In Memoriam
Ali Alemohammad (1922–1991)
more than a father
the clerics. He also thought the generation of 1920–1940 was chiefly responsible for depleting the revolutionary vigor of these two forces through "Zoroastrianism, Ferdowsiism, Kasraviism, and Bahaiism.” These were frivolous, but conspiratorially planned according to Al-e Ahmad, distractions through which the revolutionary power of the alliance between the traditionally sensitive intellectuals and the clerics was useless exhausted. Al-e Ahmad's admiration for Mosaddeq, in fact, is precisely in terms that identify him as a politician in touch with realities of his cultural context, which are also the terms in which the Tudeh Party was bound to be defeated. In Al-e Ahmad's view, Mosaddeq was decent enough not to blame his political failure on "the scarcity of instruments, insufficient cadre, and unfavorable conditions for leadership," an obvious reference to such excuses by the leaders of the Tudeh Party. Consequently, Al-e Ahmad saw Khomeini's June 1963 uprising as further support for his thesis that in order to move the Iranian masses to revolutionary engagement, they ought to be addressed in the religious language most immediate to them: a repoliticized Shi'ism.

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

Al-e Ahmad's careful and accurate observation of the Iranian political scene, after almost three decades of being active in it, was that you can only be effective in politics, or in the affairs of a society, when you have weighed the degree of receptivity or tolerance of that society vis-à-vis your ideas. And in order to achieve this measure, you will have to have known that society, its traditions, history, the factors instrumental in making its collective belief, forces that mobilize its masses in the streets, and then its silence, its sitting silently at home.

In "On the Intellectuals," Al-e Ahmad would reassert his earlier conviction that the loss of Iranian identity and alienation from the potential revolutionary uses that Islam can be put into was essentially a "Western colonial scheme": the onslaught of Colonialism is not merely to plunder the raw mineral material and human powers . . . from the colonies. It also devastates the language, the customs, the music, the ethics, and the religion of the colonized lands. And then he would sarcastically ask: "But is it fair for the Iranian intellectual to be an accomplice to colonialists instead of confronting them on all fronts?" The Iranian secular intellectuals, in Al-e Ahmad's estimation, concurred with "The Western" colonialists in denying the contemporary relevance and modern applicability of Islam— as either a formative or a transformative political force.

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

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

Because in the context of the Shi'i faith, the clerics claim political authority on behalf of the [Twelfth] Infallible Imam, that is to say, [because] they principally and by way of deanship constitute a kind of competition for the political authority, we have occasionally witnessed violent oppositions, or even revolts, launched by the clerics against the powers that be.
cannon, as Bani-Sadr characterized the defeat of Safavid Iran by the Ottomans at Chaldoran, Iran began to lose its global political power and then commenced a reversal of its long historical constitution, “the externalization of the internal.” Whereas before the advent of modern times Iran received every passing element of foreign invasion and assimilated it into its own unique Persian Geist, it was now yielding and transforming every aspect of its traditional identity to the specifics of the hegemonic “Western” force. As the Safavids and the Ottomans both perished and disintegrated, “The West” rose in political power and cultural hegemony. From this point onward, Iran is but a pawn in superpower rivalries. Iran begins to lose considerable portions of its territory and, even in what is left, the country is not exactly autonomous and independent. Extremities of foreign influence shape the external and internal policies of the sovereign state.

Bani-Sadr divides the Iranian politicians of the colonial period into three groups: the Russophiles, the Anglophiles, and those who believed in “negative equilibrium” between the colonial powers. The king has never represented the third group. He has been a mere index to the rivalries of the two superpowers of the time.

Bani-Sadr divides the religious force into two opposing groups: one that actively opposes the state and its foreign connections, and the other, which he exclusively identifies with the Baha’i, that supports the government in its internal repressive policies and external submissive relations to “The West.” Bani-Sadr is particularly critical of the “internationalistic” attitude of the Baha’i who, in his estimation, effectively advocate subjugation of Iran to foreign powers insofar as it caters to the Baha’i faith.

Bani-Sadr’s true champions are the great advocates of the “negative equilibrium.” National heroes such as Qa’im Maqam Farahani or Amir Kabir opposed both the superpowers and their disruptive influence in Iranian affairs. But the success of these nationalistic forces was always tangential to the rivalries of the Russian and British colonial powers.

The contradictions resulting from the Russophile, the Anglophile, and the nationalist interactions reach revolutionary proportions in the late nineteenth century. Bani-Sadr believes the influx of “political ideology and cultural forces” into Iran was instigated by “The West” and chiefly facilitated through Freemasonry. The advent of the Russian Revolution drastically weakened the Russophiles’ position, and the Anglophiles assumed the upper hand during the post-Constitutional period. This paved the way for the coup d’etat that brought Reza Shah to power. It is upon this premise, Bani-Sadr’s rendition of Iranian modern history, that he sees the revolutionary significance of Sayyid Hasan Modarres. As Reza Shah becomes the active agent in founding the Iranian state totally on foreign “political, financial, and cultural” grounds and in “the Westernization of Iran to [its] bone marrow,” Modarres assumes leadership of the nationalist movement. The result is that the massive subjugation of Iran (in economic, political, social, and cultural terms) to the domineering “Western” system renders totally ineffective the revolutionary movements of figures such as Colonel Muhammad Taqi Khan Pessian, Shaykh Muhammad Kheyabani, Mirza Kuchak Khan Jangali, Sayyid Hasan Modarres, and finally Mohammed Mosaddeq. The fifty years of the Pahlavi dynasty, Bani-Sadr observed in 1976, have been spent entirely on intensifying the domination of “The West.”

Bani-Sadr finally gives an ecological and demographic history of Iran, beginning with the emergence of the Iranian plateau from the sea. This is an attempt to measure the mutual effects of political and ecological changes—such as the impact of brutal powers on the physical environment—on each other and the forces of periodic changes in water resources on irrigation and respective economic policies. Particularly important has been the political impact on the environment, to the point where only 4 percent of the total land capable of being cultivated is actually thus utilized. The lack of a reliable and continuous political and economic system has led to a two-to-one ratio between cultivations contingent upon rainfall and those sustained by some type of irrigation system. Altogether three modes of irrigation have characterized the Iranian agricultural history: rivers, rain, and qanats. The qanats played a leading role in agricultural irrigation until the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century when the network sustained major damage. From that point onward, Iranian agricultural economics has suffered enormously because, in effect, it has had to rely on seasonal rain.

Bani-Sadr continues to examine the significance of wind, earthquake, national epidemics, droughts, and tribal migrations in the political economy of Iranian history. He proceeds to reiterate Karl Mintfogel’s theory of the Asiatic mode of production and “oriental despotism.” Here, Bani-Sadr believes, political powers have appropriated and slanted to their advantage the Avestan and the Qur’anic injunctions that water is the common property of all people.

Bani-Sadr concludes that in Iran the vast diffusion of the primary (natural) sources of economic productions has prevented a centralized political and economic administration. The irrigation system was too volatile to cope with rapid and violent political changes. Multiple centers of political power have further aggravated this situation. Both state and oppositional forces have used irrigation systems to consolidate or undo each other’s power. In fact, political powers were forced to engage in direct agricultural activities. This plus the fact that the scarcity of natural resources had rendered ineffective any meaningful private property have led to the effective ownership of land by the powers that be. To a considerable degree Bani-Sadr takes issue with Mintfogel’s theory of “the Asiatic mode of pro-
Al-e Ahmad, Gharbadehi. p. 110.
132. See Al-e Ahmad’s letter to Amir Pishdad and his note to this effect in Dehbashi (ed.); Nameh-ha-ye Jalal Al-e Ahmad, pp. 203-204.
133. See Al-e Ahmad, Dar Khedmat va Khianat-e Roshanfekran, vol. 1, p. 16.
134. Al-e Ahmad, Dar Khedmat va Khianat-e Roshanfekran, vol. 1, p. 16.
135. Al-e Ahmad, Dar Khedmat va Khianat-e Roshanfekran, vol. 2, pp. 149-150.
144. Zamani-nia (ed.), Farhang-e Jalal Al-e Ahmad, p. 110. For an insightful discussion of Al-e Ahmad’s position on religion, see Mottahedeh, The Mantle of the Prophet, pp. 299-305. Incidentally, I think Mottahedeh’s translation of “Eur-omania” for “Charbaredehi” leaves much of the weight of “Gharb”-which is “Charbaredehi”-behind. The construction of “The West” as a monolithic “Other,” quintessentially different from the historical experiences of “Europe,” is central to the ideological disposition of Al-e Ahmad and all other Muslim intellectuals in modern Iran. While I am on the subject of Mottahedeh’s book, let me also say that I think The Mantle of the Prophet is the single most successful text on modern Iranian intellectual history, a theme all but abandoned by modern Iranian scholarship. For some enduring theoretical observations on the subject of intellectual history, see Hughes, Consciousness and Society, pp. 3-32. For a critical assessment of The Mantle of the Prophet, see Sadri and Sadri, “The Mantle of the Prophet: A Critical Postscript.”

2. Ali Shari’ati

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7. Abolhasan Bani-Sadr

155. Bani-Sadr, Moqe'iyyat-e Iran va Naqsh-e Modarres, p. 103. Bani-Sadr's argument in this and other sections of this text is founded squarely on a long list of primary and secondary sources in Iranian history. He has equal access to Persian, Arabic, French, and English sources. This gives his discourse a certain aura of authenticity usually wished for but rarely attained by these ideologues.
