann (1985) comments that one of *Lost in the Crowd*'s most striking features is "Al-e Ahmad's wonted candor and directness in writing," which make his travel diary "almost unprecedented in Persian literature in terms of self-revelation of personal and cultural doubts, misgivings, and dilemmas" (pp. xxx-xxxi). Indeed, Al-e Ahmad seems to be entirely lacking the kind of internal censor that would prevent a more devote and circumspect *hajji* from recording his every passing thought, no matter how unorthodox it might be. In the first paragraph of his diary, he reveals that he prayed in the pilgrims' assembly area in the Tehran airport. Then he admits, "I feel like a hypocrite. It just isn't right. If it isn't hypocrisy, neither is it faith. You just do it to blend in the crowd. But does one go to Mecca without praying?" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 6). Throughout the remainder of his diary, Al-e Ahmad provides many examples of his hypocrisy but never expresses the faith of a true believer. For example, when a fellow *hajji* is surprised because Al-e Ahmad prays with the Sunnis and not with him, Al-e Ahmad (1985) replies indignantly, "My dear sir . . . . We came here to lose ourselves in the crowd. We didn't come here to reinforce our personalities and our isolation" (p. 56). However, Al-e Ahmad (1985) *also* repeatedly reveals that he zealously protects his personality from being lost in the crowd and continually works to preserve his isolation and detachment.

In Medina, for example, he suddenly finds himself in a "street clogged with files of people praying" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 19). His description of what followed is revealing:

> I stood next to a woman in the middle of the street. I touched my brow to my shoulder bag on the ground as I did my prostrations. The woman had a daughter who was playing in front of her. She herself wore a white mantle and didn't look Arab. When the prayer ended (no one left out anything, or at least I didn't see it), I went looking for a map (p. 19).

Here, even when Al-e Ahmad should be engrossed in his prayers, he is glancing all around, noticing a wealth of details, and, apparently, memorizing what he sees so that he can write about it later: he notices the woman's daughter praying, the colour of the woman's mantle, and the woman's ethnicity. He also watches the other *hajji* closely enough to conclude that none of them left out anything from their prayers. Mirsepassi (2000) points out that "Ah-e Ahmad decided before embarking on the Hajji to write about the 'experience', thereby ensuring a self-conscious separation between himself and the other pilgrims" (p. 110). Even if he wanted to, Al-e Ahmad could not lose himself in his prayers and in the crowd and also collect impressions to record later in his diary.

As a result of his writing, Al-e Ahmad has a divided self during the *hajj*. Although he does not say so explicitly, the reader senses that Al-e Ahmad participates in the pilgrimage at least partly because he hopes to have some kind of religious experience, an experience that will he "worthy" of the "grandeur" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 61) of the distant past, when Islam originated and the *Kaaba* was built. One obstacle to achieving this goal is that Al-e Ahmad would rather observe and write than participate and pray. Another problem, even more damaging, is that he is terrified of letting go of his rational self even though, as Mirseppasi (2000) comments, "concepts such as the self do not play a focal role [in traditional Islam]" (p. 105). Al-e Ahmad's

overwhelming fear of losing his self by abandoning it during some kind of trance becomes most obvious when he describes the *sa'y,* which requires the male *hajjis* to jog rapidly seven times between two markers about 250 feet apart and, at each marker, to repeat a brief prayer, with arms outstretched towards the *Kaaba*.

Al-e Ahmad's (1985) description of his aborted participation in the *sa'y* contains some of his most emotionally powerful writing. Always a doubter, he begins this description by urgently asking a series of questions:

> This sa'y . . . stupifies a man . . . . Is this the final goal of this assembly? And this journey? Perhaps 10,000 people, perhaps 20, 000 people, performing the same act in a single instant. Can you keep your wits in the midst of such vast self-abandon. And act as individual? The pressure of the crowd drives you on . . . . Which one is really an 'individual'?" (p. 62).

Despite his doubt and fear, Al-e Ahmad plunges into the crowd, but then almost immediately quits. In his diary, he explains, "I realized I couldn't do it. I began to cry and fled" (p. 62). What terrifies him most, he explains, is the *eyes* of the pilgrims:

> In this going and coming, what's really disturbing is the continual eye contact. A hajji performing the *sa'y* is a pair of legs running or walking rapidly, and two eyes without a "self", or that have leaped out of the "self", or been released from it . . . . Can you look at these eyes for only an instant? Before today, I thought it was only the sun that could not be regarded with the naked eye, but I realized that neither can one look at this sea of eyes . . . and [I] fled, after only two laps . . . . To put it clearly, I realized I was going crazy. I had an urge to break my head open against the first concrete pillar (pp. 62-63).

Conventionally, the eyes are said to be the windows to the self or to the soul, but here, the pilgrims' glazed eyes signify the *loss* of the self, or "naked consciousness . . . sitting at the edge

of the eye sockets, waiting for the order to flee" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 62). Al-e Ahmad wants no part of such an experience and flees instead of continuing it.

Al-e Ahmad's reaction afterwards should be instructive to all those who continue to gush about his "return to Islam". He goes to a bazaar and sits "in a corner with [his] back against [a] wall" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 63) -- in order to isolate himself as much as possible from the other pilgrims. Later, he writes in his diary, "I was quenching myself with one of those 'colas' and thinking about something I'd read by a European on the question of the 'individual' and society, and realized that the greater the society that envelops the 'self', the nearer the 'self' comes to being nothing" (p. 63). This insight leads him to reflect at length about "the Eastern 'ego" and to ask abruptly, "[w]hat is the difference between existentialism and socialism?" (p. 63). What is important here is not Al-e Ahmad's bizarre association of ideas and issues, but the fact that he conveys his experience "in terms of Western secular philosophy" (Mirsepassi, 2000, p. 112). Just as he does in *Occidentosis,* where he rages against the "West," but uses Western authors and sources to support his main arguments (Hillmann, 1985). Al-e Ahmad in *Lost in the Crowd* is disgusted by even the slightest hint of "Westernization," but uses Western thinkers to try to come to terms with his horrifying experiences of the *sa'y*. Thus, his "Islamic" experience terrifies him, whereas "Western secular philosophy" helps him to understand it.

The majority of the pilgrims who abandon their selves to the *sa'y* probably do so because they have faith in its spiritual efficacy: they are willing to abandon their rational selves and fuse into a larger whole because they believe that the *sa'y* will bring them spiritual benefits. In

contrast, in an important passage, Al-e Ahmad reveals that he lacks this kind of spiritual faith or belief. When he is in Medina, he visits the *Bag*i cemetery, an important cemetery where most of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad are buried (Green, 1985a). He is outraged when he discovers that after coming to state power in Saudi Arabia 40 years ago, the Wahhabis destroyed all the gravestones in the cemetery. This discovery propels him into one of his many tirades in *Lost in the Crowd* against the "Arabs" and "Saudis":

> I removed my shoes with the [other pilgrims], and opened the soft earth of this ancient graveyard. I realized that 14 centuries of Islamic tradition in such soil - - now lead to nothing . . . . Suppose I'm stupid and you Saudis are extremely wise! What right have we to reduce to dust shrines which are a part of Muslim daily life? The one who [like Al-i Ahmad] has fled the baseness of his daily life and come here wants to see the grandeur of eternity manifested in the beauty of a court, with his physical eye. To you this is idolatry, but what do you do with mythology? Haven't you read that even Moses went into retreat to contact God? To see him with his physical eye (pp. 28-29).

In order to have any kind of "spiritual" feelings in the cemetery, Al-e Ahmad (embracing a crude empiricism here) must be able to experience it physically as it existed in its original pristine state 14 centuries ago, when it manifested what he imagines was "the grandeur of eternity." Without such concrete evidence for his "physical eye" to observe, he can experience only profound disappointment and rant and rave impotently against the Saudis.

Although the *hajj* is, overall, deeply disillusioning for Al-e Ahmad, he does discover a degree of solace by writing in his diary. He provides several motivations for doing so. First, he wants to inform his fellow Iranian intellectuals about his experience. In his last diary entry, he asks,

> Wouldn't it have been better [than writing in his diary] if I had done the same thing a million other people did this year who came on the Hajj? And those millions of millions of other people who've visited the Kaaba during these 1,400 or so years and had things to say about it, but said nothing and took the results of the experience with them selfishly to the grave? (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 123).

Thus, because he is not "selfish" - - unlike the millions of pilgrims who have preceded him - - he produces a diary instead of fully participating in the *hajj*. Moreover, when he answers his own questions, he explains that he is being unselfish on behalf of a particular group of Iranians:

> Obviously, with this notebook, I have given a negative answer to [these] sincere question[s]. And why? Because Iranian intellectuals spurn these events, and walk among them gingerly and with distaste. "The Hajj?" they say. "Don't you have anywhere else to go" (p. 123).

Ignoring the likelihood that his own evident distaste for the *hajj* will only confirm the negative perceptions of his fellow intellectuals, Al-e Ahmad presents himself as an altruistic figure writing for the benefit of others.

Second, he reveals that he also writes as an antidote for his boredom. The pilgrims' journeys to and from Mecca, like the events in Mecca itself, are organized on the "hurry-up-and-then-wait" principle: the pilgrims are rushed from one location to the next and then made to wait and wait before being allowed to proceed to their next destination or event. Even when he is moving, Al-e Ahmad (1985) becomes restless. On his return flight to Tehran, he comments, "you can't sleep, neither can you do anything while awake. I must again take refuge in this notebook. What would have happened on this trip if I hadn't had the companionship of this notebook?" (p. 122). Without his notebook, Al-e Ahmad might have reflected on the spiritual

significance of his *hajj* experience. Instead, he uses the activity of writing as a "refuge" from such reflection, preferring, instead, to record the minute details of his return journey: "The evening meal consisted of a piece of Holland cheese - - which again aroused doubt as to its religious admissibility or inadmissibility - - a banana, a pear, two small pieces of white bread, egg, and four biscuits" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 122).

Writing not only helps Al-e Ahmad to deal with his boredom, but, as Raffat (1986) suggests, also has a much more important function: "The writing - - for Moslem purists, itself a form of sacrilege on the hajj - - preserves and integrates the self . . . ." This function becomes clear when Al-e Ahmad (1985) is waiting to be taken by truck from Mecca to the plain of Arafat. In his diary, he explains:

> This 'mechanized' primitivity is something else . . . . A person learns the meaning of religious expressions here. Waiting, waiting, waiting, as in the past. The saving grace is that in such a situation I immerse myself in this little notebook, sequestering myself behind its paper doors - - no matter what happens (p. 78).

The key expressions here are "saving grace" and "sequestering myself." For Al-e Ahmad, "grace" does not come from his *hajj* experience, but from the activity of writing: it enables him to isolate himself, or to hide himself away from the crowds or pilgrims and events around him. Moreover, he reveals that he will go to extraordinary lengths in order to write in his diary. He is willing to incur the wrath of his fellow pilgrims, who, he explains, perceive his writing as "distastefully ostentatious in this setting" (p. 59) -- the area around the *Kaaba.* As well, it appears that not even the most harsh conditions can deter Al-e Ahmad (1985) from writing. For

example, in a hostel in the city of Uhud, he reports, “This wind really blows the sand and grit in the building in your eyes. There is no table here. For the page to be legible one must lie down on one’s belly to write” (p. 47). Clearly, writing, and not worshipping, is Al-e Ahmad’s primary concern during his *hajj*.

Al-e Ahmad’s Sense of Place

Along with his sense of himself, an autobiographer’s sense of place is also important in his self-presentation as a “character” in his text (Howarth, 1980). The kind of information about his environment that he selects to record, as well as his reaction to it, helps to reveal key aspects of his personality. To be fair to Al-e Ahmad (1985), he does notice and describe a few beautiful scenes; for example, he is pleasantly surprised by the landscaping at *al-Mu’abidah* Square:

> There was beautiful landscaping in the middle of the square with benches amidst little flower gardens. The tropical trees are still young and without a shadow, except for one or two eucalyptus trees that cast shadows and were covered with a lot of dust. Here and there were zinnias and verberas around the garden, on a little patch of lawn (p. 71).

As this description suggests, Al-e Ahmad appreciates beauty when he discovers it in the environment. However, *Lost in the Crowd* contains very few passages like the one cited above, and even in it, he reports that “one or two” trees in an apparently otherwise pleasant setting are marred by dust.

In fact, in *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad dislikes almost everything he sees around him, and details involving dirt and “filth” dominate most of his descriptions of place. His first diary

entry establishes their overall negative tone. When he is flying over the mountains and desert between Tehran and Jedda, he reports, “Black, rocky heights. No trace of civilization. Sand, sand, sand. I wearied of it” (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 7). Here, he introduces one-half of the opposition that he proceeds to develop between “civilization” and “primitiveness”, leaving no doubt that he much prefers the former. For example, in Uhud, Al-e Ahmad (1985) reports, “The asphalt was too hot . . . and the sand around it was hotter still. It was burning hot. Obviously, the soles of the feet must be carefully protected from the primitive life” (p. 31). For Al-e Ahmad, however, the most egregious evidence of the “primitive life” in Saudi Arabia is the condition of its washroom facilities. No matter where he goes, he is certain to inspect them carefully and then to report his findings in extreme detail:

> [At the Plain of Arafat,] I walked around for an hour this morning. The condition of the toilets is the most disgraceful thing imaginable. For every 100-person tent, there is a small cloth booth over a sump dug right in the sand, with room for only one person. When you squat down your knees come together, and you are right next to the other hajjis. It is true that they have called the people to a *primeval state* for the Hajj, and to life in the desert, and in tents, but when jets and Chevrolets are used by hajjis instead of camels, some attention ought to be paid to the privies too (p. 81, emphasis added).

Al-e Ahmad compensates for the Saudis’ apparent lack of concern for their privies by turning his indignation into what becomes an excrementary motif in his diary. In Mecca, he describes the sewage system in the neighbourhood where he is staying, include the “slime” in the open gutters, while in Mina he reports that his brother told him that “an Arab was squatting beside one of the stoning pillars (I forget which one) relieving himself in the middle of the milling crowd” (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, pp. 108, 92).

Such descriptions lead into Al-e Ahmad's report of the ritual slaughter of thousands of animals in Mina. Two days after the killings, Al-e Ahmad (1985) describes his nocturnal walk through the streets of this city of horrors:

> The stench is high tonight (it is 10:30 now). There is no wind, the air is warm, the moon is high, and the stench of feces and meat crushed underfoot mingles with the smell of toilets. If the pilgrims can survive this night in good health they will have no other worries (p. 98).

Al-e Ahmad (1985) concludes that in Saudi Arabia, "the simplicity of the harshness of primitivity (or the primitivity of harshness) still dominates everything" (p. 101). After learning about the slaughter and its aftermath - - most of the carcasses are left wherever the animals are killed, until bulldozers bury them in huge pits - - most readers are likely to share Al-e Ahmad's disgust. However, he undermines his indignation when he causally reveals, after pages and pages of detailed description and criticism of the killings, "I sacrificed one for 40 rials" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 100), meaning that he paid 40 Saudi rials for the goat that he himself killed. (He explains that he did not buy a "20-rial goat" because it "can be such a scrawny sacrifice!" (p. 100).)

Al-e Ahmad's Sense of History

According to Howarth (1980), the author's sense of history is the fourth factor that determines character in autobiographical writing. "History" is important to Al-e Ahmad, who tends to judge others according to his perception of their historical knowledge. Of the many preachers who speak to his group of pilgrims during their *hajj*, he admires only the one "who

speaks in terms of history and *hadith* ["tradition"]" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 36). In contrast, he dislikes a young Shi'i whom he meets in Mecca: "I told him a few things about the Qarmatians, the story of the place of the Black Stone, and similar speculations. He knew nothing of history, however. Totally cut off from tradition" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, pp. 67-68). The "Qarmatians" led an insurrection against the Baghdad caliphate during the 9th to the 12th centuries; in the year 930, a Qarmatian leader led a military campaign into Mecca and seized the "Black Stone", which he carried to al-Ahsa (Green, 1985c). As these details suggest, Al-e Ahmad is fond of the history of the distant past, which, as he also does in *Occidentosis* and in *On the Service & Betrayal of Intellectuals*, he represents as the Golden Age of Persia and Perso-Islamic sovereign power. (For him, this Golden Age ended with the rise of the Safavid Dynasty in the early 16th century.) Throughout *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad (1985) associates his imagined Golden Age with "grandeur" and "splendor" (pp. 61, 67) and uses the distant past as his benchmark for measuring what he calls the "ugly unavoidable reality" (p. 65) of the present.

Inevitably, Al-e Ahmad's naive and simplistic understanding of history leads him to harshly criticize the present world, constructing it as a fall from the long-lost grandeur of the past. For example, the fact that the Saudi government has placed a sword on its flag and written above it "There is no God but God" provokes his furious response from him: "Anyway, when Islam conquered the world with the sword, you were nothing, sir! A Wahhabi tribe owning lands rich with oil, and now keepers of the *Kaaba*! You drove the Hashemites out with help from the Aramco company. Now you're just a keeper of pipes [oil pipelines]. Nothing else"

(p. 91). Here, Al-e Ahmad identifies the two extremes in his view of history: the glorious past, when "Islam conquered the world," and the corrupt present, when Aramco (the Arabian American Oil Company (Green, 1985a) has turned the Arab world into "nothing."

In *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad's hatred of Aramco and any other manifestation of Westernization reinforce his "conspiratorial view of history and international affairs" (Hillmann, 1985, p. xxvi). For example, in Mecca, after failing to convince a young Saudi army officer that Israel is one of the "instruments" of "foreign capitalism" in the East, Al-e Ahmad (1985) writes:

> After I left him I was thinking that the West has really used Israel as a cover for its own misdeeds, or as a way of hiding them. They have planted Israel in the heart of the Arab lands so that the Arabs could forget the real troublemakers in the midst of Israel's trouble-making, and not realize that the water and the fertilizer for the tree of Israel comes from the Christian West, the French and American capitalists (p. 73).

The claim that "French and American capitalists" had both the ability and the power to create Israel is absurd, but it leads Al-e Ahmad (1985) to ask,

> If the West is pushing the wagon of Christianity with its neocolonialism, why have we in our area allowed the cart of Islam to become so rusty and abandoned it? I asked myself, wouldn't these Hajj rituals themselves be a good launching pad for taking a stand against the West? (p. 73).

This passage reveals one of the main contradictions in Al-e Ahmad's political and social thought. On the one hand, he repeatedly dismisses the *hajj* rituals as "mechanized barbarism" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 91) and remains a detached observer of them. On the other hand, he *also* offers the *hajj* (and all the customs, rituals, and cultural forms and practices that it represents) as a defense against the West, to which he attributes "almost limitless" power (Hillmann, 1985,

p. xxvi). This contradiction is just one of what Vahdat (2000) refers to as the "series of aporias" in Al-e Ahmad's thinking, which "he was never able to resolve" (p. 55). Thus, in *Lost in the Crowd*, he represents the *hajj* as, simultaneously, a "barbaric" vestige of the distant past and also an effective "launching pad" for resisting the Western imperialist world and its culture and lifestyles in the present and future.

Technique in *Lost in the Crowd*

After character, the second main factor in autobiographical strategy is the element of technique, which Howarth (1980) defines as "those plastic devices - - style, imagery, and structure - - that build a self-portrait from its inside out" (p. 87). The chronology of Al-e Ahmad's journey to and from Mecca gave his diary a pre-determined structure, but his style and imagery are choices that are significant in their own right. As Howarth (1980) explains, "Even the simplest stylistic choices . . . are directly meaningful, since they lead to larger effects . . ." (p. 87). In *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad's accumulation of small details and images of injury and disease make important contributions to his representations of both himself and the *hajj.*

The Use of Details

As Algar (1984) comments, *Lost in the Crowd* "is marked by the same attention to the author's human and material surroundings that characterizes his works of fiction" (p. 19). Indeed, during his pilgrimage, no detail in his environment appears to be too small to escape Al-e Ahmad's (1985) attention or too insignificant to be recorded in his diary:

> The stars shone brilliantly and the sky was incredibly high. The retired police major, however, exhausted and holding his teacup, stared in amazement at a pair of intricately marked black dogs following a bitch around in the dirt and grime. At that hour of the night! One of the things was protruding bright red. This [town] of Rabigh is at the halfway point [between Jedda and Medina]. It didn't even have electricity, however, or if it had it was turned off. The Kerosene lanterns sputtered. The tea was too sweet, and oversteeped. The town of Badr also lacked electricity. Some five or ten kilometers outside Medina, telephone poles - - short and slender - - began to file past us (p. 15).

In this passage, the variety, nature, and sequencing of the details are all remarkable. Al-e Ahmad begins in the heavens (the brilliant stars), moves down into the human world (the police major), sinks into "the dirt and grime" and the depths of carnality (the dogs), returns to the human world, and then concludes by revealing that the telephone poles five or ten kilometers outside Medina are "short and slender."

Initially, one might conclude that Al-e Ahmad's apparent need to record every detail he observes is at odds with his self-absorption: how can someone who is so preoccupied with himself also be so interested in the particulars of his external world? (In a passage following his description of the slaughter of the animals, Al-e Ahmad (1985) writes, "It's amazing that you don't see more flies, no doubt because of the intense heat in the day and the intense cold at night. I recall only one fly; it sat on my foot in the slaughterhouse and wouldn't go away" (p. 94).) Why, in an account of the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca, are we reading about the only fly that Al-e Ahmad observed in the slaughterhouse in Mina?

Howarth (1980) would argue that such details are typical of the poetic autobiographer, for whom "truth' is a major preoccupation: "Rousseau searches obsessively for his own 'true

self,' Thoreau wants to 'drive life into a corner" [James] Agee hopes to capture 'a portion of unimagined existence.' Consequently, their stories are all-inclusive in scope, rich with profuse detail" (p. 110). Similarly, after repeatedly questioning his motives for going on the *hajj*, or, after searching obsessively for his "true self," Al-e Ahmad (1985) finally decides that he did not go there "to search for God." Rather, he explains, "[it] was necessary to see, to be there, to go, and to witness, to see what changes there have been since the time of Nasir-i Khusraw" (pp. 122-124) - - the 11th-century author of a famous Persian travel diary. Al-e Ahmad's small details, therefore, are what he has witnessed. They are important to him because they reveal what *he* saw, what *he* observed: they are all part of *his* self's personal experience.

Moreover, although the seemingly random selection of these details makes Al-e Ahmad's writing style appear to be spontaneous and to have uncontrived effects, the definite empirical "facts," or more precisely, the concrete empirical and socio-cultural materials/signs that he chooses to include in his diary all work together to shape his overall portrayal of his experience during his *hajj.* Discussing the poetic autobiographer's use of details, Howarth (1980) comments, "Meaning is not imposed upon facts, it emerges from them - - slowly, organically, as the ideas and the images seem to find each other" (p. 11). In the passage that begins with the description of the stars and that ends with the mention of the telephone poles, for example, the empirical "facts" or observations might be insignificant in themselves, but, together, they subtly connect with a dense network of details, signs and images that give concrete support to Al-e Ahmad's (1985) main conclusion that the *hajj* is "barbarous" and

"primitive" (p. 14), and that its organization is in the hands of "the most backward, primitive, untutored, and poverty-stricken layers of society" (p. 14). Following the description of the night sky, almost all the details in the passage have negative connotations and contribute to *Lost in the Crowd's* overall image and portrayal of a "backward" or "undeveloped" world in decline: the retired police officer is "exhausted"; the dogs are "in the dirt and grime"; the towns have no electricity; the lanterns merely "sputter"; and the tea is "too sweet" and has been "oversteeped". Cumulatively, these details suggest a world in which nothing "works," and yet, this social-historical world is the Islamic world, which Al-e Ahmad promotes as a defense against the advance of Westernization and Western technology.

The focus on Disease, Injuries, and Bodily Experiences/Activities

Throughout *Lost in the Crowd*, a network of details involving injury and disease reinforces the general impression of a world in decay. This pattern begins with Al-e Ahmad himself and radiates outwards to include almost everyone around him. In the first third of his diary, he uses the rapid mental and physical decline of a retired police officer to provide an Awful Warning of what the *hajji* can do to unwary pilgrims. In the first entry of his diary, Al-e Ahmad (1985) introduces this individual and then in the entries for the next three days, provides regular reports on his deteriorating condition. This old man just wants "to go into the presence of God and offer thanks" but is "somewhat frightened" by what he has heard about the *hajj*'s strenuous physical demands on the pilgrims (p. 7). By the fourth day of the *hajj,* after "[too] much running around in the sun" (p. 35), the old man's mild fear has turned into terror,

and he has to be forcibly restrained and then taken away to an infirmary by his nephew, who asks him, "Why did you come?" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 41). Al-e Ahmad (1985) comments, "I think he is one of those who are accustomed to solitude; he doesn't know what to do with himself now in the midst of a group" (p. 41). Actually, Al-e Ahmad could be describing himself, for he also feels very uncomfortable among the other pilgrims, and he often asks himself why he is making the pilgrimage.

The police officer's descent into illness and a kind of madness foreshadows the fate of Al-e Ahmad and many of the other pilgrims. Throughout his diary, Al-e Ahmad (1985) presents himself as a sickly man whose condition is aggravated by the punishing sun, the cold desert nights, and the *hajj*'s gruelling physical activities. Even on the first night of his journey, he is already reporting, "This [*hajj*] won't work if I have to wear myself out this way every day. I must take it easy" (p. 9). Almost all the following diary entries include some mention of his physical and mental suffering. He reports taking prescribed medications for a wide variety of illnesses: he suffers from colic, bronchitis, and trachetis; diarrhea, vomiting, and "gripes and stomach pains" (p. 61); and a "bad liver" (p. 66). Al-e Ahmad (1985) believes that this last condition has combined with "the hot sun" to cause his body to be covered with "strange red blemishes" (p. 66). In other diary entries, he mentions that his feet are so swollen that he has "never felt such pain in [his] life" (p. 13), and that he cannot walk after being repeatedly elbowed in his ribs during his circumambulation of the *Kaaba*. By the 13th day of his 25-day pilgrimage, Al-e Ahmad (1985) is "coughing excessively" (p. 93) and is unable to leave his tent.

On his last day in Saudi Arabia, Al-e Ahmad (1985) discovers a pool of "clean, deep, and crystal-green [water]" (p. 119) at the harbour in the city of Jedda. He comments, "You have to have been in such a desert to understand what an ocean is" (p. 119). Some readers will speculate that, at last, Al-e Ahmad is going to have some sort of redemptive experience during his *hajj*. Perhaps he will even have a symbolic death and rebirth after he emerges from the ocean's pure, cleansing waters. However, while he is still standing on the shore, he suddenly feels a burning pain in his left foot and realizes that he has been deeply cut by stepping on a piece of glass. Ah, the disillusioning sadness of it all! During his return journey back to Iran, his foot "hurts so much [that he] can't stand it" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 120). When he finally arrives at his home in Tehran, he is completely exhausted and cannot even walk.

Throughout *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad describes many other pilgrims who experience similar fates. The harsh desert conditions intensify the pilgrims' pre-existing health problems, while the arduous *hajj* activities batter and bruise the pilgrims' bodies. In a typical passage, Al-e Ahmad (1985) begins by describing his encounter with a pilgrim who is sitting alone, clutching his knees, and looking "like a scolded child" (p. 70). When he discovers that the man has diarrhea, Al-e Ahmad tells him, "Hajji dear, everyone gets diarrhea. The climate is bad. I am still on a restricted diet myself; diarrhea isn't contagious" (p. 70). After providing this information, Al-e Ahmad (1985) explains his role in his group of pilgrims:

> I have now gradually become a full-time doctor and secretary for our group, dispensing salt tablets, vitamin C, Ipesandrine, and the like, and most often, bandages. Every time the good people return from circumambulation and *Sa'y*, it is

> as if they have just returned from the battle of Khaybar - - some part of them is injured. They all know that I have bandages. So much skin had peeled off a Mazandarani's big toe that I put three Band-Aids on it (p. 70).

In passages like this one, the focus on the body, and on its ailments and injuries, prevents *Lost in the Crowd* from having any kind of "spiritual" quality because Al-e Ahmad is so firmly focused on the physical, and on the human body and its ailments and activities. This focus transforms the *hajj* from a religious experience into a grim test of the pilgrims' mental and physical endurance.

Moreover, Al-e Ahmad's unnecessary details involving bodily activities or movements reinforce the pattern of imagery describing diseases and injuries. In one passage, he even describes a sparrow "relieving itself as the sun came up". "With every dropping it hopped ahead," he adds, "just like Big Bertha during the bombardment of London" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 19). In addition, Al-e Ahmad not only feels compelled to describe every filthy toilet that he either observes or uses, but also to draw attention to the pilgrims' *aftabehs*. An *aftabeh* is a "special water can or ewer with a long spout used by Muslims to comply with the Prophet Muhammad's command that Muslims cleanse themselves after answering a call of nature" and is usually "kept near the toilet" (Green, 1985a, p. 125). During the *hajj*, *aftabehs* are not provided in the public washrooms, so "most" of the pilgrims are carrying some sort of water-filled container:

> [The pilgrims] come wrapped in saris, wearing loin cloths and carrying teas kettles for drinking, steeping tae, and washing. Iranians carry *aftabehs*; Turks have long tubes with bulbous ends that look like tin Kerosene lamps. The Lebanese and

> Syrians have plastic *aftabehs* that are smaller than ours - - and the Indians and Africans carry kettles. These are the most meaningful national emblems, and they aren't found on flags, but in people's hands. And how handy they are! (p. 11).

As the above passage demonstrates, Al-e Ahmad is initially amused by the pervasive *aftabehs*. However, he dislikes his own version of one because "[i]t makes [him] feel more primitive" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 16). By the fourth day of the *hajj*, the *aftabehs* and Islam's "nonsense" about cleansing and purification "make [him] sick at [his] stomach," and he explodes into one of his many tirades directed at the *hajj*'s customs and conditions: "[H]ow long must religion be tied to the handle of an *aftabeh*, and be confined to the realm of 'cleansing uncleanliness'? Or be a menace to an old fool like me? Do these people [the mullahs who preach against uncleanness] bear the highest responsibility of religion?" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 35). Al-e Ahmad does not explain what he means by "the highest responsibility of religion," but throughout *Lost in the Crowd*, he clearly shows that, in his view, his *hajj* experience is neither fulfilling this responsibility nor living up to his expectations.

Themes

Howarth (1980) explains that in autobiographical writing, "[t]he final strategic element is *theme*, those ideas and beliefs that give an autobiography its meaning, or at least make it a consistent replica of the writer" (p. 87). "Theme," Howarth (1980) continues, "may arise from the author's general philosophy, religious faith, or political and cultural attitudes" (p. 87). Finally, Howarth (1980) suggests that rather than attributing autobiographical themes to broad "historical causes," reader should note "how each autobiographer orchestrates his theme - - in

various guises and contexts - - to give himself, his story, and his reader a stronger sense of intellectual unity" (pp. 87-88). When "theme" is conceptualized in this way, then three main ideas can be seen to emerge from all the details, anecdotes, and reflections that Al-e Ahmad provides in *Lost in the Crowd.* These ideas, or themes, make claims about (1) the nastiness of human behaviour/character in general and of "Arabs" and other non-Iranian Muslims in particular; (2) the corruption and incompetence of the Saudi Arabian regime, and the resulting need to place the *hajj* under international Islamic control; and (3) the benefits of the *hajj* for a "forsaken humanity" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 115) and as a means of resisting Westernization and imperialism. Each of these themes will be discussed in the following sections.

The Nastiness of Human Behavior and Non-Iranian Muslims

Algar (1984) comments that the impression that Al-e Ahmad leaves in *Lost in the Crowd* "is that of a meticulous and generally sympathetic observer of the pilgrims, not that of an enthusiastic participant in the pilgrimage" (p. 19). However, most readers will be likely to conclude that although Al-e Ahmad is meticulous as a recorder of small details and unenthusiastic as a participant, he is almost never "sympathetic" as an observer. On the contrary, and like the narrator in *The School Principal*, Al-e Ahmad can find very little to praise in his fellow human beings. As a result, a kind of Hobbesian undercurrent flows throughout *Lost in the Crowd*, representing human life as "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 1996, p. 89)

For Al-e Ahmad (1985), the main "problem" with his fellow pilgrims is that their petty "endless quarrels" and frequent violence are not at all appropriate during what he calls "a special kind of journey" (pp. 108, 41). At the Prophet's grave, for example, Al-e Ahmad (1985) is distressed by the pilgrims' bickering and pushing while waiting to pray inside the sanctuary:

> How possessive people can be, even on a trip like this. I wasn't aware of this until my foot turned back the corner of a prayer carpet. The fellow hit the back of my foot so hard I didn't know how to react. I just looked at him. He was an old man, evidently not an Arab. He was turning a rosary and saying *zekr*; but there was a predatory look in his eye. I was embarrassed (p. 40).

Al-e Ahmad (1985) observes similar behaviour wherever he goes during the *hajj*. At Mount Arafat, where an important ritual takes place, he writes, "God save us from this bickering over water that started up first thing in the morning . . . . And such quarreling! [The pilgrims] assault one another at the slightest provocation with twisted and soaked bath towels, using them like whips. *Sharq shurq*! 'Son of a dog!' And so on" (p. 81). Al-e Ahmad (1985) could use the mass slaughter of thousands of animals as his clearest example of human nastiness. In any case, by the last day of the *hajj*, his fellow pilgrims have completely disgusted him. One of the last passages in his diary is "People have reverted to their true colours, showing themselves as they really are. Selfish and petty, intolerant of one another, deserving of whatever they have" (p. 122). In *Lost in the Crowd*, these observations are Al-e Ahmad's final comment about his fellow pilgrims and their individual behaviours.

Among the pilgrims in general, Al-e Ahmad (1985) has the most contempt for "Arabs" and Muslims of several other cultures and countries. Early in his diary, he sets the pattern in

this regard when he is describing his bus driver, who refuses all offers of help after his bus breaks down: “He had two or three drivers in our group and no matter how they tried to help him, he refused. Arab blockheadedness . . . . It was a fiasco. The people became agitated, the women whining and swearing, especially cursing everything Arab” (p. 13). As the pilgrimage proceeds, Al-e Ahmad (1985) becomes more and more like these women, making comments such as “Frankly, these Gaza Arabs who’ve fled Palestine are an embarrassment to Islam,” “I never thought an Anziah [Arab] could be just like a human being, and so neat,” and “If we were to adhere to Meccan standards of cleanliness . . . for the Muslim world, it would be most unworthy of Muslims” (pp. 16, 72, 107). Hillmann (1985), noting Al-e Ahmad’s “animus toward the Arabs,” argues that “In his xenophobic view toward the Arabs and feelings of Iranian superiority, Al-e Ahmad expresses typical 20th century Iranian intellectual feelings” (p. xxxi). Perhaps, but Hillmann does not mention that Al-e Ahmad’s contempt is not reserved for Arabs: his diary includes xenophobic/racist remarks such as “God save us from these Indonesians . . . , “These Yemenis are very rough,” and “What’s more tiresome than anything else about walking in this crowd is the roughness of the blacks and Arabs” (pp. 13, 69, 87). Al-e Ahmad’s admirers have made unsupportable claims such as Mirsepassi’s speculation that during his *hajj*, Al-e Ahmad “may have been affirming his belief that the Islamic community offers the best possible future for humanity (and Iran in particular)” (p. 110). On the contrary, in *Lost in the Crowd* nothing suggests that Al-e Ahmad either believes in the existence of or feels he belongs to “the Islamic community”; in fact, when describing the contents of an Egyptian magazine, he writes,

"It was full of the usual pictures, Westernized material, *calls for Islamic unity* . . . and other nonsense" (p. 51, emphasis added).

The Corruption and Incompetence of the Saudi Regime

Given his contempt for "Arabs," Al-e Ahmad (1985) inevitably also hates the government of the most powerful Arab country, Saudi Arabia. After he arrives in the airport in the Saudi city of Jedda, he almost immediately is offended by what he perceives as the "filth," noise, incompetence, and rampant commercialism around him, for which he blames the Saudi government. The first of his many angry statements and critical comments against it occurs in his second diary entry:

> Piles of Pepsi and Coke cans and traveler's paraphernalia. There were rivulets of water everywhere [in the "Hajji Village"], and you always wondered if it isn't sewage coming out of a privy with the top open. This glorious Saudi Arabian government (Peace be upon it)! Evidently preoccupied with guzzling up oil profits. Let all these hajjis burst open because of the filth, but keep all these oil wells pumping (p. 9).

The Pepsi and Coke cans infuriate Al-e Ahmad because he is critical of any sign of Westernization or the Western politico-economic and cultural domination, while "the rivulets of water" disgust him because he detests any hint of possible "filth." Thus, even before he leaves the Jedda airport for the next stage of his journey, he is already incensed by the Saudi government.

With each passing day, he becomes more and more indignant. On the sixth day of the *hajj*, for example, his discovery that the telegraph does not run directly from Saudi Arabia provokes another furious outburst:

> [Saudi Arabians] still use the same ocean cable from the Persian Gulf to the Suez Canal, no doubt. Corpse washers! . . . And this they call a perfect example of national management! Yet the Americans working for Aramco at Dhahran and Riadh get their new year's turkey hot from Los Angeles without fail! (p. 45)

Here, although Al-e Ahmad loathes any sign of Westernization, he is, nevertheless, using the "Americans" as his benchmark for criticizing what he perceives to be the Saudi regime's "backwardness" for not providing a better telegraph service. In fact, what he actually wants is some form of autarkic development or the (selective) "modernization" without any trace of Westernization and political subordination to imperialism.

As a result, Al-e Ahmad's main complaints against the Saudi government are contradictory: he detests it not only because he blames it for developing and commercializing the *hajj*, and *also* because it has not done enough to develop the infrastructure by, for example, providing better telegraph service or cleaner washrooms for the pilgrims. On the one hand, Al-e Ahmad is angry because the shrines and other holy places in and around Mecca are not still in their original pristine states, or the states that he imagines that they were in "1400 years ago" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 61). Similarly, he wants the Saudi government to restore the original *hajj* practices. For example, although participating in the ritual at Mount Arafat (a mountain near Mecca) "is strenuous because it requires a day of walking [at Arafat] and exposure to the hot

sun" (Green, 1985a, p. 125), Al-e Ahmad (1985) criticizes the use of vehicles to make the journey to and from this mountain:

> This going to Mina and Arafat and returning makes an enormous procession, and it would be much better if no vehicles were used. An appropriate hour at the end of the day ought to be chosen for everyone to leave on foot. It would be magnificent (p. 101)

Al-e Ahmad (1985) uses adjectives like "magnificent" and "great" (p. 85) and nouns like "grandeur" (p. 29), "magnificence" (p. 40), and "splendour" (p. 67) whenever he thinks about the *hajj* as he imagines it originally existed, and he blames the Saudi government for, for example, using "reinforced concrete everywhere . . . without a trace of the beautiful woodwork of old" (p. 71).

On the other hand, Al-e Ahmad (1985) also rages against the Saudi government for not providing better and upgraded facilities of the *hajj* sites. After conceding "that the task of transporting 800,000 foreigners in less than a month is not a simple one for a country whose population is only 5 or 6 times that number," Al-e Ahmad (1985) still lashes out at the Saudi government: "Nonetheless, it's obvious that no facilities are prepared beforehand for the Hajj. [The Saudi government has] left the matter of the Hajj to the most backward, primitive, and poverty-stricken layer of society" (p. 14). Again and again, Al-e Ahmad (1985) criticizes the "backward" Saudi regime for failing to provide better and improved amenities for the *hajj*. For example, his visit to Mount Hara, which he describes as the "foremost place of inspiration in Islam" (p. 109), is no way inspiring for him because he notices that a cavity dug out at the top of

this mountain to catch rain water is empty. This discovery provokes another angry tirade against the Saudi government: “You would think they could restore this place, put in water, build a road, put up road markers, and install some lights” (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 109). Making these changes, particularly putting in a road and installing lights, would significantly change the site from what it was 1400 years ago. Nevertheless, Al-e Ahmad wants the Saudi government both to preserve the *hajj* sites in their original state of “grandeur” and also to improve or ‘’update’’ them.

What Al-e Ahmad (1985) perceives as the Saudis’ double failure to preserve and improve or ‘’update’’ the *hajj*’s holy sites leads him to repeatedly state one of his main themes in *Lost in the Crowd*: the *hajj* must be placed under international Islamic control, and Medina and Mecca must be declared “two international Islamic cities” because one cannot expect “these Saudis” to have enough “intelligence” to manage the *hajj* and maintain its sites efficiently (p. 28). With each new discovery of the “primitive” (Al- Ahmad’s word) and harsh conditions that the pilgrims are facing, Al-e Ahmad’s (1985) call for Islamic internationalization of the *hajj* becomes more and more insistent. In Medina, for example, even just the number of flies in a new building for housing the pilgrims evokes another furious response from him:

> The buildings [in Saudi Arabia] of recent construction are designed to catch the wind. They’ve made the windows so large, however - - the idiots! - - that you’d think this was the Norwegian coast. And these flies! I’ve never seen the like in my life . . . . Yes. There is no alternative to international Islamic control over these [*hajj*] rites (p. 32).

International Islamic control, apparently, would be the panacea for solving all the *hajj*'s problems.

However, Al-e Ahmad's (1985) call for "a joint council of Muslim nations" (p. 31) to administer the *hajj* is illogical. First, a significant sector of the Muslim populations on any kind of joint council managing the *hajj* would also be Arab populations, but Al-e Ahmad repeatedly criticizes Arabs for being backward, primitive, and decadent and uncultured. Second, when he visits the ruins of an ancient Ottoman fortress near Medina, he asks, "Why shouldn't a fortress like this be preserved?" and then comments:

> All through the Muslim world we trample the remnants of those who've gone before, and wipe their traces off the face of the earth, so we can blossom ourselves. The only aspect of others that interests us is their graves and buried artifacts. It must be this way. With all your contempt, you [Muslims] flourish in the act of trampling someone else's glory, and this very contempt is gratified as you weep over the bones of this very other person (p. 25).

Actually, Al-e Ahmad (1985) reveals that the grave markers at even the holy Baqi' Cemetary in Medina were "smashed to dust" by the Wahhabi Arabs when they came to state power in Saudi Arabia, so not even the ancient graves are respected. In any case, if Arabs are, as Al-e Ahmad repeatedly asserts, unintelligent (see p. 28, for example) and also if Muslims "[a]ll through the Muslims world" destroy their own holy sites, then there is no reason to believe that a joint council of Muslim communities/populations would even be interested in restoring and then protecting the *hajj* sites.

The Benefits of the *hajj*

The third major theme that emerges from *Lost in the Crowd* involves the benefits of the *hajj* "as a refuge for every weary person" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 115) and a defense against Westernization and Western imperialist powers. Before discussing this theme, the following paragraphs will deal with the much more controversial issue of whether the *hajj* benefitted Al-e Ahmad personally.

As was explained earlier in this chapter, the fact that Al-e Ahmad went on a *hajj* and then wrote about his experiences has often been interpreted as "evidence" of his personal "return to Islam" and also used to fuel fruitless speculation about how he *might* have perceived Islam if he had lived longer. Algar (1984), for example, argues that *Lost in the Crowd* "can be regarded as the record of a step forward on a path that might have take Al-i Ahmad to a more complete identification with Islam" (p. 19). However, nothing in Al-e Ahmad's travel diary suggests that he believed that he had even an incomplete "identification with Islam" or that he had gained any spiritual benefits from his pilgrimage. The closest he comes to having any kind of "religious" experience occurs on the third day of his *hajj*, when he is praying in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. After explaining that the "greatest damage" from not praying for over twenty years "was the loss of the mornings, with their delicate coolness, and the energetic activity of the people," Al-e Ahmad (1985) continues,

> In the morning when I said "peace be upon you o Prophet," I had a sudden start. I could see the Prophet's grave and the people circumambulating. They were climbing all over one another to kiss the shrine. The police were continually scrambling to prevent forbidden behaviour . . . I started crying and abruptly fled the mosque . . . (pp. 21-22; the ellipses are Al-e Ahmad's).

Exactly what makes Al-e Ahmad cry and flee is unclear, but his images of the climbing pilgrims and the scrambling police fit into the pattern of his general portrayal of the pilgrims' brutish behaviour.

The only similar passage in the *Lost in the Crowd* occurs when Al-e Ahmad (1985) describes that he cried and fled before he could complete his *sa'y*, or ritual run. Here, he emphasizes that this response was not due to any kind of religious feelings, but to his intense fear that his self would be engulfed by the other pilgrims and that he would become "less the nothing" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 63). Earlier, he reports that he went into a mosque; opened his Qur'an "at random;" asked, "What does it all mean?" and then quickly left (p. 23); later, in Mecca, he comments, "Upon approaching every shrine, you see there is no 'sanctity' in its exterior. It is in you, in your mind. Or it was" (p. 71). The first passage suggests that Al-e Ahmad could not find any "meaning" in the Qur'an; the second, that at the moment of writing, he no longer felt any sense of "sanctity."

Anyone who still believes that Al-e Ahmad experienced a personal return to Islam during his *hajj* should read his brief fable of an old woman and khizr - - "'the Green One,' a famous figure in Arab folklore" (Green, 1985 c, p. 84). While he is waiting in Mina during his return journey to Iran, Al-e Ahmad (1985) writes, "My thoughts concerned the conditions for perpetuating the ecstasy of a tradition" (p. 85). He appears to be referring to the ecstasy of the Islamic tradition, or to the kind of intense religious feelings that eluded him during his *hajj*. His question leads him to decide that his own experience has been "like the experience of that old

woman who waited and swept her home for 40 days in her house expecting a visit from *Khizr*, and on the final day didn't see him" (p. 84). Similarly, Al-e Ahmad did not "see" whatever he was expecting, hoping, or needing to observe in Mecca and Medina. In his second-last diary entry, he is concerned mainly about what kind of "image" he has provided of himself and whether he has written "a confession, a protest, heresy, or whatever" (p. 124). One possibility that he does *not* even consider is that he might have written an account of his "return to Islam".

Although Al-e Ahmad (1985) does not believe that he has benefitted personally from his pilgrimage to Mecca, he still concludes the *hajj* can play important roles in the lives of other Muslims and the affairs of the vast majority of the population in Islamic countries. In all of *Lost in the Crowd*, he provides only two positive descriptions of the other pilgrims as they perform their religious duties. The first of these passages occurs early in his diary, when he is visiting Uhud, "the site of the first battle fought by Muslims against non-believers, and the burial ground of the first martyrs of Islam" (Green, 1985c, p. 132). As he walks through all that is left of the graveyard -- "a big pit with no grave markers" (pp. 30) -- he observes a chaotic scene: the police are cursing and chasing after Bedouin and Berber women who have stolen the coins left as offerings by other pilgrims; Al-e Ahmad's brother-in-law is holding on to a policeman and shouting, "You're a dog! You're a Jew!" (p. 29): and three young Arabs are yelling "Forbidden! Forbidden!" (p. 30) at the pilgrims who are praying in the cemetery. This scene would be typical of Al-e Ahmad's *hajj* experiences, except for the two groups of pilgrims who stand out amid all

the turmoil: “Two groups of Iranian groups of hajjis sat on either side [of the graveyard], wailing mournfully with great excitement in the *shur* mode, in a way that would have melted the hardest heart, crying and beating themselves about the head and chest” (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 30). Al-e Ahmad records very few positive reactions during his *hajj*, but his fellow Iranians’ wailing seems to genuinely move him and also to suggest the *hajj*’s redemption possibilities.

These possibilities are realized in *Lost in the Crowd’s* only similar passage, which occurs towards the end of the diary. Just before Al-e Ahmad (1985) leaves Mecca to return to Iran, he goes to the House of God “for a final visit” (p. 113). Near there, he notices a man bringing an old woman small cupfuls of water from the Zamzam well, “a sacred well in Mecca just outside the Grand Mosque” (Green, 1985 a, p. 133):

> The old woman splashed [the water] on her breasts, her head lifted to the sky, and then prayed until her son came with next cupful. I enjoyed the experience vicariously. She had no teeth, and though she prayed softly in a language I could neither hear nor understand, I know she was praying for the entire world. Then I continued on my way (p. 114).

Later, when Al-e Ahmad (1985) is wondering yet again why he is participating in the *hajj*, he remembers the old woman and has a revelation:

> [W]hy have you come here? To seek traces of a tradition in the seat of Aramco’s power? What is the point of all this, anyway - - pretence? Didn’t you see that the master of this House was that woman? Why had she come here, really, to so fearlessly move her womanly presence next to the stone [the *Kaaba*]. I realized it is worthwhile that the Kaaba has served for centuries and centuries as a refuge for every weary person, for this forsaken humanity, confounded by poverty, oppression, and anomie, like a wailing wall, if it answers even one of this woman’s

> prayers (a complaint against a rival wife in her harem, a wish for the happiness of a child, a request for a cure for sickness, and so on . . .) (p. 115).

In the above passage, Al-e Ahmad implicitly contrasts himself with the old woman, to whom he assigns a symbolic value as the representative of all of "forsaken humanity": whereas, for him, his participation in the *hajj* is only a "pretence," for the old woman and all the millions of others like her, the *hajj* provides an imaginary space of an essential and deeply meaningful "refuge" from and consolation for oppression and all the troubling hardships of life. Thus, in Al-e Ahmad's view, the *hajj* does not benefit him personally, but provides an essential "wailing wall" for true believers.

This interpretation or perception of religion as an essential outlet for the grief and hope of the masses (but not for himself) is, in effect, a positive restatement of the same view that he expresses negatively in *Occidentosis:*

> The poorer these people [Iranians] are, the more they must rely on religious beliefs as the sole means of making life bearable. Those enjoying no success in the present necessarily seek it in heaven, in religion and the afterworld. In many ways they are fortunate (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 71).

Here, Al-e Ahmad is implicitly distinguishing himself from devout Muslims. He does not consider himself to be like "these people," just as he does not consider himself to be like the old woman whom he observed praying at the Zamzam well. In fact, his mechanistic, instrumental, and functionalist conception of religion recalls Marx's (1975) famous comment (susceptible to contrary interpretations) that "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people" (p. 244). This

perception of religion as a narcotic or "social opium" (Turner, 1993; McKinnon, 2006; Lundskow, 2006) does not support the popular view that, during his last years, Al-e Ahmad found answers in Islam to his personal questions and dilemmas (Hillmann, 1985, p. xxii).

In *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad (1985) extends the benefits of the *hajj* to include not only devout individuals in particular, but also Muslim countries in general. After describing his conversation with a young Saudi army officer, about capitalism, Israel, and the oil companies, Al-e Ahmad (1985) criticizes the Western imperialist powers for planting Israel in the middle of the Arab lands, Pope John 22 for "lifting the curse of Christ," and internal rot for the overthrow of Iran's Mossadegh government in 1953. This last issue leads him to ask,

> If the West is pushing the wagon of Christianity with its neocolonialism, why have we in our area allowed the cart of Islam to become so rusty and abandoned it? I asked myself, wouldn't these Hajj rituals themselves be a good launching pad for taking a stand against the West? (Oh ho! I'm back to *Weststruckness* [occidentosis] again . . .). (p. 73).

Actually, occidentosis is never very far from Al-e Ahmad's thoughts as writes in his diary, where he leaves no doubt that he detests any and all signs of Westernization and cultural imitation. (For example, he admires "a group of half-naked [African] women" wearing "low-cut dresses," but not another group wearing "prissy, inappropriate blouses in the European style" (p. 42).) In any case, in a passage criticizing the slow, ill-prepared transportation provided for the pilgrims, he returns to the issue of the *hajj*'s potential usefulness as a defense against Westernization:

> I'm not suggesting that with all this waiting to obtain the most minimal of daily necessities, there is no longer room for the world of the unseen and its

> expectations. I'm saying that every year a million people take part in those [*hajj*] rites, and that if there were order, facilities, procedures, and creativity, *there could be great power.* After all, the Muslim people of today don't have to accept pre-Islamic Arab life or Arab ignorance in order to partake of such primitiveness! (p. 85, emphasis added).

Here, Al-e Ahmad asserts that the *hajj* rites could have "great power," not for him personally, but for "the Muslims people of today". In other words, he recognizes the role of Islamic values, expressions, and imagery as "the basic mind-set" (Hillmann, 1985, p. xii) and identity of the vast majority of the population in Muslim countries and believes in the potential usefulness of the *hajj* as a unifying and mobilizing force that would bind together the collective wills of Muslims.

As usual, Al-e Ahmad's (1985) position on a key point in his political and social thought is self-contradictory. On the one hand, he repeatedly refers to the *hajj* as "mechanized barbarism" (p. 91); he describes the *hajj*'s ritual slaughter of animals as "a primeval picnic" (p. 90); and he dismisses "calls for Islamic unity" as "nonsense" (p. 51). On the other hand, he also believes that authentic Islam in general and the *hajj* rites in particular could unify Muslims against cultural imitation, the Muslim governing elite's surrender of sovereignty and subordination to imperialism, and the economic and political policies imposed by corporate capital and Western imperialist powers. Hillmann (1985) struggled in his early work on Al-e Ahmad to reconcile these two contrasting positions. Eventually, Hillman concluded that

> The first dilemma that Al-i Ahmad faced in his life and career was between a possible lack of personal faith in Shi'i Islam and his assertion of its deleterious effects as an institution and traditional force in Iranian society and culture on the one hand, and the unifying power which Shi'i Islam could present in the country of Iran as well as religion's potential strength as both a check to absolute monarchical

> control and a bulwark against the threats the West posed for the future existence of Iranian culture (p. xxiii).

In *Lost in the Crowd*, Al-e Ahmad leaves no doubt of his lack of personal faith, and he does not distinguish between "Shi'i Islam" and "Islam" in general, or between "Iran" and other so-called Muslim countries. Nevertheless, Hillmann's point is well-taken: although Al-e Ahmad was himself a non-believer, he developed and promoted a positive view of Islam as a mobilizing socio-political force among the mass of the population - - against the relations of imperialism and the Shah's authoritarian state-form - - and is still honoured today as a Muslim who "did not live to see the exaltation of his beloved [Islamic] culture" (the Tehran magazine *E'tesam*, on the 13th anniversary of Al-e Ahmad's death, as cited in Hillmann, 1985, p. 115).

Conclusion

As the most directly "religious" of Al-e Ahmad's writings, *Lost in the Crowd* plays a key role in his *oeuvre*, particularly in terms of the perplexing issue of his personal feelings about Islam. Although this travel diary resulted from his participation in the *hajj*, one of the most sacred and important religious duties for devout Muslims, his impressions are much different from those found in more conventional and reverent accounts of religious pilgrimages. Al-e Ahmad's decision to make a detailed written record of his *hajj* experiences, as well as his intense fear of losing his "self," precludes his participation in the *hajj* rituals, except as a detached observer. As a result, *Lost in the Crowd* is more of what Howarth (1980) would call a "poetic autobiography" than a "religious" text. Like other poetic autobiographers, Al-e Ahmad

is more interested in exploring his self than in expressing traditional religious pieties: in his diary, he often admits that he is preoccupied with himself, and, in his final diary entries, his main concerns involve the kind of self-image he has provided and the kind of text he has written.

In fact, he has written a complex text, expressing not only his self-absorption, but also his contempt for Arabs -- "the same Arabs with whom Al-e Ahmad's family in claiming to be *sayyeds* asserted ultimate blood relationships" (Hillmann, 1985, p. xxi) -- for the Saudi government, and for the "mechanized primitivity" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 72), of the *hajj*'s customs and rituals. Despite this contempt, and without noticing any contradiction, Al-e Ahmad also turns his travel diary into a call for placing the *hajj* under international Muslim control and using it to foster unity against Westernization, corporate capital, and imperialism. In the end, *Lost in the Crowd* is a bizarre document, revealing that its author is a self-described "atheist" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 58) who promotes the *hajj* and Islam as a source of identity and unity among the overwhelming majority of inhabitants of the Muslim countries.

Chapter 6

A Stone on a Grave

After the first publication of *Occidentosis* during the early 1960s, Al-e Ahmad was widely perceived in Iran as "the intellectual leader of a new generation of Iranian thinkers" (Keddie, 2006, p. 189). After his death in 1969, his unofficial role in Iran was elevated, for "younger Iranians opposed to the Pahlavi monarchy seemed to revere Al-e Ahmad as a prescient martyr to the cause of intellectual freedom and social revolution" (Hillmann, 1985, p. vii). One wonders, however, what all those who revered Al-e Ahmad, particularly because of his perceived "nationalism" and alleged discovery of "his pure Islamic mentality" (Anonymous, as cited in Mirsepassi, 2000, p. 114), would have thought of him if they had been able to read his memoir *A Stone on a Grave.* Written from 1963-1964, but not published until 1981, this bitter and candid descent into nihilism proved to be too controversial for the Islamic Republic of Iran, which finally banned it (Hillmann, 1985). Even though this text was republished in an English translation by an American publisher in 2008, it has received very little attention from scholars, probably because it completely contradicts the popular image of Al-e Ahmed that was constructed by academics; his Iranian supporters and the Iranian media; and his late wife, Simin Daneshvar.

The main subject of *A Stone on a Grave* is Al-e Ahmad's (2008) struggle to cope with his inability to produce children. However, as he does in *Lost in the Crowd,* he frequently strays

from his focus in order to reflect upon a wide variety of other topics including his feelings for his parents, his traumatic memories of the death of one of his sisters, his relationship with his wife, and more generally, his reflections about "truth and reality" (p. 3). As these topics suggest, *A Stone on a Grave* is the most inward-looking of all the works by Al-e Ahmad discussed in this thesis. Apparently, he believed that no topic or reflection was too personal or too unflattering to be withheld from his readers: he explains for example, that he masturbated in order to provide sperm samples for his doctors treating his infertility, that he beat up -- "with the intent to kill" -- one of his (elementary) school students when he was a school principal (p. 46), and that his infertility makes him "happy" because "after [his] death, [he] won't leave any creature in [his] place who would be enslaved by ancestors and tradition" (p. 95). Such information, provided by an alleged staunch defender of Iranian tradition and Shi'i Islam, led a disgruntled interviewer in 1987 to tell Al-e Ahmad's widow that the posthumous publication of *A Stone on a Grave* "was a conspiracy to distort [Al-e Ahmad's] noble image" (as cited in Ghanooparvar, 2008, p. ix). "Not true!" his widow, in effect, replied, arguing that "Every writer changes and develops with the passage of time, in the same way that love and loyalty may not be lasting in him" (as cited in Ghanooparvar, 2008, p. ix).

Daneshavar's response does not convince the interviewer, who comments, "The printing and the publication of the book, in our opinion, was not proper in other important respects such as the issues of belief to which Jalal also paid attention and accepted" (as cited in Ghanooparvar, 2008 p. xiii). In this chapter, it will be argued that *A Stone on a Grave* reveals

that Al-e Ahmad never actually did accept "the issues of belief" that are central to Iranian nationalism and Shiite Islam and, that as Ghanooparvar (2008) concludes, "ascribing religious sentiments to Jalal Al-e Ahmad of the variety which seem to be held by the interviewer mentioned above are nothing short of exaggeration and wishful thinking" (p. xiv). To support this argument, the remainder of this chapter is divided in the following sections: (1) background, (2) plot / content, (3) genre, (4) character, (5) themes, and (6) conclusion.

Background

Not much has been written about the background of *A Stone on a Grave.* Most discussions of it have been brief and have agreed with Ghanooparvar (2008) that this text is "a sort of personal diary not necessarily intended for others to read" (p. ix) because of Al-e Ahmad's frank revelations of his personal life, including discussion of his infertility, extra-marital affairs, and nihilism. According to this view, this book's publication in 1981 by Al-e Ahmad's brother Shams "surprised Simin Daneshvar because Jalal had apparently not intended it to appear without rewriting, which he did not apparently live to undertake" (Hillmann. 1985, p. xxv). A brief reference to *A Stone on a Grave* by Al-e Ahmad (1982) supports this speculation. In the final paragraph of his essay "An Autobiography of Sorts," he lists his future projects, explaining, ". . . I have to rewrite *A Stone on a Grave,* which is a story about parental childlessness" (p. 19). It may be, therefore, that he did not intend this text to appear in its published form.

However, at the end of the 2008 English translation of *A Stone on a Grave,* the following note appears, apparently written by Al-e Ahmad (2008): "First writing completed on 23 July 1963; second writing, 10 January 1964" (p. 96). Whether Al-e Ahmad intended to write *A Stone on a Grave* a third time is not known. In any case, he wrote this text at least twice, and it never reads like a diary or a series of rambling stream-of-consciousness observations. On the contrary, this memoir has a clear structure, includes motifs and symbols, and divides the author into two selves, which Al-e Ahmad (2008) refers to as "the First Person Singular" and "the Second Person Singular," or his external self and his inner, "Oriental," "other self" (pp. 75, 69). Thus, although Al-e Ahmad may subconsciously reveal "aspects of himself that he may not have intended to reveal" (Ghanooparvar, 2008, p. viii), *A Stone on a Grave* still provides strong evidence of careful planning and writing.

Plot/Content

A Stone on a Grave begins with the epigraph "Every man is a stone on his father's grave" (Faqfiga Bani, Verse 1, Chapter 31). In other words, a male child, like a man's gravestone, signifies that the man existed and continues his name and legacy (Ghanooparvar, 2008). The narrative that follows this epigraph proves it to be, in Al-e Ahmad's case, bitterly ironic: at his father's grave, the childless Al-e Ahmad (2008) tells his father's spirit, "You should . . . know that I am not the stone on your grave" (p. 91). Furthermore, Al-e Ahmad (2008) exclaims, "If you only knew how happy I am to be the very last tombstone of my deceased ancestors" (p. 95). Whereas the epigraph celebrates fertility and the unbroken chain created by a family's

generations, Al-e Ahmad celebrates his *in*fertility and the *breaking* of the chain of family and tradition.

He develops this celebration by dividing his memoir into six chapters, which collectively, present his struggle to understand why having children would show that he has existed, and also why having children should be important after one's death. Al-e Ahmad (2008) begins Chapter One by immediately revealing this inner struggle: "We have no kids, Simin and I. All right, this is a reality. But is this the end of it? Actually, this is precisely what drives you crazy" (p. 3). In the remainder of this chapter, Al-e Ahmad's (2008) agitation increases while he explains that this most important "reality" is just "a microscopic field [of reality]" (p. 5), or what he can see when he studies his own semen samples under a microscope. There, he can see only two or three "honorable gentlemen" (sperm) (p. 6) in each field, instead of at least eighty thousand (the normal number) per field. The fact that this tiny field of reality is controlling his life by preventing him from having children has left him, in his view, "standing in front of nothingness" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 13). In effect, the subsequent chapters of *A Stone on a Grave* are Al-e Ahmad's account of how he has come to not merely accept, but also to embrace the "nothingness" of his life.

This paragraph briefly summarizes the content of each of Al-e Ahmad's six chapters. In Chapter One, Al-e Ahmad introduces his topic and describes his doctors' farcical attempts to "help" him. Chapter Two describes his marriage, in which he and his wife "sit in front of each other from morning till night, just like two mirrors, and witness a space full of emptiness or full

of flaws and defects" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 17). In Chapter Three, Al-e Ahmad provides a chronological account of his marriage, detailing his and his wife's efforts to treat his infertility and also to determine whether she might be the cause of their inability to have children. Chapter Four provides a long digression portraying Al-e Ahmad's callous response to the suicide of his sister-in-law and to the survivors of an earthquake. This chapter is related to Al-e Ahmad's main topic only because the sister-in-law's death raises the question of who should care for her two children. In Chapter Five, Al-e Ahmad discusses his belief that "from the time the border and boundary of reality was discovered, and the length and breadth of the microscopic field" and possibly "even earlier than that," he has had two different selves (one inhabits the other) in his personality. One is an educated, 20th-century or contemporary cultural worker and social critic, and the other is "an Oriental - - with exhortations on tradition and history and desires, all according to religion and custom" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 68). The former self (the contemporary cultural critic) wants him to remain faithful to his wife, while the latter (the oriental social self) wants him to either divorce her or marry a second wife, as his father, brother, and sisters' husbands did. This chapter also reveals the details of Al-e Ahmad's 1962 trip to Europe, where the "Oriental" in him "took charge" of his body and forced him to have sexual relations with a series of women, or to "[enjoy] the freedom of the lower part of the body" - - "[t]he only freedom that we Orientals can have in the West" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 73). Finally, in Chapter Six, Al-e Ahmad (2008) describes his visit to his father's grave and reveals how "happy" he is to be childless (p. 94).

The above bare summary of *A Stone on a Grave* makes its contents and tone appear to be much more solemn and serious than they actually are. Al-e Ahmad's reflections vary wildly in tone. At times, he is quite sentimental and moving, as he is when he describes himself and his wife as two mirrors facing a space full of emptiness between them. More often, he is harsh, bitter, and vulgar:

> Afterwards [after futilely visiting doctors and trying out home remedies for infertility], whenever my wife started talking about wanting to have a child, I would call one of my sisters or one of her brothers or sisters. They would come with their offspring for two or three days or only from morning till afternoon - - even this was enough - - and give her a taste of having children, with their pissing and shitting, their spilling and throwing, picking them up and putting them down, their crying and wailing and tantrums and quarreling and so forth. Then, for a time, there was peace . . . (p. 49).

Passages like this - - and there are many similar ones throughout *A Stone on the Grave* - - not only suggest that Al-e Ahmad probably would not have been a caring parent, but also create a strong undercurrent of disgust, much like that expressed in *The Lost in the Crowd.* Thus, whereas Vahdat (2000) describes *A Stone on the Grave* as a serious philosophical treatise expressing "some of [Al-e Ahmad's] deepest ontological thought regarding the subjectivity of the individual" (p. 64), this text's contents are much more like those of a bleak, bitter farce emphasizing the absurdity of Al-e Ahmad's condition.

Genre

In the last three pages of *A Stone on a Grave*, Al-e Ahmad declares that he is happy because his infertility has completely severed him from tradition, history, and his ancestors.

Until he arrives at this conclusion, his memoir reads like a classic example of "autobiography as poetry," in which, Howarth (1980) explains, the writer practices "the poetic act of continuing self-study" (pp. 104, 105). Howarth (1980) also comments that such autobiographical writing is characterized by uncertainty: "Poetic biographers can . . . draw only tentative, experimental self-portraits. They share equally strong doubts, especially about their current state of mind. Uncertain of the present, they study the past for some explanation of their later difficulties." (p. 105). In *A Stone on a Grave,* Al-e Ahmad (2008) carries this tendency towards uncertainty, also evident in *Lost in the Crowd,* to an extreme, even to the point of self-parody.

For example, while describing a doctor who prescribed a year of observation under his care, Al-e Ahmad (2008) blurts out, "Idiot! Of course, [the advice] wasn't really his fault! Actually it was" (P. 10). Next, after explaining that he and his wife "gave [themselves] up to fate," Al-e Ahmad (2008) comments, "But the more I think about it, the more I cannot understand it. I mean, I can. Destiny, fate, fortune, and all of that I understand, along with that scientific explanation, all of it. But, bearing it is not easy" (P. 11). Here, the doctor first is not and then is to blame for being an idiot, and Al-e Ahmad first does not and then does understand his fate. As he struggles to cope with his infertility, he continues to vacillate between opposites, alternatively bemoaning and celebrating his condition. Indeed, even just before making his final declaration of happiness, Al-e Ahmad (2008) explains that he is "unhappy" to be at his father's grave and then, just a few lines later (and referring to himself in the third person), he announces, "You don't know how happy he is . . . about the fact that

finally he will break this chain of the past and the future in one place" (P. 95). Did Al-e Ahmad's infertility "really" make him happy? One can conclude only that, at the moment of writing the above statement, he believed that he had accepted his condition.

Al-e Ahmad's candid self-revelations about controversial personal issues are unusual in the context of autobiographical writing by Iranians, who generally tend to be more guarded and circumspect in their memoirs and autobiographies. As Ghanoonparvar (2008) explains, these genres were relatively rare in Iran until recently, and were mainly accounts of the travels of government officials and dignitaries, or records of the accomplishments of individuals trying to justify themselves in the positions of authority in which they served. Ghanoonparvar (2008) comments:

> One does occasionally find in these accounts aspects of the personal life of the author, but there is usually very little attempt at writing true autobiography, if one defines this genre as a sort of soul searching and an effort for self-knowledge, even if, as in any form of self-presentation, the work offers a portrait of the author as he or she would like to be viewed by others. In other words, many autobiographies are in a sense self-posturing (p. viii).

A Stone in a Grave appears to be an exception. First, Al-e Ahmad's widow, Simin Daneshvar, described *A Stone in a Grave* as "a narrative of the self in which fictional elements have rarely been used and only as seasoning" (as cited in Ghanoonparvar, 2008, p. viii). In other words, she believed that Al-e Ahmad's self-revelations are accurate representations of his thoughts and feelings. Second, probably almost all autobiographers who posture in order to portray themselves as they would like to be portrayed or viewed by others do so in order to enhance

their reputations and polish their public images. In contrast, *A Stone on a Grave* has the opposite effect, as when Al-e Ahmad (2008) describes his mother, while she is praying at the father's grave, as a "black heap" and his deceased father as "a bag of bones" (Al-e Ahmad, 2006, pp. 88, 94).

Al-e Ahmad's candour and bluntness in *A Stone on a Grave* had contrasting effects on those Iranians who were able to read this memoir before it was banned in Iran. Some, like the interviewer who questioned Al-e Ahmad's widow, were shocked by how this text "distorted" Al-e Ahmad's revered image (as cited Ghanoonparvar, 2008, p. ix). The Iranian literary theorist and cultural critic Reza Baraheni, Al-e Ahmad's friend and follower during the 1960s, perceived the personal revelations in *A Stone on a Grave* as evidence that "with respect to himself, Jalal was more courageous than many other writers." "Iranian writers," Baraheni continued, "are afraid to admit to their own weakness, [whereas] Jalal . . . had the courage to confront the moral problems in his own life" (as cited in Hillmann, 1985, p. xxvi). Other Iranian writers and cultural workers, however, described the revelations in *A Stone on a Grave* as "foolish, pathetic, or embarrassing" (Hillmann, 1985, p. xxvi). This chapter's next section, which analyzes Al-e Ahmad and the other main figures in his memoir as "characters" in his narrative, will reveal why it has provoked such strong and divergent responses.

Character

The foremost element of autobiography is character, or "the image or self-portrait" that an autobiographer represents (Howarth, 1980, p. 87). In *A Stone on a Grave,* Al-e Ahmad presents a portrait of himself as a mercurial character, abruptly changing his moods, indifferent to his public image, and ultimately celebrating his infertility as "guaranteeing his individual freedom" (Vahdat, 2000, p. 64). He also creates three memorable secondary characters - - all women - - his sister, his sister-in-law, and his wife. His memoir's title presents the Persian metaphor that every man is a gravestone for his father, but Al-e Ahmad's father plays only a small role in the narrative. As was previously mentioned, Al-e Ahmad represents himself as having two "selves" - - one is contemporary, educated, and "one of the men of the times," while the other is "Oriental," traditional, and like "every trader and merchant and villager" (Al-e Ahmad 2000, pp. 71, 68). Al-e Ahmad reinforces this concept of the two selves in various ways: he frequently mixes his pronouns, referring to himself in the first, second, and the third person; he explains that "[t]he two of us have faced each other constantly, fighting like cat and dog" (p. 69) and then provides a long inner dialogue between his two selves; and when he describes his sexual escapades in Europe, he explains that "the First Person Singular's legs gave way" and that the Second Person Singular [his "Oriental" self] took charge of the body." "He took hold of my reigns," Al-e Ahmad (2008) continues, "and dragged me to the place that every naïve fool of a man must discover" (p. 73). Which "self" is speaking is usually unclear, and, generally, the two selves blur into each other except in the few passages where Al-e Ahmad explicitly distinguishes between them.

He also suggests the idea of two selves by, perhaps unintentionally, representing himself as being both abject and arrogant, so that his self-portrait manages to be both self-degrading and self-exalting. Early in Chapter One, Al-e Ahmad (2008) feels compelled to include the following description of himself in a doctor's office, producing a sample of his semen:

> . . . I have repeatedly gone in search of laboratories, hoping for a reprieve [from my infertility]. And in a dirty corner, in its dark and cramped toilet, any by stroking a small piece of soap - - intentionally discarded by the laundress - - I have, with a deep yearning, pleased with [my] precious few gentleman sperms to honorably descend. Afterwards, with profound fear, trembling, and haste, lest the alkalinity of the soap end the life of these little creatures - - on legs that would not move - - I have run to the table with the microscope and have handed over the temporary abode of the gentleman to the doctor, as if gifting the vanquished enemy's head to the king. Subsequently I have collapsed on a wooden chair and, in a manner that the doctor would not notice, have massaged my legs for a time . . . (p. 6).

Here, the black humour helps to lighten the mood of the passage, while the small details about the discarded soap and the images of Al-e Ahmad stroking, trembling, running, gifting, and, finally, collapsing emphasize his wretchedness.

This passage sets the pattern for the many similar scenes in *A Stone on a Grave*, where, with varying degrees of self-mockery, bitterness, and self-contempt, Al-e Ahmad draws attention to his sense of his own misery. After deciding, for example, that sex without procreation is "an animal act," he has "the crazy idea that [he] should castrate [himself] (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, pp. 26, 27). (Later, neither this idea nor his contempt for Iranian intellectuals who go to Europe (Al-e Ahmad, 1978, 1984) prevents him from going to Europe himself and having sexual relations with several European women (Al-e Ahmad, 2008).) In addition to revealing

that he wanted to castrate himself, Al-e Ahmad (2008) also feels "[j]ust like a pimp" for bringing his wife to a male gynecologist, and like "a cuckold" afterwards (pp. 33, 27). The most grotesque example of Al-e Ahmad's abjectness occurs in the long passage in which he mocks the home remedy or local Iranian treatment for infertility. Whereas his wife refuses to undergo the treatment for women - - "to pour on one's head the water of the mortuary" (p. 38), after the water has been used for 40 days - - he agrees to undergo the treatment for men - - to eat a raw fertilized egg each day for 40 continuous days. Eventually, he wonders if it is possible to fry a fertilized egg: "I saw that my wife was not looking and poured the single dose for that day into a frying pan. And what a fried egg, like thickened snot. Egg white running on it. And tasteless; even with salt and pepper I was not able to eat it" (pp. 40-41). The Iranian cultural workers or "intellectuals" who found the personal revelations in *A Stone on a Grave* to be foolish and pathetic were probably thinking of those listed in this paragraph.

At the same time, however, Al-e Ahmad (2008) is also often obnoxiously arrogant, so that he represents himself as being, simultaneously, both inferior and also superior to other individuals. Early in his memoir, he introduces what he gradually shapes into his central theme involving nihilism by comparing himself to a friend whose brother was killed in an automobile accident. The speeding car jumped a median, raced straight towards the place where the brother "was waiting for his future, making plans with his friends" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 12), and hit only the brother. Al-e Ahmad (2008) comments: "And what a hit, it crushed him. It is in such situation that neither accident nor destiny is escapable. And reality also becomes

meaningless. Do you know what this gentleman of an artist [Al-e Ahmad's friend] now thinks? He thinks they intentionally hit his brother" (p. 13). Al-e Ahmad goes on to explain the significance of the artist's response: "I saw that the artist and I were both standing in front of nothingness, the difference being that he was found refuge in fantasy and imagination in the borderlands of non-existence, but I am not able to" (p. 13). Al-e Ahmad (2008) is able to accept nothingness because his understanding of "reality" has "left no room for imagination" (p. 13) - - or, one can add, no room for believing that a divine being controls everything that happens.

In the long dialogue between his two selves, Al-e Ahmad expands on his idea that his insight into "reality" differentiates him from other individuals. In this passage, his "contemporary self" disingenuously asks his "Oriental" self, "I am . . . one of the men of the times. Is there any difference between me and all those others?" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 71). Impatiently, his other self replies:

> Why are you playing dumb? Really, your problem is that you get struck with whatever you write. You live to write. *All those others merely live their lives, with no purpose whatsoever* [emphasis added]. Even having children is not their aim. Instinct rules their life, not forcing themselves to be sad. This is why you possess neither the satisfaction of their hearts nor the peace of their minds, nor the ability to act like them . . . . At least make yourself understand that one must either live or think. The two cannot be done together (pp. 71-72).

Yes, Al-e Ahmad is unlike other individuals. According to his other self, other individuals have no purpose, whereas he has one. Other individuals have children, whereas he has none. Most importantly, other individuals merely "live," whereas he "thinks."

However, although Al-e Ahmad (2008) prides himself on being a "thinker," which in his case, involves mentally working his way towards his final embrace of nothingness, he actually reveals that he is intensely emotional and consumed by bitterness, hatred, and fantasies of revenge. He hates the doctors who try to treat his infertility, particularly the one who uses "a bag full of European terms" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 4) to discuss Al-e Ahmad's condition, and also the one with "hairy wrists," who operated on his wife:

> If I were to mention his address, many of the women of the city would realize who he was. But to hell with him and his addresses, the last one of which is Hell. Only to settle a score with him, I am willing to accept that all-embracing and limitless Day of Judgment with its copper disc of the sun over one's head, and its sword, narrower than a hair, as a bridge. Not just to accept it but to endure it. You see that I am still making threats, just like a pimp (p. 36).

This is the superior man, who *thinks* and is far above the everyday petty concerns of the rest of us?

Al-e Ahmad (2008) also reveals that he hates or, at least, thinks he hates even children and the survivors of an earthquake. When he is describing his experience of holding his wife's hand while a doctor operated on her, he comments:

> The situation was not such that I could let go of myself, or of her. This was how I let go of the kid. Now I understand. It was one of those moments when hatred appeared, to the point of death, hatred towards any and every kid, yes, towards a kid, towards the inheritor of my name and reputation, the future of the show-off of the name and reputation of his pimp of a father that I am! (p. 34).

This passage would be remarkable in any context, but it is particularly unsettling in a memoir that begins with the childless writer sadly commenting that his house "is dreadfully empty"

without children (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 4). Within the space of 30 pages, Al-e Ahmad moves from lamenting the absence of children to expressing his hatred of children - - and not merely "normal" hatred, but hatred "to the point of death." This passage is also remarkable for its clear expression of the author's *self*-hatred: Al-e Ahmad begins by hating "any and every kid" and concludes by revealing his hatred for the "pimp of a father" that he believes himself to be.

In an equally self-revealing passage, Al-e Ahmad (2008) expresses his hatred for a group of earthquake survivors. He reports that in the summer of 1962, when Iran experienced a "catastrophic earthquake" (p. 53) that killed 12,000 people in a rural area, his wife received a telephone call, informing her that her sister, Homa, had attempted suicide by pouring kerosene over herself and setting it on fire. Seventy-five per cent of her skin was burned, and she died soon after. (In "Jalal's Sunset" Daneshvar's (2008) famous elegy for Al-e Ahmad, Daneshvar claims that her sister "suffered a heart attack" (p. 115).) During their drive to Homa's town, Al-e Ahmad and Daneshvar pass through the earthquake region, where aid workers are now distributing water to the grieving and shocked survivors. For some reason, what he calls "a thoroughfare of charity" infuriates Al-e Ahmad (2008) and he mutters, "These people [the survivors] had to be in such abject poverty for those people [the aid workers] to come to give them charity. They deserve each other. I am talking about the two sides of the coin"(p. 60). What "the coin" refers to is unclear. What is clear is that Al-e Ahmad speeds up and roars through the earthquake zone, He explains, "With difficulty we got through and set off again. I had never driven with such hatred. And at eighty or ninety kilometers per hour. . ." (p. 61).

When he and his wife arrive at their destination, he shouts out, “Where is the idiot owner of the house?” referring to the house where he believes Homa’s body was taken, and his wife asks him, “What’s wrong with you?” (p. 63).

What, indeed, is “wrong” with Al-e Ahmad? He hates not only the doctors who try to help him and his wife, but also children, earthquake survivors and the aid workers who are trying to assist them. Moreover, he not only hates all these living individuals or groups, but also casually writes about his hatred, so that everyone who reads *A Stone on a Grave* will picture and imagine him at his very worst. In addition, his response to the earthquake strongly challenges Mirsepassi’s (2000) argument that Al-e Ahmad “equates the rural with the pure wisdom of the common people,” and that by repeating this theme throughout his works, “he creates a mood of nostalgia for a lost yet superior world” (p. 104). In fact, Al-e Ahmad does not express this theme in any of his major works, and his reaction to the earthquake survivors demonstrates that he *loathes* the “common people” even when they are in deep distress. Finally, this reaction also shows that Al-e Ahmad feels none of the kind of sense of “imagined community” and “fraternity” that, as Anderson (1991) argues, are core components of nationalism. Anderson (1991) comments, for example, “Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings [of ‘community’]” (p. 7). Clearly, Al-e Ahmad is never “willing to die” for his fellow Iranians -- he is not even willing to or able to feel sympathy for the survivors of a disaster in his own country.

Those who admire Al-e Ahmad for being some kind of "progressive" force in more recent or contemporary Iranian history should also be troubled by his representation of women in *A Stone on a Grave.* He does not appear to "hate" women, exactly, but to at least feel a strong contempt for them. In his memoir's first chapter, Al-e Ahmad (2008) mentions that an acquaintance told him about a husband who was "eager to have children . . . due to his wife's secret abortion" (p. 11). Then he comments that the wife, whom he has never met and does not know, "was probably one of those flirtatious hussies expecting to go to Hollywood and did not want to lose her figure" (p. 11). A few pages later, Al-e Ahmad (2008) spews out similar sexist discourses and statements about one of his sisters, who was still childless when she died of cancer: "That sister of mine who died, if she had had a child, she would not have become neurotic. And if she had not become neurotic, she would not have messed with herself so much and not have gotten cancer"(p. 17). Hillmann (1985) comments that Al-e Ahmad "seems to exemplify culture-specific male-chauvinism and double standards that the poet-critic Mahmud Azad Tehrani asserts were typical of Tehran intellectuals of the day" (p. xxv). Perhaps, but one hopes that most other "Tehran intellectuals" would not have shared Al-e Ahmad's belief that the doctors' clinics are full because the doctors "are well dressed and attractive, and [married Iranian women] have nothing to do and are simply out to have a fling" (p. 45).

Throughout *A Stone on a Grave,* when Al-e Ahmad is in his arrogant or boastful mode, he represents himself as a sophisticated man of the world, especially in his relationships with women. For example, he explains, "Like everyone else, I have played with myself as a kid. Then,

when I had enough money in my pockets, I would go out for some action, and later on I fell for someone, and I have played the field" (p. 13). Al-e Ahmad (2008) also lists all the women that he "picked up" in Europe, and describes one of them as his "devoted servant in the complete sense of the word. A bigger naive fool than I. Seven days was not enough for her" (p. 76). Al-e Ahmad's obvious chauvinism and contempt for women, however, completely belie his pretense of sophistication and also border on misogyny.

Finally, Al-e Ahmad's chauvinism and heterosexism shape and determine his representations of the three main female figures in *A Stone on a Grave:* his sister, his sister-in-law, and his wife. This sister is the same sibling that Al-e Ahmad (1982) wrote about in his short story "My Sister and the Spider," which is analyzed in Chapter One of this thesis. In this autobiographical story, the narrator (Al-e Ahmad as a boy) reveals that one of his sisters died when his mother and two other women placed red-hot lead on her breasts in order to "treat" her cancer. This sister's ghostly presence haunts the narrative of *A Stone on a Grave,* to the point where this memoir often seems to be as much about Al-e Ahmad's memories of his sister as it is about his infertility. He usually blames her for her own suffering and death, but in his memoir's final chapter, and in his most anguished writing, he alternatively blames both his mother and sister and concludes by conflating her with all children. His mother, he explains, was

> [p]rostrating at the head of [her husband's] grave. And her voice? How similar it is to my sister's voice. *By the way, Mother, do you remember that you have placed molten lead on my sister's chest to cure her breast cancer. Do you?* (p. 89)

. . . . . .

> Fear! My little sister herself had asked for them to apply the molten lead. She had said that she wanted to experience hellfire in this world. After all, she had seen everything else. Experienced it (p. 89).

. . . . . .

> Amazing! Now I understand. Yes, now. Why whenever I hear something about children I remember my sister and her cancer and the molten lead on her chest and the smell of burning flesh (p. 91).

Here, with disturbing intensity, the logic of the nightmare shapes and determines Al-e Ahmad's association of images and emotions, and what cannot possibly happen does happen: in this passage, his mother transforms into his sister, the molten lead transforms into "hellfire," and then his sister transforms into all children.

Perhaps because Al-e Ahmad (2008) blames both his mother and his sister for traumatizing him, he has no sympathy for other women such as the other two women in his memoir. His immediate comment on his sister-in-law's suicide is "She left the care of two precious flowers [her two children] in the hands of fate and a husband that would be promoted to a brigadier general, and she killed herself. *Why did you do this, woman?"* (p. 52). Similarly, when his wife is weeping during the drive to her sister's home, Al-e Ahmad (2008) snarls at her, "You see, woman? You made such a fuss that I forget to pick up my glasses" (P. 55). In both these examples, the term "woman" expresses Al-e Ahmad's belief that women are inferior to men, while in the second example, it indicates his total lack of concern for his wife's suffering after she has received the terrible news of her sister's suicide. In "Jalal's Sunset," Daneshvar (2008) reports, "I thought I would never find tranquility [after her sister's death]" but Jalal could

placate anybody with his kind hazel eyes, his beautiful lips and teeth, and his voice that could tenderly caress, soothe, guide, and express compassion (p. 116), but in *A Stone on a Grave,* which had not yet been published when she wrote her elegy, Al-e Ahmad's representation of his marriage turns her claim that he was "the perfect mate" (Daneshvar, 2008, p. 123) into a wistful fantasy. Moreover, she concludes her 1987 interview about *A Stone on a Grave* by minimizing its revelations about her husband while also ignoring their implications for her elegy's glowing portrait of him and her marriage: "In the final analysis, the book shows that Jalal in a particular situation and a particular psychological state, was not addicted to me. Well, so what if he was not?" (as cited in Ghanoonparvar, 2008, p. xiii).

Theme

The main theme of *A Stone on a Grave* is the nihilistic idea that human life is meaningless and that by not merely accepting but also celebrating its "nothingness" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, pp. 13, 83, 94, 95, 96), one can assert one's individual freedom. Al-e Ahmad develops this idea in a series of relations and events. First, in Chapter One, he introduces the image of the "microscopic field" as his symbol of "the field of [all of] reality," and the image of his "precious few" sperm, running "no one knows where" as his symbol of himself, and by extension, also of all humanity:

> I thought: *Sickly little rascals! How they run! Just like you. No wonder you're in such a hurry! Always in a hurry to go! Just like those infinitely small versions of yourself, and precisely like them, no one knows where to* (p. 8).

Next, after establishing, at least in his estimation, that human life is a frantic flurry of meaninglessness running to "no one knows where," Al-e Ahmad (2008) continues to use statements and images of meaninglessness to punctuate his narrative. For example, he reports that "the ruling of law, religion, and morality" concerning his "problems in the bedroom" makes him "want to throw up" (p. 37) -- law, religion and morality offer no meaningless response to his condition.

Al-e Ahmad (2008) continues in this line of thought until he introduces his final conclusion, made at his father's grave. He notes that he is "at the end of the rope and the end point" (p. 77) and then asks,

> But these others, with their offspring and progeny, what exactly are they connecting to? They are on the way station in the middle of which road? On the bridge over which canyon? Or the connection in the line from where to where? Indeed, which line? Staying away from self-righteousness and self-pity? And similarly avoiding the license to exhibit a complex (p. 77).

One could argue that most of *A Stone on a Grave* is an exercise in self-pity, and also the exhibition of a "complex," or obsession, but in any case, Al-e Ahmad's main point is clear: everyone is on the same road to nowhere, but unlike Al-e Ahmad, all those who have children or, at least, those who have a male child, can console themselves by believing that a boy is the "connection of blood and lineage" and also "a transmitter of culture and customs, and other such nonsense" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 77).

All these reflections on nothingness reach a crescendo in *A Stone on a Grave's* final chapter, in which Al-e Ahmad describes his and his mother's visit to his father's grave, and as his wife explains to her interviewer, "comes to believe in 'nothingness'; he grafts 'nothingness' to 'nothingness' and frees himself from the past, the future, tradition, and so on (nihilism)" (as cited in Ghanoonparvar, 2008, p. x). At the grave site, this world and the next, life and death, the living and the dead, blur into each other in a bottomless abyss of nothingness:

> On this path [of life], there is no need for a leader of the caravan. Indeed it is no road and no journey. This world is just like the next and the next world is just like this one . . . . In truth, in which of these two worlds does this mother of mine belong? The bag of bones wrapped in chador that if she were to cry a little louder, the sound would come out of her bones instead of her throat . . . . Now she neither eats nor sleeps. Just like Dad. Dad is now also no more than a bag of bones. Only the two bags are different. One is made up of a black chador, the other of a white shroud (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, pp. 86-87).

Here, one can find no evidence of either Islamic belief or filial piety, only a morose declaration covering over both the physical and the spiritual worlds in the same shroud of nothingness.

However, Al-e Ahmad does not end his memoir in despair. In the final paragraph, he climbs out of his abyss to proudly announce,

> I am, as it were, in one place and by measure of one body the sole and end point of tradition. I am the soul of the negation of a future that must remain slave to this past . . . . So at least I will be happy with the idea that, if possible, there is in this world a choice and freedom the size of a single solitary body. And this chain [of tradition and ancestry], evidently connected together, that on the back of the fortitude of the people from the beginning of creation till the end of the Day of Judgment joins nothing to nothing, if possible, will be broken by the measure of one solitary link (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, pp. 95-96).

According to the popular view of Al-e Ahmad, his writing offers Iranians "an essential choice between cultural authenticity or 'return to the self,' and subservience to the West, or 'rootlessness"' (Mirsepassi, 2008, p. 120). However, at the end of *A Stone on a Grave*, Al-e Ahmad is ''rootless," in the sense that he has severed his connection with his family, his religion, and their traditions, and the "self" that he boasts of "freeing" is obviously not the so-called "authentic" Islamic self that devout Muslims are supposed to believe in.

Such incongruities in Al-e Ahmad's work led Vahdat (2000) to write an article entitled "Return to Which Self? : Jalal Al-e Ahmad and the Discourse of Modernity." Vahdat (2008) argues that Al-e Ahmad's call for a return to "cultural authenticity" was "issued in a series of aporias . . . that he was never able to resolve" (p. 55). Al-e Ahmad (1978a) argues that Iranian intellectuals should recognize the power of Shi'i Islam and the clergy for effecting social change, yet he believes that "in Islam, the relation between humans and God is that of master and slaves" (p. 33). In this context, *A Stone on a Grave* can be read as Al-e Ahmad's declaration of his independence from his "master." For this reason, he has much closer affinities to Satan in Milton's (1667, 1977) epic poem *Paradise Lost* than to a "convinced Muslim." In this poem, Satan rebels against God in heaven, who exiles him and the other Fallen Angels into Hell, where he boasts of his "courage never to submit or yield" and declares, "Here [in Hell] at least / We shall be free" (Book One, Lines 107, 258-259), not recognizing that (as Milton believes), submission to a loving God is not bondage, but true freedom and joy. Similarly, in *A Stone on a Grave,* Al-e Ahmad (2008), in effect, rebels against his religion and culture by declaring that he

will not “leave any creation in [his] place who will be enslaved by ancestors, tradition, and the past” (p. 95). He then exiles himself to an “eternity in nothingness” (p. 95), boasts of his superior intellect, and declares that he is happy to have gained his “freedom” (p. 95), apparently forgetting that in *Occidentosis*, he savaged Iranian cultural workers or intellectuals for severing “their ties with the depths of society, culture, and tradition” (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 93). In one important sense, however, Al-e Ahmad is even worse off than Milton’s Satan: whereas he has the other Fallen Angels to talk to in Hell, Al-e Ahmad (2008) is all alone in his “eternity [of] nothingness’ (p. 95).

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the background of Al-e Ahmad’s (2008) memoir *A Stone on a Grave* and analyzed its plot, genre, main character and main theme. It was argued that this text reveals that Al-e Ahmad did not accept the main “issues of belief” that a “declared” or “convinced” Iranian nationalist and a devout Shi’i Muslim would acknowledge and defend. Apparently, he wrote *A Stone on a Grave* to explore his feelings about his infertility and to challenge the popular Iranian metaphor that compares every man to a gravestone to his father. His narrative portrays his visits to doctors to treat his condition, as well as his marriage and his response to his sister-in-law’s suicide and the survivors of an earthquake. He also explores his belief that two personalities are struggling for control of his mind. Finally, as Vahdat (2000) explains, Al-e Ahmad (2008) interprets “his infertility as the negation of the past and tradition [and characterizes] the past and tradition as Nothing (*Hich*)” (p. 64).

In *A Stone on a Grave,* Al-e Ahmad's self-revelations and ultimate conclusions challenge the two most common misunderstandings of him. First, his supporters never tire of claiming that Al-e Ahmad "affirmed Islam as a key component of cultural resistance and 'authentic' Iranian subjectivity" (Matin-asgari, 2009), implying that he himself was a devout Muslim. However, he never states that Islam is an important component of *his* subjectivity, and, in *A Stone on a Grave*, he proudly cuts himself off from history, religion and culture and celebrates his individual freedom. Second, although his supporters also welcome Al-e Ahmad as a staunch Iranian nationalist, *A Stone on a Grave* reveals that he is incapable of feeling any sense of community with other Iranians. Instead, Al-e Ahmad (2008) represents himself as the archetypal outsider, rejecting his community and declaring that he is "a human without trace or legacy" (p. 95).

In Place of a Conclusion

After Al-e Ahmad died in 1969, many eulogies, elegies and remembrances were published in Iran. Hillmann (1985) considers that "perhaps the most artful" (p. xviii) of these tributes was the 1969 poem by the then leading Iranian writer, cultural critic, and poet, Ahmad Shamlu (1925-2000). Two stanzas from his "Anthem for the Bright Man Who Went into the Shadows" are quoted below (as cited in Hillmann, 1985, pp. xviii-xix):

Before being turned to ashes
by the wrath of the thunderbolt
he had forced the steer of the tempest
to kneel before his might.

* * *

A bird blooms in its wings,
a woman in her breasts,
a garden in its trees.
We bloom in your angry look,
in your haste.
We bloom in your brook,
in defending your smile
that is certitude and faith.

Together, these two stanzas encapsulate both the myth of Al-e Ahmad and also his importance as a key political figure and an authoritative source in Iran's 1979 revolution. The image of "being turned to ashes / by the wrath of the thunderbolt" appears to refer to the popular belief that Al-e Ahmad was murdered by SAVAK, the Shah's secret police, while the description of him forcing "the tempest / to kneel before his might" suggests his allegedly awesome authority as a threat to the Shah's regime. In the second of the quoted stanzas, the poet begins by representing Al-e Ahmad as a force of nature (he enables Iranians to "bloom") and concludes by referring to Al-e Ahmad's "certitude and faith," or by expressing the widespread belief in his "return to Islam" before he died.

In reality, Al-e Ahmad died from the combined effect of the many serious physical ailments that he refers to throughout *Lost in the Crowd* (1966), and his writing never directly threatened the Shah, who, during the 1960s, was still firmly on his throne, not to be radically challenged until the late 1970s (Hillmann, 1984). Moreover, far from expressing "certitude and faith," Al-e Ahmad's writings, particularly *Lost in the Crowd* and *A Stone on a Grave* (2008), emphasize his *lack* of certainty and faith and his ultimate turn towards nihilism. For example, in the former text, he summarizes his *hajj* experience by explaining that it has given him a new sense of "skepticism" by "smashing the steps of the world of certainty" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, p. 123). As Hillmann (1985) concludes, Al-e Ahmad never resolved the conflict that he faced in his life and career between his lack of personal belief in Shi'i Islam and his perception of it as a

source of unifying force for Iran as a defense against Westernization and Western neoimperial powers.

Despite the hyperbole in Shamlu's poem, however, it still expresses an important point by suggesting Al-e Ahmad's profound influence on many Iranians, including Iranian *ulama* (Islamic religious scholars), author-activists, the Left, and cultural workers. During his lifetime, Al-e Ahmad became "Iran's leading intellectual of the 1960s" (Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 75), while since his death, he has been widely credited for producing "the basic vocabulary of the Islamic ideology that was to dominate the future of Iranian politics" (Mirsepassi, 2011, p. 121). Because Al-e Ahmad was a herald of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, he is generally perceived today as a Iranian "nationalist," who after a lifetime of intellectual wandering that embraced both Marxism and existentialism, finally discovered "his authentic Islamic nature [and] returned to his true self" (*E'stesam* magazine, as cited by Mirepassi, 2000, p. 114).

This thesis provided a close reading and a deconstructive analysis of a selection of Al-e Ahmad's fiction, polemics, and memoirs to support the counter-argument that he was never a "nationalist" in the sense of being someone who identifies himself with his nation as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991), and also that he was never a devoted Muslim who accepted and practiced the teachings of "Islam." The title of this thesis, therefore, points to the central paradox in Al-e Ahmad's writing: it strongly supports Iranian sovereignty without providing any evidence of an inclusionary view of Iran's national imaginary community, and it promotes Shi'i Islam as a unifying force and a bulwark against Westernization and imperialism

without expressing any personal belief in God and, indeed, while also embracing "nothingness" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 95) and the existential void.

Two important points need to be made about this argument. First, it does not ignore the possibility that Al-e Ahmad's varied views at different stages of his life are not "contradictions," but reflections of a growing or maturing intellect. As an oeuvre, the works analyzed in this thesis do not suggest intellectual "growth" or "development." Rather, they indicate a consistent inability to reason coherently and convincingly. Not only do Al-e Ahmad's various views (e.g., his limited support of Islam as a political ideology, and his final embrace of nihilism as his personal philosophy) contradict each other, he also consistently contradicts himself while trying to articulate and support each individual view. Thus, in *Occidentosis* for example, he promotes Islam or Irano-Islamic legacy as Iran's best defense against the "West," while *also* criticizing Islam or Irano-Islamic cultural practices for Iran's backwardness. In *A Stone on a Grave*, Al-e Ahmad (2008) observes that "The real problem [in his writing] is that all this time another human, from inside me, was crying out in a different tune" (p. 69). However, although he has this self-revelation, he is never able to combine his different "tunes" into a well-reasoned argument.

Second, in keeping with the spirit of deconstruction, which gave this thesis its analytical method, it should also emphasize that the above interpretation of Al-e Ahmad's work can be only tentative and provisional. Throughout his writing, Derrida directed his skeptical theories against the belief that textual analysis could present the "objective truth" about a text and

argued that, instead, any “right reading” or “correct reading” of a text is impossible (Abrams & Harpham, 2005, p. 60). As Eagleton (1983) argues, some interpretations of texts are elevated “to a privileged position, or made the centres around which other meanings are forced to turn,” but, in fact, no interpretation is ever free from “an open-ended play of signification” (p. 131). Similarly, the interpretation of Al-e Ahmad’s work remains an open-ended, on-going process with no absolute grounds for claiming the “objective truth” of any single interpretation. Again, to quote Eagleton (1983), “Whoever thought such absolute grounds existed, and what would they look like if they did?” (p. 144).

In order to summarize and conclude this thesis’s argument, the remainder of this conclusion is divided into the following sections: (1) summary, (2) main findings, and (3) suggestions for future research.

Summary

Chapter One explained and justified the method of analysis used in this thesis. As Al-e Ahmad’s works had never been subjected to a close reading, some of the principles of the “New Critics,” who popularized this analytic tool, were used to analyze Al-e Ahmad’s texts. However, whereas the New Critics focused only on the text and ignored external factors, this thesis included biographical details about the author, issues involving genre, and historical, political, and socio-cultural considerations in the analysis of Al-e Ahmad’s works. Moreover, as these

works are plagued by their internal inconsistencies and contradictions, the principles and practices of Derrida's deconstructionism also strongly influenced this thesis's analytic method.

In Chapter Two, a representative selection of five of Al-e Ahmad's short stories and his two best-known novels was discussed. In "The Pilgrimage" (1945), which is Al-e Ahmad's first published story and also appears to be autobiographical, the first-person narrator reveals his ambivalence towards religion while participating in one of the most important Shi'i Muslim experiences: the pilgrimage to the shrine of the Shi'i third *imam* Hosayn at Karbala in Iraq. Foreshadowing Al-e Ahmad during his *hajj,* as reported in *Lost in the Crowd* (1966), the narrator of "The Pilgrimage concludes, "Everyone [at the shrine is] in a special state, and no one there [is] a spectator but me" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 41). "The China Flowerpot" (1946) and "She'tar" (1949), and "The Ultimately Breaking of the Fast" (1946) and "My Sister and the Spider" (1971) were discussed as two pairs of similar stories. The first of these pairs expresses the theme that beauty and joy cannot be sustained in Iran -- "a nation worth nothing" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982, p. 46), while the second pair is highly critical of Islamic values and customs and traditional Iranian folk beliefs and practices. Together, these five stories suggest Al-e Ahmad's deep sense of alienation from Iranian social life, particularly from the oppressed classes, or the "popular masses." Moreover, nothing in these stories foreshadows that Al-e Ahmad would later affirm Shi'i Islam "as a key component of cultural resistance and 'authentic' Iranian subjectivity" (Matin-asagari, 2004, p. 45).

Al-e Ahmad's novels *The School Principal* (1958) and *By the Pen* (1961) were also discussed in Chapter Two. The autobiographical *The School Principal,* based on Al-e Ahmad's experience as the principal of an elementary school from 1955-1956, focuses on Iran's education, but also continues the main project of his short stories by criticizing all aspects of Iranian social life. By combining elements of naturalism, farce, and the Absurd, Al-e Ahmad provides a bitter study of an educational institution and a social form or a socio-political order that are completely failing to satisfy the needs of students in particular and Iranians in general, and also a caustic criticism of Iran's local populations and their institutions during the mid-1950s. Overall, the narrator (the principal), who perceives himself as "a nothing at [his] school" (Al-e Ahmad, 1974, p. 63), expresses his crushing sense of futility, for his apathy prevents him from even trying to improve his wretched life.

Al-e Ahmad's *By the Pen* extends the theme of futility at the individual level to the social and political levels by arguing that any revolution against an oppressive government will invariably only replace one form of oppression with another. This novel uses an historical allegory to reveal the reasons for the failures of the Nuqtavis's rebellion against the Safavid Dynasty in the 16th century and of the leftist movements in Iran after World War II. The complex double plot that interweaves the stories of two scribes with the revolutionary activities of the "Calenders" against a despotic monarch attributes both failures to the inevitable corruption of the revolutionaries' initially moral motives and methods. Al-e Ahmad's "good scribe" is Mirza Asadollah, who uses his writing skills to help others and whose frequent

criticisms of Iranian social life are similar to those of the author. Given that Al-e Ahmad is probably most famous today for promoting Shi'i Islam as the basis for anti-imperialism resistance, the good scribe's firm belief that "The times when religions were the main factor in bringing about change have passed" (Al-e Ahmad, 1998, p. 77) is puzzling, but also typical of the contradictions that plague Al-e Ahmad's thinking and writing.

Chapter Three of this thesis analyzes Al-e Ahmad's best known and also most self-contradictory work: *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West* (1962). Published in its first form one year after the publication of *By the Pen, Occidentosis* reverses Al-e Ahmad's theme in this novel and offers the third way (*rah-e-sevvom*) or self-reliance or the sovereign self, informed by the Iranian Islamic heritage, as the cure for Iran's disease of *gharbzadeghi*, or occidentosis, or "Weststruckness" (Hillmann, 1988, p. xv). Al-e Ahmad's (1984) theory of occidentosis, which, as Boroujerdi (1996) suggests, "could be viewed as a less-systematic version of dependency theory (p. 71), combined with his anxieties about sexuality (the debasement of national manhood, for example), demonizes the "West" as the source of all Iran's problems, but also harshly criticizes rural Iranians for their "primitive mode of thought" (p. 69) - - which could not have been caused by Westernization. When Al-e Ahmad (1984) is not criticizing the West and contemporary Iran, he is busy romanticizing the distant Perso-Islamic cultural past and its memories and traditions as a bulwark against the Western imperialist powers and also as the treatment for contemporary Iran's sickness, while also criticizing the "proud villagers," who are still living a "traditional" lifestyle. However, although *Occidentosis* "does not stand up well to scholarly

scrutiny" (Hillmann, 1985, p. 27), Al-e Ahmad's thesis equating Westernization with a disease and advocating a return to the self or self-reliance or the "authentic" self, informed by a distant, unchanged pre-Safavid past still resonated deeply with many Iranian readers. As Halliday (2004) concludes, Al-e Ahmad's occidentosis thesis "diffuses a hostility to Western ideas that served, equally, the purposes of the dogmatic left on the one hand, and the Islamic forces on the other" (p. 31) and that culminated in the 1979 Iranian revolution.

In order to demonstrate Al-e Ahmad's limitations as a thinker and a social critic, Chapter Four of this thesis compared *Occidentosis*, to Fanon's (1969) *The Wretched of the Earth* by focusing on the view of the "colonized intellectual'' in these two works. In *Occidentosis*, just as Al-e Ahmad's (1984) preoccupation with the machine as "this contemporary monster" (p. 31) prevents him from understanding the complexity of the technology, the contradictions of capitalism, and the heterogeneity of the "West," his intense dislike of Iranian intellectuals or "cultural workers" and, indeed, of the members of all Iranian social classes, prevents him from going beyond simplistic negations in his class analysis. Al-e Ahmad condemns Iranian intellectuals for embracing and promoting occidentosis, not recognizing that, as Boroujerdi (1996) comments, "as a social group, they were only a reflection of the internal contradictions and incoherence of their own society" (p. 74). In contrast, Fanon (1969), who, generally has a much more generous view of human capabilities and possibilities, provides a more nuanced analysis of intellectuals, recognizing their potential to help bring about revolutionary change and development. Moreover, whereas Fanon's class analysis is coherent, that of Al-e Ahmad

suffers from his usual inconsistencies and self-contradictions. For example, when Al-e Ahmad criticizes the "backwardness" of Iran's subaltern classes, he is actually mimicking and not opposing colonial attitudes. As well, when he condemns other Iranian intellectuals for isolating themselves from "the depths of [Iranian] society, culture, and tradition" (Al-e Ahmad, 1984, p. 93), he ignores his own writing's exposure of his profound alienation from the Iranian society, its traditions, and its religion. Overall, Al-e Ahmad's class analysis collapses under the weight of its internal contradictions, whereas Fanon's is still valuable today for enriching our understanding of intellectual activities and their complex relations with identity-based oppression, grassroots democracy, and mass-based autonomous movement in a colonial and post-colonial context.

Al-e Ahmad's *Lost in the Crowd* and *A Stone on a Grave*, which were discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six, respectively, display the depths of his alienation and also challenge the popular view of him as someone, who, after a lifetime of unsatisfying intellectual wandering, experienced a life-changing "return to Islam." The first of these texts is a travel diary written during Al-e Ahmad's *hajj* in 1946. Unlike traditional *hajj* diaries, *Lost in the Crowd* never mentions God or the soul or sin, but, instead focuses on Al-e Ahmad's sense of his own individuality and the threat that participating in the *hajj* rituals poses to it. Early in the pilgrimage, Al-e Ahmad (1985) decides that "It's easy to be among the people and not be a part of them" (p. 42). Even before this point, he is never more than a detached observer, continually recording his impressions, feelings, and reflections in his notebook and, at one point, even

writing on the pages of his *Qur'an* after he runs out of notepaper. As he records his criticisms of the *hajj*, the other pilgrims, and the Saudi government, the contradictions accumulate: he explains that he wants "to be of the same [religious] school as the Muslims at the dawn of time," but also calls himself an "atheist" (Al-e Ahmad, 1985, pp. 68, 58); he argues that "authentic" Islam in general and the *hajj* rites in particular could unify Muslims against cultural imitation, but also criticizes "calls for Islamic unity" as "nonsense" (p. 51); Finally, he argues that Muslims could use the *hajj* in their struggle against the "West," to which he attributes almost unlimited power, but also repeatedly describes the *hajj* as "mechanized primitivity" and "mechanized barbarism" (pp. 78, 91). In the end, Al-e Ahmad never loses himself in the crowd of the other pilgrims, and he never expresses his personal belief in Shi'i Islam. For him, it had an instrumental value for mobilizing other Muslims against Westernization and Western political, economic and cultural domination (Boroujerdi, 1996), but was never a source of personal value for enriching his spiritual life and understanding of the world.

A Stone on a Grave is even more extreme in its rejection of Shi'i orthodoxy and would probably be considered blasphemous by most devout Muslims. Al-e Ahmad begins this brief memoir by discussing his and his wife's inability to have children, and ends by concluding that his marriage's barrenness is salutary because it will ensure that he "won't leave any creature in [his] place who will be enslaved by ancestors and tradition and the past" and that he himself will experience an "eternity in nothingness" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 95). "If only you knew how happy I am," he comments, "to be the very last tombstone of my deceased ancestors" (p. 95).

In *A Stone on a Grave*, the Iranian social critic and political theorist who has been often praised for being the first "to project an [Iranian] future based on some vivid imagining of a stable and authentic past" (Mirsepassi, 2011, p. 13) proudly announces that he has severed all his ties with his personal past by joining "nothing to nothing" and, thereby, gaining his own "freedom" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 95).

Main Findings

The analysis in this thesis leads to four main findings. First, Al-e Ahmad was deeply divided as both an individual and a social critic and never resolved his ensuing inner conflicts. In *A Stone on a Grave*, he acknowledges his self-division when he writes that "The problem is that all this time another human, from inside me, was crying out a different tune" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 69). He identifies his second self as "an Oriental -- with exhortations on tradition and history and desires, all according to religion and custom" (p. 69). Al-e Ahmad does not explain who his "first" self is, but Hillmann's (1985) description of it as "an educated, modern mid-20th century social critic and writer" (p. xxv) seems reasonable. In this context, it is Al-e Ahmad's "Oriental" self who questions political subordination to imperialism, expresses resistance to Westernization and calls for a return to the self or self-reliance informed by Iran's pre-Safavid "authentic" Perso-Islamic past, and his contemporary or other self who translates the latest works of European existentialists into Persian and ultimately decides that he is "happy" to have embraced "nothingness" (Al-e Ahmad, 2008, p. 95). Such two radically different selves cannot comfortably co-exist with the same person. Elsam Kazemiyeh, one of Al-e Ahmad's colleagues,

argues that his "strident, belligerent, negative voice was actually a life-long cry for help" (Hillmann, 1985, p. xxviii). According to Kazemiyeh, Al-e Ahmad fell into an abyss while "reaching for the 21st century, but having . . . to leap from the 16th century or earlier without the benefit of time and gradual stages in between" (Hillmann, 1985, p. xxxviii). From this perspective, Al-e Ahmad's writings are, collectively, his record of his fall in the sense that his writings reveal the weaknesses of his conceptual apparatuses that suffer from the lack of historical specificity in analysis and overlook the concrete social forces, the historical events, and the fundamental changes that have occurred since the Safavids' time.

Second, the kind of division that characterized Al-e Ahmad's personality is inevitably evident in his writing. According to the common view of his work, it "presents a picture of an active, conscientious intellectual whose concerns were the exact issues that one would in retrospect expect an Iranian intellectual to have addressed during the post-World War II era," including Westernization; the Pahlavi regime's inefficiency, corruption, and tyranny; Iranian identity and the role of religion in the contemporary or present world; and the social responsibilities of Iranian intellectuals (Hillmann, 1985, p. xix). Academics and Al-e Ahmad's admirers have tended to focus either mainly or even exclusively on this aspect of his writing. However, when his work is subjected to close reading and deconstructive criticism, a contrasting view of it emerges, for it is ridden with unresolved aporias (Vahdat, 2000), conflicts, and contradictions. As a result, one can find evidence somewhere in Al-e Ahmad's writing to support almost any interpretation of his positions on his major issues of concern. Its

problematic aspects begin to emerge only after it has been studied for its overall logic and consistency.

Third, such a study undermines the popular view of Al-e Ahmad as a staunch nationalist who returned to Islam. In fact, his writing shows that he strongly supported Iranian sovereignty while also excluding most Iranians from his Iranian national imagined community. In this context, the appeal that the European existentialists had for him is revealing. Out of all the works of Western authors that he could have chosen to translate into Persian, he selected those by Camus, Sartre, and Ionesco, as well as other existentialists (Al-e Ahmad, 1984). All of these works feature isolated protagonists who feel alienated from their fellow citizens and who are struggling to cope with an inherently absurd social world. Al-e Ahmad, as he represents himself directly in his autobiographical writings and indirectly in his fiction (e.g., *The School Principal*), is essentially an existentialist anti-hero. For such an individual, who positions himself as a social outsider, the ideology of nationalism, which, as Mentinis (2006) points out, contains utopian promises of autonomy and constructs an imagined community inviting individuals or groups to identify with that national imagining (Thompson, 1986; Anderson, 1991), is not a possibility.

Anderson (1991) suggests that "nationalist imaginings" have "a strong affinity with religious imaginings" (p. 10). If one accepts this suggestion, then one will understand why the popular mythology surrounding Al-e Ahmad obscures not only his exclusionary and elitist view of Iran as an imagined nation (Vaziri, 1993), but also his lack of a personal faith in Islam. When,

in *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad (1984) proudly represents Iran's "Islamic totality" and "Islamic civilization" (p. 53) as the ultimate defense against Westernization and imperialism, one intuitively assumes that he must have had a personal belief in Islam. However, a close reading of his work reveals the counter-intuitive reality: he had only "an instrumentalist view of Shi'ism as a mobilizing political ideology" (Boroujerdi, 1996, p. 75) and considered himself to be, during his *hajj,* an atheist. Thus, *A Stone on a Grave*, in which Al-e Ahmad actually celebrates his lack of religious belief, shocked his admirers, such as the one who considered that his work's posthumous publication reflected a conspiracy to tarnish Al-e Ahmad's reputation (Ghanoonparvar, 2008).

Fourth, despite Al-e Ahmad's limitations as a thinker and a cultural critic, no one is seriously questioning his place in the pantheon of 20th-century Iranian thinkers or social critics. As Mirsepassi (2011) reports, *Occidentosis,* "which dominated the Iranian panorama of the 1960s, perhaps played the founding role in the effort to articulate a local, Islamic modernity as a blueprint for revolutionary social change in Iran" (p. 120). Al-e Ahmad's simple thesis equating the "West" with a disease and "self-reliance" or independence and autarkic development as the cure easily overrode all the inaccuracies and inconsistencies in his supporting argument, because this thesis was a message that every Iranian could understand and that most author-activists, social critics, and radical militants or revolutionaries wanted to hear. For this reason, Al-e Ahmad's limitations, such as his inadequate understanding of Iranian history, did not undermine his message's powerful appeal. As Moaddel (1993) comments, "After all, when

history becomes relevant for political action, it is not the kind of history that is based on what actually happened but is often based on what political actors think happened" (p. 151). By Inhibiting the development of any kind of democratic/autonomous alternative and counter ideological discourse, other than the fight against imperialism (conceived as the main source of Iran's underdevelopment, oppressive dependency, and moral-sexual decay), Al-e Ahmad's concept of occidentosis "found a large and interested audience in the public" (p. 151).

Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis' close reading and deconstructive analysis of a representative selection of Al-e Ahmad's works provides the foundation for future researchers wishing to explore the wider political and cultural implications for Islamism and the 1978-1979 Iranian revolution. The meaning of "Islamism" is still being hotly contested, but, generally, it refers to the beliefs that Islam is both a religious and a political system, and that contemporary devout Muslims can unite politically by returning to "a pristine past" (Al-Azmeh, 2003, p. 32) or "*High* Islam" (Gellner, 1997, p. 19) and to the roots or "fundamentals" of their religion (Achcar, 2004; Harman, 1994; Rupert & Solomon, 2006). However, this interpretation is questionable because it fails to specify how or why Islamism emerged and is unable to account for its specific form and character. In other words, this interpretation does not answer the question of why the critique of political economy and the emergence of anti-imperialist resistance movements have taken an Islamist form, rather than some other form in the Middle East (Marshall, 1995). Islamism should be understood as an ideology, and the form it takes is closely connected to the

contending political forces within a particular state form (in, for example, Iran) and to the "new forms of internationalization of capital" and neo-imperial politics that have compounded social contradictions in the Middle East, since the 1970s (Rupert & Solomon, 2006; Boal et al, 2003). This understanding of Islamism is based upon and derived from Ryan's (1989) critical conception of ideology characterized as an "undecidable phenomenon, a marker of instability as much as of the stabilization of inequality" (p. 132). For this reason, any discussion of Islamism should recognize it as both an "exercise in domination/power" and as a "response" to concrete forces, which, if they are not contained will challenge the status quo in the Middle East, destabilize the local discourses and strategies of power, and shake the existing global order. Thus, the conventional understanding of Islamism as a simple negation of the present and a call for "a return to a mythical early Islam" (Achcar, 2004, p. 62) or a "dreaming of the return of the Caliphate" (Boal et al 2006, p. 133), should be contested. Islamism, rather, should be conceived as a novel political praxis and as a locus of at once "utopian and fearful desires'' (to use the words of Ryan and Kellner, 1990), i.e., the articulation of a utopian dream-image and desire for self-reliance or autarkic development or sovereign self and the fear of women's and the other oppressed forces' desires for autonomy and democratic equality (Sanasarian, 1982, p. 134).

Al-e Ahmad, who idealized the pre-Safavid Islamic past and promoted the "third way" or self-reliance/autarkic development and a political alliance between the so-called "engaged" intellectuals and the clergy as a defense against imperialist political, economic and cultural

domination, can be considered as one of key architects and theoreticians of Islamism. In this context, he is often closely associated with Ali Shari'ati (1933-1977), the Iranian political theorist and social critic who, after Al-e Ahmad died, "took up the part of his work that was devoted to giving an Islamic response to the modern world" (Keddie, 2006, p. 189). Like Al-e Ahmad, Shari'ati is still widely admired by many Muslim scholars and author-activists, but no one has yet subjected his writing to close reading and deconstructive analysis. Given that Shari'ati's work is an extension of Al-e Ahmad's ideas, it should be studied carefully to determine if it suffers from similar inconsistencies and contradictions.

Moreover, as Al-e Ahmad was one of the fundamental theorists of Islamism, its discourse is also likely to be logically suspect. Harman (1994), Marshall (1995), Poya (1999), and Vahdat (1999) have provided pioneering studies of the contradictions in Islamism, but only Vahdat (1999, 2000, 2002) has considered them in relation to Al-e Ahmad's ideas. More work needs to be done to determine where and how these ideas have influenced Islamism and its followers.

Finally, neither Al-e Ahmad's *On the Service and Treason of Intellectuals* (1978a, b) nor his ethnographic articles and monographs on various rural Iranian locales have been translated into English. Like *Occidentosis*, Al-e Ahmad's book on intellectuals has been highly influential and is often cited by authors using their own English translations. This text should be translated into English and other languages so that its arguments can be analyzed by non-Persian writers. In studies by these writers, Al-e Ahmad's monographs have been often mentioned but have never been discussed. Hillmann (1985), for example speculates that they are evidence of "what

seems to have been a Marxist-inspired impulse to get to know the people before trying to influence them to political awareness" (p. xi), but does not quote from them to support this claim. Given Al-e Ahmad's (1984) characteristically low opinion of the "masses" (Iran's rural populations), whom he describes as "these superstitious, prejudiced folk" limited by their "primitive mode of thought" (p. 69), it would be interesting to know how he actually describes them in his monographs and how these texts fit into the overall pattern of his work. Therefore, it is recommended that his ethnographic materials be translated into English and then analyzed and connected to his major writings.

Endnotes

1 Some scholars distinguish between class and religion in Iran. I, however, consider this distinction to be controversial. In any case, I am not making a general claim about either the interrelationship between them or the lack of it. Rather, I am questioning Mirsepassi's interpretation, on the grounds that Al-e Ahmad's stories do not connect class and religion, but are concerned with the effects of a strict adherence to Islamic teachings rather than with social class.

2 Although *The School Principal* and *By the Pen* might be called "long stories," I will follow Hillmann (1988), who refers to these works of fiction as "novels" (p. x1).

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