

Parallel Discursive Fields in Pre-revolutionary Russia and Iran: The West as a Model or an Anti-Model

*We had the same love but not the same way of loving - and like Janus or a two-headed eagle we looked in different directions, though the heart that beat within us was as one*¹

Keywords: Iran, Russia, intellectual history, history of political thought, Westoxication, revolution, Slavophile-Westerniser Controversy

Abstract

Iranian and Russian intellectual traditions reveal a similar discursive genealogy in relation to Western modernity. Differing in social and global context, historical periodisation, goals, methods and scope of inquiry, Iranian and Russian political debate reflects fascinating parallels, some of which prevail today. The debate over orientation reflects contemporary Iran and Russia's deep-rooted ambivalence towards Western norms and institutions. This study delves deeper into this dilemma by revealing that both countries are heirs to a similar intellectual heritage that casts the West in a binary: as either a model or as an anti-model. In the case of Iran, this took form in the 'Westoxication' narrative that developed as a counter-discourse to the early twentieth century debate that drew on Western liberal principles, and in the case of Russia, it manifested in the Slavophile-Westerniser controversy. Both intellectual debates were embedded in a complex exercise of self-reflection, with psychological, historiographic, religio-cultural dimensions that ultimately revealed a pattern that illuminates the contemporary dilemma that persists in both countries.

Introduction

The history of development in Russia and Iran has been beset by a common dilemma: the question of orientation in political, socio-economic and cultural development. Russia and Iran share a comparable dialectic in relation to Western modernity, characterised by admiration and adaptation on the one hand, and iconoclastic denunciation, on the other. These two orientations feed on each other but each has distinctive roots. Locked in conflict, these contesting epistemes, to use a Foucauldian term to denote "justified true beliefs", are an enduring feature of contemporary Russian and Iranian societies.²

The debate over whether Russia is "European" or "Eastern" is as topical in the twenty-first century as it was in the eighteenth century. In the words of Nikolai Berdiaev, twentieth-century Russian philosopher, the "problem of East and West" was an "eternal" one for Russia.³ In Iran, on the eve of the 1979 Iranian revolution ending the Westernising Pahlavi epoch, revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini articulated the problem of orientation by summarising the objectives of the revolution in the slogan: "Neither East nor West" alongside

¹ Alexander Herzen, *Ends and Beginnings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 173.

² Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2005).

³ Ana Siljak, 'Between East and West: Hegel and the Origins of the Russian Dilemma', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 62 (2001), p. 335.

his revolutionary slogan, “*āzādī, esteqlal, jomhūri Īslami*” (“freedom, independence, Islamic Republic”). The dilemma over orientation, however, persists in both countries as the ruling elite struggle to chart out a coherent developmental path that is not only ‘modern’, but also reflective of a (somewhat undefined) *sui generis* historical-cultural genotype.⁴

In an earlier study, I argued that this conflict has been somewhat reconciled in the form of “modernisation from below”: the pursuit of a “non-model” that is neither “Western” nor “anti-Western” in orientation.⁵ The central feature of this developmental trajectory is the perpetuation of civilisational and cultural identities in the pursuit of modernity. This study delves deeper into this dilemma by revealing that both countries are heirs to a highly comparable intellectual tradition that casts the West in a binary – as either a model, or a non-model. As I shall elaborate further on in the analysis, I am not suggesting that two categories represent entirely cohesive ideational structures. However, they do address broad sets of ideas that distinguish them from other prevailing ideologies.

Pre-revolutionary Russian and Iranian intellectual circles were engrossed in questions of self-definition, a discursive exercise which, in both countries, branched into two distinctive categories of thinking. In Iran, it took the form of the pejorative narrative of *Gharbzadegi* (“Westoxication”), which was presented in the 1960s and 1970s as a counter-discourse to those advocating standards of civilisation defined by Western norms (the latter being comparable to the Russian “Westernisers”, or the *Zapadniki*). As Afshin Matin-Asgari rightly notes, “this Iranian controversy seemed to echo a famous debate in Russian intellectual history where the question of a purported East-West split in national identity preoccupied the nascent intelligentsia from the early nineteenth century”.⁶ In imperial Russia, the debate took the form of the “Slavophile-Westerniser” controversy that was prevalent in the early to mid-1800s. The Slavophiles rejected modernisation in its Western garb, with all of its attendant political, social, and economic dislocations, while the Westernisers saw Russian political destiny as inextricably intertwined with that of Europe.

By comparing this intellectual repertoire, this analysis will interpret some of the major political ideas that developed in response to Western modernity. By gleaning through these parallel discursive strands, this study will uncover comparable ideational foundations of a

⁴ This is a theme I have fleshed out in my earlier study entitled: ‘To be or not to (like the West): Modernisation in Russia and Iran’, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 10 (2018), pp. 1998-2015.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Afshin Matin-Asgari, ‘The Impact of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union on Qajar and Pahlavi Iran’ in Stephanie Cronin (ed), *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions Since 1800* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 19.

Commented [R11]: I have made a reference to one of the publications that was recommended by the Reviewer.

shared civilisational dilemma that whittled down to the question: was the West a model to be emulated, or was it an anti-model? Indubitably, there was a middle ground within the debate as the enlightened literati in both countries explored different forms and variations of social organisation and development in relation to the West. However, for the purpose of this analysis, I shall focus on the opposite dialectical categories in the spectrum.

As a point of departure, it would be useful to consider Michael Freedan's observation that there is a lacuna in the study of political thinking of considered approaches, and their attendant methodologies, to a genuine comparative political thought. Freedan explains that while there exist numerous instances of the juxtaposition of Western and non-Western political thought – such as a Japanese or Indian – these studies concentrate on differences and incompatibilities, while failing to engage in the construction of a rigorous comparative framework. Many scholars, he argues, are too focussed with the universality of reason, discourse, concepts or values to pay attention to mentalities, climates of opinion and varying national experiences as a backdrop.⁷

Freedan contends that historians of political thought and political comparativists are uninterested in temporal and spatial variations. He contends that comparisons over time, within sequential contexts, and synchronically across space, and within a given culture, are more common than other kinds of comparisons. He adds that similarities and differences in institutions, structure, economic indicators, social practices and processes are more likely to be examined than micro-similarities and differences in patterns of political thinking and its expression. Freedan recommends that comparativists cast a wider net and that they adopt less totalising cross-cultural and intra-cultural tools in comparative studies.⁸

It is in this spirit that this analysis compares Russia and Iran's discursive genealogy in relation to Western influence and socio-political development – an exercise in theoretical juxtapositioning of two very different backdrops. In relation to units of analysis, Freedan makes an interesting observation, which I have taken on board in this comparative study. Freedan argues that in the case of empiricists, a macro approach to ideas is mismatched with a micro approach; that is, there is less examination of the *ideas* contained within, for example, a specific policy practice or discourse within government circles. Although there is much raw material for comparison, he argues, it is often invisible to comparative politics scholars. Comparison of such “underplayed and unobserved features”, Freedan explains, could lead to an additional

⁷ Michael Freedan, 'Editorial: The Comparative Study of Political Thinking', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (February 2007), pp. 1-9.

⁸ Ibid.

body of theory about political thinking by equipping the comparativist with cross-cultural and intra-cultural tools. Of course, he notes, such comparisons cannot be random and have to follow a rationale of comparison.⁹

In the case of pre-revolutionary Russian and Iranian intellectual thought, there is ample “raw material” to support the rationale for comparison. By bridging Russian and Iranian political thinking in relation to the West, fascinating comparative angles become evident – such as the rather severe notion that Western socio-cultural influence was a “disease”. The Russian Slavophiles believed that Russia’s future depended on a return to “native principles” in overcoming the “Western disease”.¹⁰ Once “cured”, the mission of the Slavophiles would transcend into a purely evangelical role of delivering Russian culture to the “deteriorating West”.¹¹ Similarly, Iranian critics of the West created the medical metaphor – “Westoxication” – to denote the social illness of slavishly imitating the West.

Another interesting parallel was the shared eschatological view of the “end of time”. The Slavophiles held the apocalyptic belief that the religious destiny of the world lay in the East rather than in the West. Russian apocalyptic thinking ranged from conservative religious messianism to nationalistic, Pan-Slavic, revolutionary millenarianism.¹² Similarly, Iranian intellectuals like Ali Shari’ati exhumed principles from the past to cultivate millenarian expectations by fusing Shi’a apocalypticism and the eternal battle between justice and injustice, with a mixture of ideas that were laden with Third World-ism, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism.¹³

Another commonality was the engagement of Russian and Iranian intellectuals with European philosophy. Both Russian and Iranian intellectuals embraced or debated European political discourse as a result of the transnational circulation of European political ideas in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This dialectic was not limited to pro-West apologists. Ironically, Slavophiles and Iranian nativists also engaged with European philosophy while trying to define the contours of Russian/Iranian identity and destiny. Slavophilism, with its romantic notions of national identity, was in many ways an offshoot of German

⁹ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

¹⁰ Andrej Waliki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth Century Russian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 11-12.

¹¹ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 363.

¹² Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *An Obsession with History: Russian Writers Confront the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 137.

¹³ Abbas Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi’ism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009).

Romanticism.¹⁴ On the Iranian side, the term *Gharbzadegi* was originally coined by the philosopher Ahmad Fardid, who was inspired by German luminary Martin Heidegger. Drawing on Heideggerian concepts of anti-Western nativism, Fardid developed the argument that Western notions of liberalism, democracy, and technology were in opposition to Eastern notions of spirituality and unity.¹⁵

These themes are discussed through a brief survey of key Iranian and Russian thinkers whose ideas and corpus of work best captured the essence and spirit of the principal discursive trends and intellectual patterns that emerged in the pre-revolutionary years of each country. The brevity of the surveys is justified in two ways: the first relates to space constraints, while the second has to do with my objective in compiling this exposition. My goal is to open a parenthesis behind the study of comparative political thought of what on the surface, may appear to be an overly ambitious analysis of two very disparate case studies. However, this work is merely an introduction aimed at revealing the many parallels in Russian and Iranian intellectual thought; specifically, intellectual engagement with notions of identity, modernity, and development, and their thematic link to the West. While I engage with a range of thinkers, each very prolific, the surveys are concise as my main goal is simply to introduce the “raw material” that Freedman speaks of.

Owing to space limitations, I have organised this study to begin with an examination of what can be considered two intellectual phases in Iranian political thought, where there is a discernible shift in perceptions about Western values and principles. There is a discussion of the Constitutional Movement in Iran with a survey of the ideas of key thinkers who were inspired by prevailing Western notions of the rule of law and representative government. This is followed by an analysis of the arguments of the critics of Western influence – debates that were largely shaped by historical context. The second part of the study examines the position of Russian Westernisers as they cast Russia as part of European civilisation with their concentration on principles of individuality and “personhood”. This is followed by a discussion of the religio-historical roots of Slavophilism with its emphasis on traditional Russian values and institutions as distinct from, and superior to, those of the West.

Methodologically, this comparative study also benefits from a global history approach, by looking at Iranian and Russian interactions, connections and linkages in the global context.

¹⁴ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1980).

¹⁵ Vide Ali Mirsepassi, *Transnationalism in Iranian Political Thought: The Life and Times of Ahmad Fardid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

My goal is to transcend the classic comparative approach by exploring the development of Iranian and Russian currents of thought in the context of a wider historical theatre. By revealing the interconnectivity of non-European states and societies to the Western hemisphere, this study features Iran and Russia as part of the broader international system. The study also explores trans-civilisational relations between Iranian and Russian intellectuals, by identifying overlapping and intersecting influences. By adopting a global perspective, the goal is to contribute to new debates that excavate history from confined regional and national compartmentalisation, in order to advance scholarship that explores threads of the most intricately woven tapestry – the mosaic of global politics and history.

Commented [R12]: I have added this section to reflect the global-historical approach to the study of Iranian and Russian intellectual thinking vis a vis the West (as suggested by the Reviewer).

Persian Westernisation

Two distinct intellectual phases can be identified in relation to Iranian political thought. A chronology shows a shift from the application of Western norms and institutions in reconstituting Iranian identity, to resistance towards the West and a “return to authentic self”. This was largely tempered by historical context – in particular, the legacy of the West’s interference in Iran’s internal affairs, and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s state-sponsored Westernisation drive, a type of “modernisation without modernity”.¹⁶

To proponents of European culture, “Westernisation” was a shorthand method by which Iran could dissociate from its Arab past and jump-start its cultural evolution. In the first intellectual current, it was the belief of many nineteenth century Iranian nationalists, including the intellectual, Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh that Persia’s decline from an earlier period of supremacy began with the invasion of the “barbarous” Arabs in 740 AD.¹⁷ Addressing Iran, Akhundzadeh inveighed: “What a shame for you Iran: Where is your grandeur? Where is that power, that prosperity that you once enjoyed? It has been 1,280 years now that the naked and starving Arabs have descended upon you and made your life miserable. Your land is in ruins, your people ignorant and innocent of civilisation, deprived of prosperity and freedom, and your King is a despot”.¹⁸ This statement reveals that the Western pivot had less to do with dependence or imitation of the West, and more to do with civilisational recovery and the

¹⁶ Vide Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Revolution and Reform in Russia and Iran: Modernisation and Politics in Revolutionary States* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

¹⁷ Vide Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism* (Columbia, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016).

¹⁸ Hamid Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973), p. 92.

retrieval of the Persian/Iranian past and not unescapably, a “concession of inferiority to European ideas”.¹⁹

Central to Akhundzadeh’s thinking was the conviction that Islamic dogma had impeded progress in Iran: “the nations of the East, because of the advent of the Arabs’ religion [Islam] and their domination over Asia, have completely lost their freedoms, do not enjoy equality, and have been deprived of the gift of human rights”.²⁰ Akhundzadeh held that the religiosity inherited from the Arabs was both the cause and symptom of Iran’s economic, political and cultural backwardness. Traditional social practices, Akhundzadeh contended, had to be completely eradicated and replaced with the rule of law.²¹

Others like the secularist nationalist, Mirza Agha Khan Kermani took this prescription even further by contrasting knowledge, reason and modern science with the dogmatism of religion. Kermani assailed the religious, educational, and political system prevailing in Iran and denounced the Islamic legacy within Iranian culture. He argued that Iran’s identity could only be retrieved in the pre-Islamic past. In glorifying the ancient past, Kermani drew on Western philosophy, including the works of Descartes, Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Spencer, and Darwin.²²

From their oeuvres, Kermani developed ideas for the establishment of a constitutional parliamentary system to curb the power of the Qajar autocrat. Such a liberation, he argued, would turn popular attention to national problems and convert religious fanaticism into patriotic zeal. It would also bring about the reform of the educational system and the study of “meaningful” sciences. Kermani’s stressed that it was necessary to uproot, “the malicious tree of oppression for the revitalisation of the power of the nation in the character of the Iranian people”.²³

The Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) drew from the legacy of these ideas, uniting a coalition of secular intellectuals, reformist state officials, bazaar merchants, and several prominent clerics. Their goal was to replace arbitrary power with representative government and to restrain foreign interference. Like their forefathers, this generation of

¹⁹ Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernity*, p. 61.

²⁰ Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh, *Maktubat-e Kamal al-Dowleh* (Tehran: Elm, 1985), p. 56.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Mangol Bayat, ‘Mirza Agha Khan Kirmani: A Nineteenth Century Persian Nationalist’, in Ellie Kedouri and Sylvana Haim (eds.), *Towards a Modern Iran* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), p. 67.

²³ Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, ‘The Evolving Polemic of Iranian Nationalism’, in Nikkie Keddie and Rudi Matthee (eds.), *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics* (University of Washington Press, 2002), pp. 163-4.

Iranian thinkers also drew on Western philosophies in their search for political resources that would disassociate the Iranian nation from its “archaic past”.²⁴

Mirza Malkom Khan was a prominent modernist intellectual close to the royal court who was especially influenced by liberal European thinkers. Drawn to the works of Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill – whose ideas he introduced to the ruling and religious elites in Iran, Malkom Khan called for rapid reform of the Qajar autocracy. He communicated his grievances through the magazine, *Qanun* (‘Law’), which became the main outlet for propagating liberal-constitutionalist ideas. The magazine was crafted in language that appealed to religious as well as secular intellectuals. Amongst its contributors was Jamal al-Din Afghani, who framed his advocacy of constitutionalism in terms familiar to religious intellectuals.²⁵ As Nikki Keddie explains, Afghani proved to be effective as the architect of the “religious-radical alliance”, owing to his proximity to both the ulama and the intellectual modernists.²⁶ The religious clergy, or the ulama responded positively, and emerged as strong ideological advocates of constitutionalism. In fact, the ulama developed their own interpretation of popular sovereignty in the form of religious edicts. Among the supporters of a constitution was Mohammad Hossein Naini, a higher-ranking member of the clerical establishment who derived from Islam a discourse in support of modernity. Others like his conservative rival, Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri claimed constitutionalism to be anti-Islamic.²⁷ Due to such rifts within the clergy, the alliance between the ulama and the intellectuals turned out to be short-lived. Alarmed by the secular drift of the constitutional movement, the ulama eventually retreated.

Pathologising the West

The intellectual tide in Iran turned following the 1953 coup orchestrated by British and Americans secret services, overthrowing the government of the democratically-elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq. Following the coup, heightened repression, coupled with Mohammad Reza Shah’s state-sponsored Westernisation project in the 1960s and 1970s, contributed to a growing sense of alienation amongst the Iranian intelligentsia.²⁸ Western

²⁴ Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran’s Intellectual Encounter with Modernity* (New York: Syracuse, 2002), p. 64.

²⁵ Abdol-Hadi Hairi, *Shi’ism and Constitutionalism in Iran: The Study of the Role Played by Persian Residents of Iraq in Iranian Politics* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), p. 53.

²⁶ Vide Nikki Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

²⁷ Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980), p. 259.

²⁸ Vide Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Revolution and Reform in Russia and Iran* for a full account of the Shah’s lop-sided campaign of ‘modernisation from above’.

interference in Iran's domestic affairs and the contradictions of the Shah's modernisation campaign contributed to a paradigmatic shift in political imagination. A new "non-Western" narrative emerged, romanticising native culture, the pre-Islamic Iranian heritage, and Islamic tradition. In Ali Mirsepassi's words, "The romanticism of the Islamic and Iranian traditions engendered an extremely hostile reaction against modernization as a West-centered project".²⁹ At the forefront of this anti-West tide were intellectuals like Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad (1923-1969) and Ali Shari'ati (1933-1977) who believed that Western culture was eroding Iran's cultural authenticity, political sovereignty and economic stability.³⁰ Āl-Ahmad and Shari'ati need no introduction as their ideas on national awakening, cultural protectionism and social change are central to modern Iranian political thought. However, I would like to justify my analysis of Samad Behrangi (1939-1968) amongst these two intellectual heavyweights. A leftist and a secularist teacher, Behrangi's depiction of American infiltration of the Iranian education system and the need for revolutionary struggle deserve attention as they reflect the nexus between political thought and (violent, if need be), revolution.

In spite of profound differences in style, medium and content of their messages, Behrangi, Āl-e Ahmad, and Shari'ati each crafted unique response to the onslaught of Western influence. A folklorist, translator, teacher, and author of many short stories, Behrangi's social critique was principally class-based. To evade the censor, Behrangi embedded his social critique in of his folktales such as the popular allegorical children's book, *The Little Black Fish*, which was intended for both children and adults.³¹ Having taught in village schools of Azerbaijan where he witnessed rural poverty first-hand, Behrangi believed that a class-based struggle would bring about social equality and cultural independence to rural Iran.³²

In addition to folktales, Behrangi wrote essays that were devoted to pedagogy and reform of the education system. Mocking the trite bourgeois culture so imitative of the West, Behrangi criticised the culture of the *farhangīān* (the plural of *farhangi*, which denotes professors, teachers, administrators and clerks in teaching and education). He believed it was necessary to look at this group as "microbes" in order to develop antidotes against the nationwide epidemic that plagued them. Behrangi held that an entire generation of high school

²⁹ Ali Mirsepassi, *Transnationalism in Iranian Political Thought*, p. 49.

³⁰ Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (New York, Syracuse University Press, 1996), pp. 68-9.

³¹ Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, 'Review of *The Little Black Fish and Other Modern Persian Stories*, by Samad Behrangi', *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1997), pp. 216-222.

³² Brad Hanson, 'The Westoxication of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, Āl-e Ahmad, and Shari'ati', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 15 (1983), p. 4.

and university graduates had been ‘infected’ by the *farhangiān*.³³ He accused the *farhangiān* of being primarily concerned with comfort, and in partaking of decadent American cultural activities that were devoid of meaning or substance.³⁴

Concentrating on American cultural influence, Behrangi calculated that over ninety percent of texts used in Iranian teacher training schools were American educators’ texts translated into Persian. Most of the teaching material, he assessed, were designed for classes composed of American expats residing in Tehran, and for “Westernised” Iranians.³⁵ As for remedies to curb American influence in the Iranian education, Behrangi suggested that Iranians with teaching experience in the villages and towns, and not the *farang rafteh* (literally, “those who have been in the West”) should be given the responsibility of devising the curriculum. In his essays he made clear his aversion to American influence with a clear indication that he advocated armed struggle and violence to combat social injustice and cultural imperialism. Behrangi made no mention of the role of religion in the struggle of the land toilers and the urban workers in rising up against the bourgeoisie. While acknowledging that religion had to be respected, Behrangi did not discuss any particular role for the clerical establishment or of Islamic ideology in mitigating Western influence.³⁶

While Āl-e Ahmad was born into a religious family, he did not initially give much weight to the role of religion in the struggle against Western cultural influence as he believed that the clergy would inevitably retreat into dogmatism. However, following a religious pilgrimage, Āl-e Ahmad reconsidered the potential of religion as an indigenous cultural tool against “Westoxication”. With the passage of time, Āl-e Ahmad went full circle by going so far as to defend the anti-constitutionalist, Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri, mentioned earlier, by calling him a martyr.³⁷ To quote his wife, Simin Daneshvar, Āl-e Ahmad’s intellectual transformation reflected, a “relative return to religion and the Occulted Imam, both as a means of preserving national identity and as a path leading to human dignity, mercy, justice, reason, and virtue”.³⁸

³³ Samad Behrangi, *Kand o Kāv Dar Masā’el-e Tarbiātī-e Īrān* (Tabriz: Chapkhāneh-ye Mohammadi-ye Elmieh, 1965), p. 123-124.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Brad Hanson, ‘The Westoxication of Iran’, p. 5.

³⁶ As widely documented after the 1979 revolution, Behrangi was drowned in the Aras River at the age of twenty-nine. In his eulogy, Al-e Ahmad implies that Behrangi was not only a Communist and a secularist, but also an atheist. Peyman Vahabzadeh, *Guerilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and the Fadai Period of National Liberation of Iran* (New York: Syracuse, 2010), p. 23.

³⁷ Ali Mirsepassi, *Transnationalism in Iranian Political Thought*, p. 50.

³⁸ Hamid Algar, ‘Introduction’, in R. Campbell (trans.), *Occidentosis: Plague from the West, Jalal Al-e Ahmad* (Berkeley, Mizan Press, 1984), p. 19, who in turn quotes from Simin Daneshvar, *Ghurub-i Jalal* (‘Jalal’s Sunset’) (Tehran: Hadis-i Nafs, 1982), p.30.

Although he dabbled in politics, having been a member of the leftist Tudeh party and later participating in the Third Force party of the National Front Movement, led by Mossadeq, Āl-e Ahmad was best known as a belletrist, writing short stories and essays of social criticism. Originally a term coined by the Heideggerian philosopher Ahmad Fardid, *Gharbzadegi* was later adapted and popularised by Āl-e Ahmad in his seminal treatise of the same name, published in 1962. In *Gharbzadegi*, Āl-e Ahmad laid out the contours of Iran's infatuation with, and dependence on, the West.³⁹

In his earlier years, Āl-e Ahmad witnessed Reza Shah's sartorial policies, aimed at giving Iranian subjects a "European look".⁴⁰ Comparable to Peter the Great, who enforced a "Western-style" dress code, Reza Shah had restricted the use of the clerical habit.⁴¹ Reza Shah saw the traditional headdresses as evidence of Iranian backwardness. A new hat was introduced, known as the "Pahlavi hat", closely resembling the French military cap. Later, the Shah decided that the Pahlavi hat was not sufficiently "modern", so he ordered the use of the French "chapeau" and he ordered the unveiling of women.⁴² Such cultural policies likely raised the ire of Āl-e Ahmad who himself was donned in Islamic dress.

However, in Āl-e Ahmad's assessment, of all the cultural institutions, it was the education system that had become the most "Westoxicated". Āl-e Ahmad compared *Gharbzadegi* to a disease that killed wheat from within, a malady with two faces: the West, and those inflicted by the disease, the *Gharbzadeh*.⁴³ Foremost amongst the *Gharbzadeh* were the Iranian returnees from Europe and the United States who he accused of betraying Iranian culture by furthering the goals of the Western powers. Āl-e Ahmad lambasted Iranian scholars and academics for disregarding the West's blatant intrusion into Iranian affairs.⁴⁴ Like Behrangi, Āl-e Ahmad had a solution for this predicament: the staffing of schools and government departments and ministries with "Eastoxicated" Iranians.⁴⁵

³⁹ Majid Mohammadi, *Political Islam in Post-Revolutionary Iran: Shi'i Ideologies in Islamist Discourse* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), pp. 62-3.

⁴⁰ Michael Hillman, *Iranian Society: An Anthology of Writings by Jalal Al-e Ahmad* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1982), p. 119.

⁴¹ During Peter's Westernisation campaign, hair growth, the material, cut and colour of clothing and footwear were all minutely regimented by edicts. A category of men was forbidden to wear beards and clothing of the old style (anything other than Hungarian, French or German dress). Nicolai Petro and Alvin Rubenstein, *Russian Foreign Policy* (NY, Longman, 1996), p. 3.

⁴² Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979* (NY, New York University Press, 1981), pp. 125-6.

⁴³ R. Campbell (trans.), *Occidentosis: Plague from the West, Jalal Al-e Ahmad* (Berkeley, Mizan Press, 1984), p. 27.

⁴⁴ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Khasi Dar Miqāt* ('Lost in the Crowd') (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Ravaq, 1977), p. 40.

⁴⁵ Brad Hanson, 'The Westoxication of Iran', p. 11.

For Āl-e Ahmad, the nucleus of Western power and influence over Iran was technological and scientific superiority. Iran thus faced the challenge of preserving its historical-cultural character against the onslaught of the machine. Āl-e Ahmad argued that the West thrust its machines upon Iran in order to exploit the country. To avoid the pitfalls of the past and to regain its economic and cultural sovereignty, Iran had three options: passive submission to machines; retreat into the obscurantism of traditional customs; or the “taming of the machine” through the domestic mastery of science and technology.⁴⁶ Āl-e Ahmad believed that the third approach would prevent Iran from reproducing the pathologies of the past.

This line of reasoning would form the foundation of Ayatollah Khomeini’s social criticism. Hamid Dabashi explains that Islamic ideology became a mobilising or motivational force as the outcome of a conceptual “conversation” with the West.⁴⁷ In other words, Iran’s troubled dialectic with the West, and the growing unpopularity of the Pahlavi Shah’s Westernising policies and his political dependence on Western powers, engendered a distinct retreat to Islamic traditions. Dabashi explains that while Islamic ideology did not necessarily cause the revolution, it set the “discourse” and “universe” in which the revolution unfolded.⁴⁸

Anti-Western, Iranian-Islamic romanticism quickly became the focus of cultural discourse among the anti-Shah opposition who started to experiment with Islamic norms and imagery as ideational tools to rally support behind a revolutionary struggle. Intellectuals like Shari’ati reconstituted Iranian identity in a mixture of ideas that were laden with Third Worldism, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and the eternal battle between justice and injustice – with the Pahlavi shahs and the West firmly in the folds of the unjust side of that dichotomy. Having benefitted from a mixed Islamic and Western education, the Sorbonne-educated Shari’ati’s literary output was mostly limited to essays and his method of communication was lectures. In order to evade the censor, Shari’ati often cloaked his social criticism in the story of the martyrdom of Hossein, in the hands of the oppressor Yazid, who implicitly represented Mohammad Reza Shah.

Drawing inspiration from Western sociology, Muslim theology and the teachings of Third World theorists, Shari’ati devoted much energy to the task of wedding modern socialism to traditional Shi’ism, and to adapting the revolutionary theories of Marx, Fanon and other non-

⁴⁶ R. Campbell (trans.), *Occidentosis: Plague from the West, Jalal Al-e Ahmad* (Berkeley, Mizan Press, 1984), p. 31.

⁴⁷ *Vide* Hamid Dabashi, *The Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution* (NY: New York University Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-7.

Iranian thinkers to the Iranian context.⁴⁹ Shari'ati was profoundly influenced by the anti-colonial and liberation movements of the 1960s. However, as Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi explains, his contribution lies neither in his sophisticated knowledge of Western sociological theories, nor in his thorough re-examination of Islamic theology. Shari'ati was concerned with rewriting and reinterpreting the history of Shi'ism, in order to bring it back to what he believed was its original reading – the Shi'ism of Imam Ali, or in other words, the Islam of the “disinherited”.⁵⁰ It was on this foundation that Shari'ati re-engineered Islam as an ideology of social change by centring it in liberation ideology.

However, in Shari'ati's formulation, it was the clerical establishment that represented the most important institution that legitimised social oppression, a position it had occupied since Shi'ism became the official religion of the court under the Safavid dynasty (1501-1736 AD). According to Shari'ati, Safavid Shi'ism was exclusively engaged with “spiritual and metaphysical phenomenon” and was shed of its progressive, this-worldly quality. He excoriated the clerical establishment for transforming Islam into a culture of “submission”.⁵¹

In order to break the shackles of Western imperialism, Shari'ati maintained that the “Third World” had to first regain its cultural identity and religious heritage.⁵² In this vein, he proposed two concurrent revolutions. The first was a *national* revolution that would end all forms of imperial domination, and thereby revitalising the country's national identity. The second was a *social* revolution that, in the pursuit of a just, dynamic and classless society, would end all forms of exploitation by eradicating poverty and capitalism.⁵³ According to Shari'ati, the onus was on the Iranian intelligentsia to guide the masses through the dual revolutions, as they had been privileged by living “in a society whose religious culture, Shi'ism, was intrinsically radical”.⁵⁴ Considered the chief ideologue of the Iranian revolution of 1979, Shari'ati would not live to see the trajectory of the revolution as he died in 1977.

By way of a summary, in the first phase of contemporary Iranian intellectual history, Iran's relationship to modernity and the West was generally one of adaptation. The intellectuals of the era of the Constitutional Revolution saw no contradiction between the authentic roots of

Commented [R13]: I have added these lines in the interest of clarity. Also, as in my discussion of diverging approaches to religion, I refer to the 're-purposing' and 're-engineering' of Islam as distinct from the way in which Slavophiles broached Orthodoxy.

⁴⁹ Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), pp. 143-58.

⁵⁰ Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, 'Contentious Public Religion: Two Conceptions of Islam in Revolutionary Iran: Ali Shari'ati and Abdolkarim Soroush', *International Sociology*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2004), p. 511.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Ali Shariati, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies: An Islamic Critique*, R. Campbell (trans.) (Berkeley, Calif.: Mizan Press, 1980), p. 49.

⁵³ Ervand Abrahamian, 'Ali Shari'ati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution', in E. Burke and I. M. Lapidus (eds.) *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 292.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Iranian culture and Western civilisation. Left-leaning intellectuals, despite struggling against imperialism, continued to endorse Western political philosophies like Marxist-Leninism. In the second phase, anti-Western, Iranian-Islamic romanticism became the focus of cultural discourse amongst intellectuals who searched for a usable past – a version of Iranian history that would rid the country of Western influence – both as an imperial force and as a deeply flawed model of modernity. Thus, the Iranian revolution can be interpreted as a revolt in defence of culture and tradition vis à vis the West. This formed the foundation on which Khomeini set about creating a distinctly non-Western variety of modernity through practices and rhetoric of Shi'a revolutionary activism.⁵⁵

The Slavophile-Westerniser Controversy

While Iran's dialectic with the West reflected a linear shift over the course of a century – from admiration of the West as the bastion of liberal values, to denunciation of Western influence and interference – Russian political thought was bifurcated into two concurrent and opposing camps: the Slavophiles versus the Westernisers. Both groups borrowed heavily from European Romanticism but clashed over questions of Russian identity and Russia's mission in the post-Petrine world. The clash developed over Peter the Great's Westernisation campaign launched between 1721 and 1725, a process that in the words of Wayne Allensworth, "disoriented Russian society and raised Russian national self-awareness".⁵⁶ While the Slavophiles sought to separate Russia from the "corruption of the dying West" by advocating a return to values of Eastern Orthodoxy, the Westernisers held that the progression of civilisation was a single line leading to the *summum bonum* of societal evolution – the advance from the East to the West.⁵⁷ This argument was embedded in the history of Christianity, which became the discursive canvas on which arguments were developed. As Robert Bird explains, "the question of Russia and Europe became a transcription of the question of Orthodoxy and Western Christianity".⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Mehdi P. Amineh and Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, 'Theorizing of the Iranian Revolution of 1978–1979: The Multiple Contexts of the Iranian Revolution', in Gerhard Preyer and Michael Sussmann (eds.), *Varieties of Multiple Modernities* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 162, 173.

⁵⁶ Wayne Allensworth, *The Russian Question: Nationalism, Modernization and Post-Communist Russia* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), p. 31.

⁵⁷ Martin Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism: 1812-1855* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 289.

⁵⁸ Robert Bird, 'Introduction', in Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (eds.), *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader* (Hudson, New York: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), p. 11.

As in Iran, philosophical writing in Russia was influenced not only by historical context but also by political ideas moving through Russia from Europe. Alongside advances in science and technology initiated during Peter's Westernisation campaign, questions about what "Russia" and "Russian" meant came to the fore. During Catherine the Great reign, under the influence of Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu, Rousseau and Voltaire, questions about the rights of "man" and "personhood" became more popular, gaining a specifically Russian slant in debates about the twin institutions of serfdom and autocracy.⁵⁹

Russian Westernisers

The problem of 'Russia and the West' was first given powerful philosophical formulation in Piotr Chaadaev's eight 'Philosophical Letters', which helped to set the terms of the debate between the future Slavophiles and Westernisers in the 1830s. In these *lettres*, Chaadaev outlined in French, a religious philosophy of history, according to which Christianity was said to be the source of universal historical development, and the Western church the embodiment of humanity. The leitmotif of Chaadaev's argument was that the source of Russia's backwardness was its disconnection from the Roman Catholic Church. Chaadaev lauded the Roman Catholic Church for eliminating serfdom in the West and for developing law codes that protected human rights. Western Catholicism, he held, had created a genuinely multinational community based on a deeply traditional, but also rational, value system.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, according to Chaadaev, Russia had derived its Christianity from "miserable, despised Byzantium".⁶¹ Chaadaev traced Russia's failure to achieve a Western level of civilisation to the decision in the tenth century by Vladimir, Prince of Kiev, to embrace the teachings of the Greek Roman Orthodox (Byzantine) Church rather than those of the Roman Catholic (Latin) Church. This decision, according to Chaadaev, had isolated Russia from Western Christian civilisation.⁶² Chaadaev believed that unlike the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church lacked a unifying quality or structure. The Russian Orthodox Church, was

⁵⁹ See Inna Gorbato, *Catherine the Great and the French Philosophers of the Enlightenment* (Bethesda, Maryland: Academic Press, 1955).

⁶⁰ Marc Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 145-6.

⁶¹ Petr Chaadaev, 'Philosophical Letters,' in James M. Edie et al. (eds.), *Russian Philosophy* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), Vol. 1, pp. 116-117.

⁶² Lawrence Dickey, 'Translatio Imperii and Translatio Religionis: The Geography of Salvation in Russian and American Messianic Thinking', in Catherine Evtuhov and Stephen Kotkin (eds.), *The Cultural Gradient: The Transmission of Ideas in Europe, 1789-1991* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), pp. 13-14.

regressive because it was cut off from the unique source of civilisation, which he regarded as Western Catholicism.⁶³

Chaadaev also engaged with broader philosophical questions concerning ideas of nation and nationalism. The transnational circulation of German philosophy gave Chaadaev new epistemological tools such as Hegel's notion of the *zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age), and Hegel's conception of history as progress towards the ideal. Chaadaev also engaged with Kant, whose concept of reason he critiqued. However, contrary to the ideals of the Enlightenment, Chaadaev eschewed individual freedom, instead favouring the interdependence of individuals and their duty to society.⁶⁴ Chaadaev believed that the mission of both individuals and nations was to move towards unity and community and that the West's developmental path had created a collective consciousness, which Russia lacked. A corollary of his argument was that Russia had never been a historically significant community. In his 'First Philosophical Letter', published in 1836, Chaadaev famously described Russians as rootless "orphans with one foot in the air".⁶⁵ He attributed this partly to Kievan and Tatar cruelty, and Muscovite barbarism.

Firmly in the folds of the Westerniser camp was Vissarion Belinsky, a literary critic for the major nineteenth century Russian writers, including Dostoevsky and Gogol. One of the progenitors of Russian social criticism, Belinsky supported Peter's reforms, which he believed had put Russia on the path of assimilating European ideals. Belinsky adulated Peter but was convinced that Peter's work was incomplete, and that further radical political and social reform was needed.⁶⁶ Belinsky held that Russia had escaped stagnation through Peter's intervention, "a god who breathed a living soul into the colossal, sleeping body of ancient Russia".⁶⁷

In his article, "Russia before Peter the Great", Belinsky argued that Europe was the only society that had grown beyond the primitive stage of "natural immediacy" into a fully conscious, "world-historical civilisation".⁶⁸ He decried Russian religious obscurantism, the oppression of serfs, legal corruption and popular ignorance in his seminal "Letter to Gogol".⁶⁹

⁶³ M. Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 145-6.

⁶⁴ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford University Press, 1980), p. 83.

⁶⁵ Gary M. Hamburg, 'Russian Political Thought: 1700-1917', in Dominic Lieven (ed), *The Cambridge History of Russia, Imperial Russia: 1689-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 126.

⁶⁶ Lindsey Hughes, 'Petrine Russia', in Abbott Gleason (ed), *A Companion to Russian History* (Sussex: Blackwell, 2009), p. 182.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁶⁸ Gary M. Hamburg, 'Russian Political Thought: 1700-1917', in Dominic Lieven (Ed), *The Cambridge History of Russia: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 128-9.

⁶⁹ 'Vissarion Belinsky, 'Letter to Gogol', in Thomas Riha (ed), *Readings in Russian Civilisation*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), pp. 315-320.

Like Shari'ati who resorted to Shi'a themes of martyrdom, by idolising Imam Hussein, Belinsky made references to Jesus in his writings. By depicting Jesus as a rebel against social injustice, he rationalised that serfs had the moral right to throw off their oppressors.⁷⁰

The principal Westerniser response to the Slavophile conception of Russian history is usually considered to be Konstantin Kavelin's 1847 essay, "Analysis of Juridical Life in Ancient Russia". A former student of Belinsky who is often considered the chief architect of Russian liberalism, Kavelin tackled fundamental questions concerning the genesis of Russian society. Kavelin's central thesis was that Russian society suffered specifically from the suppression of "personhood". According to Kavelin, before Peter the Great, "Russia did not possess the principle of personhood" but that "from the eighteenth century onward, it was cultivated and made active".⁷¹ In a private letter to a dowager countess, Kavelin inveighed that "the Russian state crushed personhood at every level of social development".⁷² That millions of Russians lived in bondage was an embarrassment, Kavelin argued; however, he held the conviction that Russians had the innate capacity to develop individuality.⁷³ The theme of "personhood" constituted the red thread that ran through the Westerniser discourse, comprising both its pathos and its *raison d'être*. As we shall discuss below, this was an ideal vehemently rejected by the Slavophiles who, instead, emphasised solidarity, community and collective consciousness.⁷⁴

Before I delve deeper into the discussion of the pro-Western camp of Russian philosophical thinkers, an important caveat must be made given limitations of space. The Westerniser vision of history, which concluded that Russia had been Europeanised and had entered the "universal life of nations", was embraced only by those Westernisers who had come to think of themselves as "liberals".⁷⁵ But as early as 1845, the Westernisers split into two factions: and a radical faction, which included Vissarion Belinsky, Alexander Herzen and Mikhail Bakunin and a liberal faction, which included thinkers such as Kavelin. More aligned with the conservative Chaadaev, the Westernisers on the radical side of the spectrum did not

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 128.

⁷¹ Sergey Horujy, 'Slavophiles, Westernizers, and the Birth of Russian Philosophical Humanism', in G. M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole (eds.), *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 38.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Gary M. Hamburg, 'Russian Political Thought: 1700-1917', in Dominic Lieven (ed), *The Cambridge History of Russia: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 131-2.

⁷⁵ Sergey Horujy, 'Slavophiles, Westernizers, and the Birth of Russian Philosophical Humanism', in G. M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole (eds.), *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 38.

see in Russian reality any signs that the country was entering the “universal life of nations”. The history of Russia, as the radical Herzen wrote, was the “history of the development of autocracy and power, whereas the history of Europe is the history of the development of freedom and rights”.⁷⁶

Herzen and Bakunin both perceived representative government as the “absence of oppression” – a definition that inevitably suggested the disappearance of government itself.⁷⁷ Herzen contended that a progressive era could not begin until Europe had been plunged into revolutionary destruction. In his 1851 book, *On the Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia*, Herzen noted that Europeans, being wealthy, feared revolution, whereas Russians were freer of the past, “because our own past is empty, poor and limited”. He maintained that Russians, with their love for bold experiments, would lead the world toward socialism.⁷⁸ In a similar vein, Bakunin argued in his 1842 essay, “The Reaction in Germany”, that the age of “unfreedom” would only come to an end when the “eternal spirit” of history finally destroyed the old European order.⁷⁹ He called on the Central European Slavs to fight for their independence from the Austrian empire by wringing concessions from their masters or by annihilating them as oppressors. In 1848-9, Bakunin began to suggest that the Russian people themselves lived under a German yoke in the form of the Romanov dynasty. In his celebrated *Confession*, written in prison in 1851 to Tsar Nicholas I, Bakunin revealed his deep-seated pan-Slavic sentiments, admitting that he hoped to provoke, “A Slav war, a war of free, united Slavs against the Russian Emperor”.⁸⁰

Russian Slavophiles

The Slavophiles argued that Western Christianity was descending into total collapse in the nineteenth century. In the view of the Slavophiles, the religious destiny of the world lay in the East and not in the West. In this line of reasoning, I identify the ideological origins of apocalyptic, messianic thinking, which can be compared to Shi’a Islamic messianism with its “end of days” utopian scenarios.⁸¹ Fixated with the uniqueness of Russia’s history, the more

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Gary M. Hamburg, ‘Russian Political Thought: 1700-1917’, in Dominic Lieven (ed), *The Cambridge History of Russia: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 133.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Gary M. Hamburg, ‘Russian Political Thought: 1700-1917’, in Dominic Lieven (ed), *The Cambridge History of Russia: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 131- 2.

⁸⁰ Ibid. *The Confession of Mikhail Bakunin*, Robert C. Howes (trans.) (London: Cornell University Press, 1977).

⁸¹ Lawrence Dickey, ‘Translatio Imperii and Translatio Religionis: The Geography of Salvation in Russian and American Messianic Thinking’, in Catherine Evtuhov and Stephen Kotkin (eds.), *The Cultural Gradient: The Transmission of Ideas in Europe, 1789-1991* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), p. 15.

radical Slavophile thinkers held that Russia had to play an exclusive role in the future, as the “messiah among nations”, and whose time would come “after the apocalyptic crash of the present order”.⁸² The Slavophiles believed that Russia was destined to bring the churches together, and to usher into the world the thousand-year kingdom of God. This unique sense of destiny was premised on the “Russian idea” – the notion that Russia could forge a superior path to the modern world through emphasis on traditional institutions and spiritual values: specifically, autocracy, serfdom, the Orthodox church, the sense of community, religiosity, equality and the notion of *narod* (“people”).⁸³

Mainstream Slavophiles rejected Chaadaev’s contention that Russia lacked a significant history, arriving at very different conclusions in relation to Russia’s global position.⁸⁴ Using Eastern Orthodoxy as a springboard, the Slavophiles presented what they perceived as the superior Russian position vis-à-vis the West through a series of binaries: Russian spirit stood in opposition to Western rationalism; Russian unity stood against Western individualism; and Russian traditionalism and community contradicted Western law imposed from above.⁸⁵ As Nicholas Riasanovsky explains, at its core, the premise of Slavophile thinking was that the West was guilty of a multitude of sins with perverse spiritual principles at its foundation.⁸⁶

The co-founders of the Slavophile movement were Aleksei Khomiakov and Ivan Kireevsky. The irony was that in their attempt to define a Russian identity and destiny, they engaged with the ideas of European Romanticism.⁸⁷ In a sense, Kireevsky’s biographer Abbott Gleason explains, “the debate between the Slavophiles and Westerners was little more than a reworking, in Russian terms, of the arguments which conservative followers of Herder and Schelling were having with Hegelians and particularly with left Hegelians”.⁸⁸ However, as Susanna Rabow-Edling explains, “[German] Romanticism made them realize that the long-

⁸² Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *An Obsession with History: Russian Writers Confront the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 1.

⁸³ Mikhail D. Suslov, ‘Neo-Slavophilism and the Revolution of 1905-07’, *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 24 (2011), p. 36.

⁸⁴ Patrick Lally Michelson, ‘Slavophile Religious Thought and the Dilemma of Russian Modernity, 1830-1860,’ *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 7 (2010), p. 256.

⁸⁵ Robin Aizlewood, ‘Revisiting Russian Identity in Russian Thought: From Chaadaev to the Early Twentieth Century’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 78 (2000), pp. 20-43.

⁸⁶ Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles: A Study of Romantic Ideology* (Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 3.

⁸⁷ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, pp. 106-7.

⁸⁸ Abbott Gleason, *European and Muscovite: Ivan Kireevsky and the Origins of Slavophilism* (Cambridge, Mass: Russian Research Centre, 1972), p.3.

lasting practice of imitation had led to an acute lack of a national cultural contribution”.⁸⁹ Rabow-Edling underscores that both Khomiakov and Kireevsky elaborated their own philosophy rather than trying to adapt Western ideas.⁹⁰

Considered the father of the Slavophile movement, academic theologian, Khomiakov concentrated on defining Russia’s role and mission as the mainstay of Eastern Orthodoxy. Napoleon’s invasion of Russia in the War of 1812 was a formative event in Khomiakov life as it came with Russia’s victory over the French, and the subsequent rise of Russian influence in the West.⁹¹ Another early influence on Khomiakov was his mother, a devout Orthodox Christian, who instilled in the young Alexei, fervent Orthodox convictions that manifested later in his theological writings.⁹² In his essay, “The Church is One”, Khomiakov declared that Western Christianity had “ceased to be Christianity”, while Eastern Orthodoxy was sustained by the “living spirit of Christ”. By critiquing Western Christendom, Khomiakov maintained that the only historically significant community lay in the East and not in the West.⁹³

Khomiakov believed that Peter the Great had damaged the fabric of Russian society. In his view, Peter had forced Russians to compare themselves in relation to European standards. Peter had also eroded the link between the ruling classes and their connection to Russia’s people, and to its native traditions and religion. Khomiakov and his Slavophile followers believed that through Orthodoxy, a Christian culture had developed and nurtured the Russian *narod* into a society that prized the community above the individual. This society cared for its members through uniquely Russian structures like the *obshchina* (the “peasant commune”), which administered the land and kept social order. Khomiakov denounced rationalism and individualism as the ultimate degenerative forces in Western society. He presented the theological concept of *sobornost*, which denoted “unity in multiplicity”; a type of counter-culture to “personhood”.⁹⁴ *Sobornost*, he held, was the Russian answer to class conflict, and the antidote to the rationalism and legalism of the West.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), pp. 33-4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹¹ Peter K. Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Russian Slavophilism* (Hague: Moutin & Co., 1961), pp. 26-8.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Vide* Vera Shevzov, ‘The Burdens of Tradition: Orthodox Constructions of the West in Russia’, in G. Demacopoulos and A. Papanikolaou (eds.), *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

⁹⁴ Pavel Florensky, ‘Around Khomiakov’, in Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (eds.) *On Spiritual Unity: a Slavophile Reader* (NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), pp. 323-4.

⁹⁵ Bernice Glatzeer Rosenthal, ‘Transcending Politics: Vyacheslav Ivanov’s Visions of *Sobornost*’, in Henrik Birnbaum, et al. (eds.), *California Slavic Studies*, Vol. 14 (Berkeley: California University Press, 1992), p. 147.

The literary critic, Kireevsky, was the co-founder of the Slavophile school of thought. Like the majority of Slavophiles, Kireevsky was born into a noble and wealthy family, rooted firmly within the folds of the patriarchal traditions of Russia. Much of Kireevsky's earlier thinking was the product of a dialogue with French Romantic historiography, and with François Guizot and Augustin Thierry, in particular. In the early years of his writing in the 1830s, Kireevsky first defined Russia's role as the new guiding light of European civilisation.⁹⁶ A couple of decades later, he depicted Russia on entirely different principles. European civilisation, Kireevsky argued, was based on three distinguishing features all of which were entirely alien to Russia. The first had to do with the particular form of penetration of Christianity; the second related to the peculiar reception of the learning of classical antiquity; and the third was associated with the specific elements from which the European form of governance took shape.⁹⁷

Kireevsky maintained that Russia, by virtue of having received Christianity through Greece, had by-passed and transcended Rome. Therefore, the Russian state was spared the kind of violence and class struggle that characterised Europe.⁹⁸ In his 1938 essay, "Answer to Khomiakov", Kireevsky wrote that Russia's lack of a pagan heritage had allowed it to accept Christianity in a pure form, and to build its social relations on the basis of Christian truth alone.⁹⁹ By introducing a distinction between *prosveshchenie* ("European culture") and *obrazovannost* (Western civilisation), Kireevsky maintained that Russia had received the former in its pure form through Byzantine Christianity; thus, Russia was free from the rationalistic ideology that had developed in the West.¹⁰⁰

In his 1852 letter, 'On the Character of Europe's Enlightenment and its Relationship to Russia's Enlightenment', Kireevsky made the case that European thought and Western rationalism had fostered individualism, class warfare, and revolutionary destruction.¹⁰¹ Violence and revolution were, according to Kireevsky, European phenomena that were detrimental to civilisation.¹⁰² Kireevsky maintained that despite its achievements in a wide range of human endeavours, Western civilisation was on the verge of collapse, having

⁹⁶ Catherine Evtuhov, 'Guizot in Russia', in Catherine Evtuhov & Stephen Kotkin (eds.), *The Cultural Gradient: The Transmission of Cultural Ideas in Europe, 1789-1991* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), p. 62.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

⁹⁹ Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (eds.), *On Spiritual Unity*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ Abbott Gleason, *European and Muscovite*, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Catherine Evtuhov, 'Guizot in Russia', p. 62.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

destroyed its own spiritual foundations.¹⁰³ “In the West”, he explained, “theology became a matter of rationalistic abstraction, whereas in the Orthodox world, it retained its inner wholeness of spirit”.¹⁰⁴ In the West, he argued, “the forces of reason were split asunder, while here there was a striving to maintain a living totality”.¹⁰⁵ Like Khomiakov, Kireevsky was convinced that the Russian peasantry’s qualities of spirituality, charity and collective endeavour made for a system of life superior to the individualistic and materialistic West.¹⁰⁶

A frequent mistake regarding Slavophilism is to simplify the movement by reducing it to the mere antithesis of Russia and Europe. Classical Slavophiles were not “un-modern” or “anti-Western” in an ideological sense, but they criticised the “wrong turns” taken by the West, especially during the Enlightenment era, which they believed had bred revolutionaries, anarchists and atheists by way of rationalism.¹⁰⁷ The movement itself was varied and complex enough to be broached from different angles: ecclesiastical, historiographical, cultural and relating to forms of social organisation, or even psychological (implying Russia’s feelings of inferiority). Khomiakov and Kireevsky viewed the entire trend almost exclusively from a religious and cultural perspective. Both thinkers believed that reason was subordinate to faith, and that truth could only be understood when all spheres of understanding – spiritual, instinctive, as well as rational – acted together. In this vein, both Slavophiles stressed organic unity and wholeness, arguing that Western Europe’s emphasis on abstract thinking, logical theories and rationalism had destroyed any organic wholeness, and that this was the root of the problem of Western stagnation and fragmentation.¹⁰⁸ Russian civilisation, by virtue of its faith and culture, was an organically superior model to that of the declining and sterile West.

For nativists in both Russia and Iran, faith and religion played a central role in defining authentic culture. Eastern Orthodoxy and Shi’a Islam were unique to Russia and Iran, respectively, and thus served as the pillars of a distinctive national, civilisational identity. However, from a comparative angle, religion was broached very differently by Iranian intellectuals. In Iran of the 1960s and 1970s, religion was refashioned into an ideology; it was re-engineered and instrumentalised in order to serve the practical purpose of mass mobilisation.

¹⁰³ Russell Bova, *Russia and Western Civilization: Cultural and Historical Encounters* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2105), p. 36.

¹⁰⁴ Ivan Kireevsky, ‘On the Nature of European Culture and its Relationship to Russian Culture’, in Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (eds.), *On Spiritual Unity*, p. 229.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Robert Service, *Russia: Experiment with a People* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2003), p. 61.

¹⁰⁷ Wayne Allensworth, *The Russian Question*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁸ Sarah Hudspith, *Dostoevsky and the Idea of Russianness: A New Perspective on Unity and Brotherhood* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 7-8.

In traditional Russian intellectual circles, there was a unified understanding of the core principles of Eastern Orthodoxy. Religion was reserved for the spiritual and metaphysical realm, unadulterated and preserved in its purest form – and this, conservative Slavophiles believed, distinguished Eastern Orthodoxy from Western Christianity that had been contaminated by materialism.

Shari'ati's discourse of progressive social and political transformation was developed on the basis of a simultaneous critique of the essentialist conceptions of Islam and Eurocentric accounts of modernisation.¹⁰⁹ In fact, Shari'ati's repurposing of Islam, which entailed radical criticism of traditional religious doctrines, was such that Shi'a clerics accused him of heresy and issued several religious edicts or *fatwa* against him.¹¹⁰ Another difference in the Iranian context was that the role of religion shifted in importance. For Al-Ahmad, who excoriated the Westernising Pahlavi shahs for cultural capitulation and dependence on Western powers, religion played a more prominent role only later in his life. On the other hand, Russian Slavophiles consistently and devotedly subscribed to the view that confessional (and ethno-cultural and geographic) attributes formed the core of Russia's unique civilisational identity.

Global and Intra-cultural Encounters

In this cross-cultural comparative study, I examine the historical circumstances that shaped Russian and Iranian intellectual discourse in relation to Western patterns of development. In Russia's case, the French Revolution, the Crimean War, and the encounter with the "Eastern Other" led intellectuals to delve deeper into questions of orientation and reform. Encounters and exchanges on the global stage played an important role in influencing Russia's proximity or opposition to the West, with Russian intellectuals reassessing deeply engrained notions of the "Other".

Whereas "the French Revolution indicated that the interdependence of nations was an idea whose time had come", both Slavophiles and Westernisers rejected the idea that a French-style revolution was Russia's historical destiny.¹¹¹ For the Slavophiles, the French Revolution, and indeed, the entire course of Western history, reflected "a litany of brutality and sexual perversion".¹¹² Orthodoxy would spare Russia of a calamity of the magnitude of the French

Commented [R14]: I have added these paragraphs to distinguish Russian and Iranian approaches to religion and the centrality/importance of religion in defining national identity.

¹⁰⁹ Siavash Saffari, *Beyond Shariati: Modernity, Cosmopolitanism and Islam in Iranian Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 4.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

¹¹¹ Dmitry Shlapentokh, *The French Revolution in Russian Intellectual Life: 1865-1905* (Abingdon, Oxon: Transaction Publishers, 2009), p. 3-4.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.4.

Revolution. Westernisers believed that a revolution was a possibility, but they rejected the idea of Western democracy. In their view, the Russian monarchy could avoid the fate of the French by clamping down harder on the opposition. Even the more liberal Westernisers were wary of democracy – although they opposed autocratic rule, they saw the monarchy as an institution that was more appropriate for the masses than parliamentary democracy. More conservative Russian intellectuals believed that not only would Russia preserve its authoritarian regime but would spread this regime all over the world and become “the leader of European civilisation”.¹¹³

Until the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian thinkers defined their future as the result of a dialectic with the West. This began to change with Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War (1854–56) against Britain, France, Turkey and Sardinia. Russia’s humiliating defeat called into question the myth of Russian military prowess, and its ability to fulfil its self-appointed role as defender of Orthodox Christians. At the same time, the war fuelled the growing perception of a duplicitous West that had allied with an Eastern power.¹¹⁴ The combined image of a morally corrupt and politically hostile continent laid the groundwork for the emergence of anti-European civilisational theories.

In relation to the Eastern “Other”, Andrei Tsyganov explains, Russia’s nineteenth century discourse was not different from that of the rest of Europe. Tsyganov explains that the east was viewed with a combination of “superiority and fear”, owing to “primitive” political institutions.¹¹⁵ This perspective began to change as leading Slavophile intellectuals like Nikolai Danilevski and Konstatntin Leontyev, began to frame the West as a civilisational threat in the aftermath of the Crimean War. In his writings, Danilevski reinforced the notion that Russia was a “cultural-historical type” that could not see itself as a part of Europe. Leontyev went even further and became known for his calls to embrace the East.¹¹⁶

While Iran had not suffered military defeat, it grappled with a different kind of political threat. Unlike Russia, that had to confront the reality that it was in need of fundamental social reforms in order “catch-up” with a rapidly industrialising Europe, Iranian intellectuals were not concerned with the problem of economic “backwardness”. Their concern was the pathology of cultural backwardness, or more specifically, cultural capitulation. At the same time, As

¹¹³ Andrei Tsyganov, ‘Self and Other in International Relations Theory: Learning from Russian Civilisational Debates’, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 10 (2008), p. 766.

¹¹⁴ Tsyganov, p. 773.

¹¹⁵ P. J. S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and After* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 44.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Eskandar Sadegh-Boroujerdi indicates, the *Gharbzadegi* narrative was founded on a critique of the rapid, coercive and violent path to modern statehood that began with Reza Shah Pahlavi in the 1920s.¹¹⁷

Both Russian and Iranian intellectual binaries developed in increasingly unsettling political environments. However, while Iranian intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s were driven by the quest for independence, Russians were driven by a sense of inferiority. As Vadim Mezhuer explains, “many non-European countries, which are also modernising, do not emphasis a national problem their difference from Europe and do not feel any inferiority to it. In contrast, our Westernizers have always perceived Russia, not as Europe’s neighbour but as a relative, even a poor relation, delayed in its development”.¹¹⁸

Mezhuer asserts that Russians continue to hold the paradoxical view that they have a distinct and unique identity while also viewing themselves as a backward and underdeveloped nation compared to the West.¹¹⁹ The conflict between these opposing themes – unique identity and backwardness – can explain why the intellectual binary developed in parallel in Russia. In contrast, Iran’s bifurcated approach to the West developed sequentially, gaining momentum as Iranian intellectuals felt more and more stifled by neo-colonial forces and by the decadence and the dependence of the Westernising Pahlavi shah.¹²⁰

However, although separated by a vast swathe of time, as Matin-Asgari notes, the Russian and Iranian intelligentsia had much in common. In terms of political culture, the first generations of Iran’s educated elite were closer to the Russian intelligentsia than their European counterparts. This was partly due to Iranian engagement with Marxist discourses that occupied a dominant intellectual space in Western Europe. The Russian intelligentsia’s ambivalence and/or hostility toward “Western” modernity, Matin-Asgari explains, was largely shared by their Iranian counterparts.¹²¹

Conclusion

The intellectual repertoire of key Iranian and Russian thinkers reveals a highly comparable discursive genealogy in relation to Western modernity. The most discernible similarity in the

Commented [R15]: This is a new section that addresses the concerns that the Reviewer had. Please note the new literature that I have integrated into my discussion as per the Reviewer’s recommendation.

¹¹⁷ Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, ‘Gharbzadegi, Colonial Capitalism and the Racial State in Iran’, *Postcolonial Studies* (2020), pp. 9-12.

¹¹⁸ Vadim Mezhuer, ‘Russia in Search of its Civilizational Identity’ in Mikhail Sergeev, Alexander Chumakov, and Mary Theis (eds.), *Russian Philosophy in the Twenty-First Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 289-290.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Sadegh-Boroujerdi, p. 9.

¹²¹ Matin-Asgari, pp. 19-20.

Iranian and Russian dialectic with the West was the way in which discourse bifurcated into two categories of thinking. Thinkers in both countries articulated a vision of modernity and societal progress by either (1) emulating the West and adapting Western institutions and practices to the local context as an exit from religious obscurantism and medieval political practices, or by (2) by eschewing the Western model of modernity and its attendant social and cultural ills while nurturing traditional archetypes of national consciousness stemming from the past. Whilst the goals, methods and scope of inquiry and debate were different in both countries, they reveal significant parallels, some of which prevail today. The debate over orientation reflects contemporary Iran and Russia's deep-rooted ambivalence towards the Western model of modernity as both countries grapple with the task of defining a *sui generis* path to modernity.

Both Iranian and Russian intellectuals engaged with Western European political philosophy in order to elaborate their own theories about how development would unfold in relation to the West. Nativists and pro-Western apologists alike engaged with European philosophy – from Romanticism to Marxism – in their attempt to define a specifically Iranian/Russian identity and destiny in relation to modernity. Like the Iranian and Russian thinkers that benefitted from the transnational circulation of political ideas, this study has traversed an ambitious terrain by venturing beyond conventional limits – geographic, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, historical and religious – in an effort to blur the boundaries between ‘West’ and ‘non-West’ in relation to political thought.

By bridging the gap between two disparate case studies, that is, of two very different historical contexts and political cultures – I have identified a similar bifurcated narrative vis à vis the West. I have explored how ideational structures – perceptions, cultural peculiarities, identities, and normative values – (those “unobserved and underplayed features” and the “units of analysis” that Freedon speaks of) – have informed and shaped this bifurcated approach to the West.¹²² Pre-revolutionary Iranian and Russian thinkers revealed a shared cultural and historical understanding of the impact of the West on socio-economic and political development, which they interrogated with similar ideational and discursive tools. Both Iranian and Russian minds reflected on questions of national identity, development and modernity alongside similar anxieties and dilemmas in relation to the West. The benefit of this comparative framework is that it extends over time and space, as the debate over Western influence remains in continuous contention in contemporary Iran and Russia. Thus, the “raw

Commented [R16]: I have added a reference to Michael Freedon here in order to demonstrate how it has shaped the article. As the Reviewer noted, there was little mention of this approach beyond the introduction.

¹²² Freedon, pp. 1-4.

material” and the categories of thinking presented in this exposition also serve to provide more explanatory power to the dilemmas of development in both countries today.