Defying the System: The Origins of Anti-Westernism in the Non-Western World and the Case of Iran
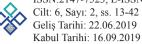
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Abstract

Anti-Western sentiment is a common feature of politics in many non-Western societies such as China, Cuba, Venezuela, Turkey, Iran and various Arab countries. Challenging the scholarly literature that depicts anti-Westernism as an "irrational, extremist and fundamentalist reaction to the cultural hegemony of the West," this article conceptualizes anti-Westernism as a rational reaction to –and an unsurprising consequence of– the problematic political/economic interactions between non-Western societies (e.g. Iran) and Western powers (e.g. Britain, France and the US). Iran is a particularly noteworthy case because anti-Westernism played a key role in the formation of the modern state in the country. The foreign policy behavior of Iran in our time and the historical trajectory that produced the Islamic Republic after the 1979 Revolution cannot be understood without acknowledging anti-Westernism. The origins of anti-Westernism in Iran are explored in this article through interpreting the path dependent historical experience of the country, with a particular emphasis on the relations between Iran and Western countries. In contrast to works that attribute Iran's anti-Western foreign policy to the Islamist ideology of the post-1979 era, it will be argued that hostility to the Western-dominated international political system should actually be traced to the transformation in which the Iranian national identity evolved in the early 20th century.

Keywords: Anti-Westernism, Eurocentrism, Imperialism, Iran, National Identity Formation

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Sisteme Meydan Okumak: Batı-Dışı Dünyada Batı Karşıtlığının Kökenleri ve İran Örneği

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Öz

Batı karşıtlığı; Çin, Küba, Venezuela, Türkiye, İran ve Arap ülkeleri gibi birçok Batı-dışı toplumun siyasal hayatında sık rastlanılan bir öğedir. Bu makale; Batı karşıtlığını "Batı'nın kültürel üstünlüğüne karşı irrasyonel, köktenci ve aşırılıkçı bir tepki" olarak sunan akademik literatürü eleştirip, Batı karşıtlığını Batı-dışı toplumlarla (İran vb.) Batılı güçler (Britanya, Fransa ve ABD vb.) arasındaki sorunlu siyasal/ekonomik ilişkilerin doğal ve rasyonel bir sonucu olarak tanımlamaktadır. İran özellikle dikkat çekici bir örnektir çünkü Batı karşıtlığı ülkedeki modern devlet yapısının oluşumunda anahtar rol oynamıştır. İran'ın günümüzde sürdürdüğü dış politika ve 1979 Devrimi'nin ardından İslam Cumhuriyeti'ni üreten tarihsel rota Batı karşıtlığı göz önüne alınmadan anlaşılamaz. Bu makalede İran'daki Batı karşıtlığının kökenleri ülkenin nevi şahsına münhasır tarihsel tecrübesi yorumlanarak incelenmektedir; bu bağlamda özellikle İran ile Batı ülkeleri arasındaki ilişkilere odaklanılmaktadır. İran'ın Batı karşıtı dış politikasını 1979 sonrası devletin İslamcı ideolojisine bağlayan çalışmaların aksine, bu çalışmada ülkenin Batı-merkezli uluslararası siyasal sisteme duyduğu husumetin kökenlerinin aslında İran ulusal kimliğinin 20. yüzyılın başlarında geçirdiği dönüşümde aranması gerektiği savunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Batı Karşıtlığı, Avrupa-merkezcilik, Emperyalizm, İran, Milli Kimlik Oluşumu

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1. Introduction

Anti-Western sentiment is a common feature of politics in many non-Western societies such as China, Cuba, Venezuela, Turkey, Iran and various Arab countries. Iran is a particularly noteworthy case because anti-Westernism played a key role in the formation of the modern state in the country. The foreign policy behavior of Iran in our time and the historical trajectory that produced the Islamic Republic after the 1979 Revolution cannot be understood without acknowledging anti-Westernism. As a result of real and imagined external threats the country has faced since the late 19th century, anti-Westernism has become an integral part of contemporary Iranian political culture – regardless of notable religious, ethnic and ideological differences within the society.[1]

Undoubtedly, the 1979 Revolution was one of the turning points of Iranian history and a key event that has molded the world we live in today. Observers such as Michel Foucault immediately recognized the 1979 Revolution as a revolt that was launched against the Western-led international political system, in other words, a "counter-hegemonic mass movement."[2] Since 1979, Iran's foreign policy has reflected the essence of this movement by challenging the *status quo* in the Middle East – an order established by leading Western powers such as Britain in the aftermath of World War II and preserved by another Western hegemonic power, the US, since then. The 1979 Revolution continues to define Iran's relations with Western states and the international community as a whole. Today it is not hard to understand why Iran is anti-Westernist as the country has long been under Western-imposed economic sanctions that have dramatically impacted the lives of many Iranians due to the severe effects of sanctions such as high inflation and lower purchasing power for the average individual.[3] Yet, why does Iran continue to defy the Western-centric political system in the Middle East and beyond? What are the roots of the widespread strong sentiment against the West and Iran's tumultuous relationship with

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[1] Hamid Ahmadi, "Unity within Diversity: Foundations and Dynamics of National Identity in Iran," *Middle East Critique* 14, no. 1 (2005): 131.

[2] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, "Islamic Utopian Romanticism and the Foreign Policy Culture of Iran," *Middle East Critique* 14, no. 3 (2005): 265.

[3] Attila Sandıklı and Bilgehan Emeklier, "Iran at the Center of Chaos Scenarios," *Bilgesam Report* 40 (2012).

Western powers? What insights can we draw from the case of Iran for the broader literature on anti-Westernism? These are the questions this study seeks to answer while putting forward an original understanding that could contribute to debates on anti-Westernism.

Instead of automatically associating anti-Westernism with fanaticism, religious fundamentalism, irrationality and terrorism as segments of scholarly literature and mainstream media outlets tend to do,[4] this article avoids value judgment and attempts to objectively analyze the historical trajectory that produces the phenomenon. Contrary to common belief, anti-Westernism is not exclusive to the Muslim world and/or Middle Eastern societies as non-Western societies from all parts of the world exhibit anti-Westernist sentiments at times. For instance, anti-Westernism also manifests in some predominantly Christian societies (e.g. Greece and Russia) as demonstrated in the work of Vasilios Makrides.[5] As such, anti-Westernism can be possibly understood as a reaction to the global hegemony of leading Western states (e.g. Spain, Portugal, Britain, France, the Netherlands), which have severely constrained and/or completely eliminated the independence of other societies during the classical colonial age of the 18th and 19th centuries and the neo-colonial era that followed World War II. If it is defined in political terms rather than cultural, with a meaning akin to anti-imperialism, it can be said of anti-Westernism that it has manifested itself in countries that do not necessarily have a cultural affinity with each other – from Haiti, Cuba and Venezuela in the Western Hemisphere to Algeria, Egypt, Turkey and Iran in the Middle East to

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[4]   See, for example, Peter Knoope, "Anti-Westernism and Terrorism," *Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations*, January 17, 2017, https://www. clingendael.org/event/anti-westernism-terrorism; Jamie Bartlett, "Conspiracy Theories Fuel Anti-Western Sentiment in the Middle East," *The New York Times*, September 13, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/09/12/does-mideast-democracy-complicate-diplomacy/conspiracy-theories-fuel-anti-western-sentiment-in-the-middle-east; Kenneth W. Stein, "Western Intrusion Collides with Tradition in the Middle East," *The Carter Center* (1991); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: The Western Impact and the Middle Eastern Response*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: A Short History of Anti-Westernism* (London: Penguin Press, 2004).

[5]   Vasilios Makrides, "Orthodox Anti-Westernism Today: A Hindrance to European Integration," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9, no. 3 (2009).

Japan, China and North Korea in East Asia, and even in Russia which, paradoxically, appears in Iranian nationalist historiography as part of the "West."

The origins of anti-Westernism in Iran are explored in this article through interpreting the *path dependent*[6] historical experience of the country, with a particular emphasis on political, economic and cultural relations between Iran and Western countries. In contrast to works that primarily attribute Iran's anti-Western foreign policy to the Islamist ideology of the post-1979 era, it will be argued that hostility to the Western-dominated international political system should actually be traced to the transformation in which Iranian national identity evolved in the early 20th century. Challenging the scholarly literature that depicts anti-Westernism as an "irrational phenomenon caused by an extremist/fundamentalist reaction to the cultural hegemony of the West," this article conceptualizes anti-Westernism as an unsurprising consequence of the problematic political/economic interactions between non-Western societies (e.g. Iran) and Western powers (e.g. Britain, France and the US).

The article begins with a critical evaluation of the existing theoretical literature on anti-Westernism, highlighting its weaknesses for the purpose of providing an original non-Eurocentric approach to understand the making of anti-Westernism. Then, this revised approach to anti-Westernism is applied to the case of Iran through a historical review. Iran is one of the most appropriate country cases in the world to test the validity of a new approach to the notion of anti-Westernism, because there is an established and rather extensive literature on the impact of anti-Westernism on Iranian history and contemporary political life.

2. A Critique of Mainstream Approaches to Anti-Westernism

What does the popular term "West" mean? It is surely an elusive and highly contested concept. It has often been used as a derogatory term by non-Western observers to point to the "undesirable influence" of European and

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6   For more information on a research methodology based on path dependency, see Oğuzhan Göksel, "Uneven and Development and Non-Western Modernities: A History Sociology Guide to the New Turkey," *New Middle Eastern Studies* 8, no. 1 (2018): 64-65.

American culture on their societies, whereas it has also been used fondly to mean "modern" by those seeking to reform their societies through emulating the Western model of development.[7] In political discussions, the West often evokes negative images in the non-Western world, referring to a history of colonialism, slavery and humiliation. In this context, Occidentalism and anti-Westernism are sometimes used interchangeably; however there is a major difference between them. Occidentalism can be defined as the "dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies".[8] As such, Occidentalism refers to the stylized images of the Western civilization constructed by non-Western societies during their interactions with Western societies, which is often a hierarchical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as seen in pre-World War II Africa and many parts of Asia (e.g. India, Indonesia and Vietnam). In contrast to the culture-oriented subject matter of Occidentalism, anti-Westernism has a more political connotation as it involves an active opposition and challenge to the Western-dominated international system as a whole and/or the policies of specific Western states. Nevertheless, Occidentalism and anti-Westernism are deeply connected as the former surely enhances the influence of the latter on public opinion. Anti-Westernism has its roots in Occidentalism, because the self-images of non-Western societies have historically evolved as a response to the perceived identity of the so-called West.[9]

Orientalism and Occidentalism developed in parallel with each other, intensifying in the 18th and 19th centuries as European and non-Western societies encountered each other. Contacts between these societies immediately became entangled with military conflicts, political rivalries and struggles over economic resources in countries such as the Ottoman Empire, Iran, China and Japan. As a direct result of the increased political, economic and cultural influence of European colonial empires over non-Western societies, anti-Westernism began to manifest across the world. Anti-Westernism is directly linked to the emergence or social construction of national identity – a process that began in non-Western countries when

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[7]   Buruma and Margalit, *Occidentalism*, 2.

[8]   Buruma and Margalit, *Occidentalism*, 5.

[9]   James Carrier, "Introduction," in *Occidentalism: Images of the West,* edited by James Carrier (New York: Clarendon Press, 1995): 6.

their intellectuals engaged the Western civilization and became familiar with its ideas during the modernization process of the non-Western world.[10] Paradoxically, even though national identities in non-Western societies have been formed through engagement with Western ideas; when nationalism actually manifests in these countries, it often possesses a very strong anti-Western character.

Scholars offer various explanations to account for the origins of anti-Westernism. Proponents of what this article terms *the culturalist approach* suggest that anti-Westernism in the non-Western world – particularly in predominantly Muslim societies – is caused by the "clash of civilizations," namely a culture shock that is the product of the technological development gap between non-Western societies and powerful Western nations.[11] Distinguished scholars such as Bernard Lewis, Samuel P. Huntington, Kenneth W. Stein, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit put forward typical examples of the culturalist approach as they focus on the alleged incompatibility between Islam and modernity.[12] They depict anti-Westernism as an "irrational" reaction against the penetration of the Muslim world by Western ideas that were developed within a particularly Christian setting.[13] Lewis, for instance, only understands anti-Westernism as a cultural critique and focuses on the works of Muslim intellectuals rather than looking at actual political and economic events that had shaped the way non-Western societies see the West today. Not unlike Lewis, Marvin Zonis and Craig M. Joseph offer the Islamic belief system and culture as the main source of conspiracy thinking and anti-Westernism.[14]

Buruma and Margalit emphasize cultural incompatibility as a source of anti-Westernism by arguing that radical Westernization programs such as those adopted by the Meiji Japan, Kemal Ataturk's Turkey and Pahlavi Iran resulted in the emergence of conservative groups whose fear for the

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[10]   James Carrier, "Preface," in *Occidentalism: Images of the West,* edited by James Carrier (New York: Clarendon Press, 1995): VII-X.

[11]   Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): 1.

[12]   See Kenneth W. Stein, *Western Intrusion*; Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*; Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong*; Buruma and Margalit, *Occidentalism*.

[13]   Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong*.

[14]   Marvin Zonis and Craig M. Joseph, "Conspiracy Thinking in the Middle East," *Political Psychology* 15, no. 3 (1994).

loss of their indigenous cultures have evolved into anti-Westernism over time.[15] To support their argument, Buruma and Margalit refer to the anti-Western works of Islamist thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb who, for instance, had visited the US and was particularly disturbed by American culture.[16] Anti-Westernism is presented by this school of thought as a side effect of elite-led cultural Westernization and secularization. The idea that "Western civilization had been swallowed too fast" is offered as the primary cause of anti-Westernism, thus making anti-Westernists a reactionary force in non-Western societies.[17]

The culturalist approach above overlooks the fact that many non-Western political movements and intellectuals – who had adopted anti-Westernism – were also ardent supporters of cultural Westernization. In reality, reformist politicians in non-Western countries implemented modernization programs in order to strengthen their countries against the threat of the West, thus the statesmen of the Meiji Japan, Muhammad Ali's Egypt, Kemalist Turkey and Pahlavi Iran should not be regarded as pro-Westernists. The difference between Islamists and these reformists were about methods as in terms of ultimate objectives, both secular and religious groups shared strong political anti-Westernist aims. For instance, even though the leading cadre of the Turkish nationalist movement of the 1920s was secular and reform-minded, the movement resisted Western European colonial designs on Turkish homeland in the aftermath of World War I and fought the invading Western armies rather than accepting Western mandate rule or some other political compromise.[18] Anti-imperialism and the supposed "untrustworthiness of the West" were doctrines emphasized by the Kemalist leadership in Turkey, thus they adhered to anti-Westernism.[19] Iranian reformists of the 20th century constitute another example in this context as even though secular Iranian nationalists were keen on adopting

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[15]   Buruma and Margalit, *Occidentalism.*

[16]   Buruma and Margalit, *Occidentalism*, 32.

[17]   Buruma and Margalit, *Occidentalism*, 4.

[18]   Engin Deniz Akarlı, "The Tangled Ends of an Empire: Ottoman Encounters with the West and Problems of Westernization – an Overview," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 3 (2006): 354.

[19]   Cemil Aydın, "Between Occidentalism and the Global Left: Islamist Critiques of the West in Turkey," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 3 (2006): 451.

the scientific developments of the West; Iranian nationalism had an anti-Western character in terms of aiming to transform Iran into a global hegemon that would eventually "punish" Western imperialists.[20]

Certainly there has been a cultural critique of the West which has reinforced the frustration of non-Western societies but the role of cultural reaction to modernization is over-stated in the mainstream literature on anti-Westernism. The aforementioned emphasis on the supposed clash between Islam and Christianity also constitutes a key weakness of the culturalist approach. As mentioned earlier, anti-Westernism is hardly exclusive to Muslim societies. Thus, it is unrealistic to define anti-Westernism as a primarily cultural and/or religious phenomenon because nations from various regions of the world such as China, Iran and Japan do not possess common belief systems that would condition them to take a stance against the West. What is common to all these peoples, however, is a shared historical experience of humiliation as non-Western nations had for a long time been treated as pariahs of the Eurocentric international system, especially until the second half of the 20th century. The culturalist approach fails to provide a genuine objective attempt to understand the making of contemporary non-Western societies as they re-produce the Orientalist and Eurocentric arguments that have historically *judged* and *condemned* these peoples through a Western lens – just as described by postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said and Samir Amin.[21] Anti-Westernism can be said to have emerged as a rational reaction to the inherent injustice within the hegemonic international system established by Western colonial empires and imposed over the non-Western world.[22] Therefore, it would be more accurate to regard anti-Westernism as a political/economic rather than a cultural/religious phenomenon.

Naturally the culturalist approach has received criticisms over the years, especially by those adhering to postcolonial as mentioned above. As such, there are now notable works arguing that anti-Westernism is a "natural"

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[20]   Mehrdad Kia, "Persian Nationalism and the Campaign for Language Purification," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 2 (1998): 9.

[21]   Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[22]   Michelangelo Guida, "Al-Afghani and Namik Kemal's Replies to Ernest Renan: Two Anti-Westernist Works in the Formative Stage of Islamic Thought," *Turkish Journal of Politics* 2, no. 2 (2011), 58.

response to the Western history of imperialism across the world.[23] According to this second body of literature, if a country is a former colony, then it must – ipso facto – have the potential to be anti-Westernist. However, some non-Western societies such as Turkey and Japan, which were never colonized, are known to have strong traditions of anti-Westernism. Therefore, a more nuanced explanation is necessary to understand the scale and enduring potency of anti-Westernism. Cemil Aydın argues that neither the culturalist approach nor most of its postcolonial opponents can fully account for the manifestation of anti-Westernism in non-Western societies.[24]

Aydın's main claim is that anti-Westernism emerges due to the "legitimacy crisis" of the Eurocentric global political and socio-economic order.[25] During the 19th and 20th centuries, the unequal nature of global power relations that benefited Western colonial empires at the expense of non-Western areas – which experienced direct colonial rule (e.g. India) or indirect tutelage (e.g. China, Ottoman Empire and Iran) – was justified in the Western intellectual discourse by the rise of racism and Orientalism. As racism and Orientalism demoted non-Western societies to a sub-human level, Western colonialists did not have to feel guilty about violating human rights. Aydın argues that anti-Westernism was developed by intellectuals of the non-Western world as a response to a self-contradictory aspect of Western civilization – namely the "double standard" that emerged over time.

The double standard critique refers to the belief that "Western powers were violating their own proclaimed standards of civilization and Enlightenment ideals as a result of their imperialist ambitions."[26] While Western thinkers were developing ideas such as universal human rights, Western states were actively involved in occupying the lands of non-Western nations and robbing numerous people of their rights such as freedom and self-determination. To the non-Western intellectual, human rights must not have

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[23] Stephen Kinzer and Rashid Khalidi, for example, can be evaluated as representatives of this perspective as they have applied such an argument to contemporary Middle East politics – and more specifically, to explain the origins of anti-Westernism in Iran and Arab countries. See Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, (New Jersey: Wiley, 2003); Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East*, (London: Beacon Press, 2004).

[24] Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*, 2.

[25] Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*, 6.

[26] Cemil Aydın, "Between Occidentalism and the Global Left," 448.

seemed so "universal" under these circumstances. The double standards of the global Eurocentric political and economic order led to disillusionment from Western civilization among non-Western intellectuals, resulting in the emergence of anti-Westernism. For instance, this shared disillusionment can account for why non-Western intellectuals in Ottoman Turkey, Iran and China praised the Japanese victory as their own when the Japanese military defeated the Russian Empire in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War.[27] For many, the Japanese victory of 1905 was a proof that non-Western nations could defeat what was then perceived as a Western nation, the Russians. In this article, a revised version of Aydın's alternative approach to the study of anti-Westernism is adopted. It will be shown that in the case of Iran, the aforementioned double standard has certainly played a major role in driving anti-Westernism, yet this concept is not sufficient by itself to explain the influence of anti-Westernism in this country.

This study argues that, in addition to double standard, anti-Westernism in Iran and other non-Western societies is also linked with the national identity formation processes as the West fills in the much needed role of the "antagonist" in non-Western nationalist narratives. A key source of anti-Westernism in non-Western societies is the clash between the bitter contemporary realities of Western-dominated international system and a socially constructed glorified past. National identity is forged via a Manichean worldview that is based on positing oneself against someone else, in other words, according to the simple maxim of "this is us because we are not them."[28] Arshin Adib-Moghaddam explains this process as: "Propagating the glory of 'our' race or culture almost always entails the suppression of equal status for the race or culture that is represented as the *other.*"[29]

During the construction of non-Western national identities throughout the 20th century, while the fictional past was being portrayed by nationalist thinkers as a "golden age" when the society was very advanced and in total control of its own fate, the reality of modern day was that these non-Western societies such as Iran and China were declining vis-à-vis the

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[27]   Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*, 9-10.

[28]   Buruma and Margalit, *Occidentalism,* 106.

[29]   Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, "Reflections on Arab and Iranian Ultra-Nationalism," *MRZINE Monthly Review* (2006), http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2006/aam201106p. html.

Western powers and gradually falling under their control. This situation has bred disappointment and led a desire to re-formulate the system – which formed the foundations of revisionist and anti-Western foreign policies. A narrative of "imperial pride" is constantly re-produced by national education curriculums that have emerged with the establishment of West-like modern nation-states in the non-Western world. Today, many non-Western societies such as Iran may arguably possess a kind of imperial pride due to a particular construction of national identity based on over-emphasizing the achievements of old empires (e.g. the Achaemenid Empire and the Safavid Empire) that preceded the modern states in these countries.[30] Iran is an appropriate case to test the validity of this revised approach to anti-Westernism on a concrete example. Unique a country as it is, it is hoped that the analysis of anti-Westernism in Iran in the following part of this article can shed some light on the driving factors behind anti-Westernism in general and contribute to the scholarly literature.

3. The Genesis of Anti-Westernism in Iran

It is believed by some observers that anti-Westernism appeared in Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 or during the tenure of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq in the early 1950s.[31] Another popular approach is to trace the anti-Western element of the post-1979 Iranian state to the 1960s when Marxist and Islamist critiques of the West came to the foreground of Iranian politics.[32] Anti-Westernism actually began to manifest much earlier with the nationalist disillusionment from the international political and economic system that always seemed to work against Iran. Thus, the roots of anti-Westernism in Iran should be traced to the emergence and evolution of Iranian nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Throughout the 19th century, numerous Iranian students were sent to Europe to study Western material development but many instead showed interest to social sciences, bringing with them the ideology of nationalism.[33]

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[30] Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*.

[31] See Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979): 17; Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Iran*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Adib-Moghaddam, "Reflections."

[32] Arshin Adip-Moghaddam, "Islamic Utopian Romanticism," 273.

[33] Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "The West in the Eyes of the Iranian Intellectuals of the Interwar Years (1919-1939)," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 3 (2006): 394.

Even though signs of national consciousness in Iran can be observed for many centuries preceding the 19th century, nationalism as commonly understood to be a "phenomenon of mass politics in the era of nation-state" began in the 20th century after a centralized national education system was implemented in the 1930s by Reza Shah Pahlavi.[34] Clearly, some cultural continuity existed between pre-Islamic Iran and the contemporary society, most notably in terms of the Persian language. However, many other elements of Iranian national identity were socially constructed during the Pahlavi period when the bureaucracy of Reza Shah initiated a systematic program to build a modern nation-state.[35] It is important to note, however, that nationalism was already established among the Iranian intelligentsia by the late 19th century and it has played a major role in shaping Iran's subsequent political trajectory. Intellectuals of the late 19th century pondered about several themes, most notably "the glorious past of Iran," the weakened status of the country in those days and what should be done under the circumstances for the good of Iranian people.[36] These were popular discussions not just in Iran but also in many other non-Western societies throughout Asia such as Japan, China and Iran's neighbor, the Ottoman Empire. In contrast to the Ottomans, Iran's geographical location caused the country to encounter Western colonial empires relatively late, initially in the early 19th century during the reign of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar (1797-1834). The Qajar period witnessed the entry of Western notions such as the *nation* and *homeland* to Iran as intellectuals attempted utilize these concepts. The source of nationalist ideas was originally European, mostly French, intellectual influence over Iranian thinkers.[37]

Iranian nationalism was initially the domain of secular modernists and it was based on a non-religious understanding of *vatan* (homeland) – referring to the land of Iran. While the pre-Islamic past of the country was heavily emphasized as a "golden age of Iranian civilization," the

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[34]   Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001): 5.

[35]   Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development of Archaeology in Iran," *American Journal of Archaeology* 105, no. 1 (2001): 52.

[36]   Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998): 20.

[37]   Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "From Patriotism to Matriotism: A Topological Study of Iranian Nationalism, 1870-1909," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 2 (2002), 217; Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*.

period after the adoption of Islam was popularly depicted by early Iranian nationalist ideologues as the destruction of the supposedly advanced Persian culture by "inferior Arab influence and Islam."[38] Secular Iranian nationalism was heavily influenced by the Western modernization ideal of progress. To shorten the development gap between Iran and the West, cultural westernization was offered as the main solution. Secularist thinkers such as Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzade regarded Arab culture and Islam as the primary factors that had caused the decline of Iran.[39] There were conscious and repeated attempts to disassociate Iranian people from Arabs, the latter playing the role of an antagonist in nationalist narratives.[40] The Achaemenid and Sassanid empires were heavily utilized by the Iranian elite of the time to create a strong basis for the emergent Iranian nationalism.[41]

Despite the secularist character of early Iranian nationalism, "national awakening" as formulated by thinkers was based on a narrative of emancipation from Western hegemony – the "West" referring primarily to Russia and Britain in the first half of the 20th century, covering also the US in the second half of the century.[42] Why has Iranian nationalism taken a strong anti-Western character since its very inception? The answer should be searched in the political and economic history of Iran from the late 19th century to the 1979 Revolution, a period shaped by Iran's interactions with Western powers (i.e. Britain, Russia and the US) that had designs over Iran.

It is important to note that in the 19th century, Iran was in rapid decline vis-à-vis the aforementioned Western powers and this was the reality Iranian intellectuals and people had to face. Iranian thinkers over-emphasized the past glory of Iran, probably as a reaction to the abysmal outlook of their age. The clash between an "imagined golden age" and the bitter reality in Iran fuelled anti-Westernism as Western interests over the country seemed to stand in the way of building an independent, prosperous and powerful Iran. This clash is succinctly explained by Mehrzad Boroujerdi: "Seeking out the comfort of the golden age of bliss, the cloister of a mythically-contrived history, and the abyss of ideological musings, many historians

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[38]   Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran,* 96.

[39]   Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* 30.

[40]   Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran,* 100-101.

[41]   Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development."

[42]   Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* 2.

as well as lay people have taken refuge in the belief that Iran enjoys the blessing of God, the angel of history, and prodigious heroes and sages."[43]

In contrast to the comforts of an imagined past of Persian glory, the reality of Iran was that encounters with Russia and Britain in the 19th century resulted in an increasingly desperate struggle to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country. For the formation a particularly aggressive and potent form of anti-Westernism, the Russo-Persian war of 1804-1813, which resulted in the loss of significant territory in South Caucasus, was a genesis. As Iran suffered more military defeats at the hands of Russians, losing territories that had long been part of the country such as Nakhchivan and northern Azerbaijan, calls for an *Iranian nation* by intellectuals intensified. The idea of an Iranian nation could theoretically be traced back to the early 19th century, later to be actually built in practice via national education and state-led media by Reza Shah Pahlavi in the early 20th century.[44] The unstoppable decline of Iran was apparent to local and foreign observers in the late 19th century as the state not only lost a considerable amount of territory to the expanding Russian Empire in the Caucasus and Central Asia but also lost its full independence as it "was nominally transformed into a buffer zone between the British and Russian empires in Asia."[45]

The first sign of a national reaction against the West manifested with the Tobacco Revolt of 1892, when segments of Iranian middle class rose up to protest the tobacco concessions granted to the British in 1890, the last of a series of economic concessions given by the Qajar ruler Naser ad-Din Shah to Western powers.[46] The 1892 Revolt proved to be a key turning point in Iran's path dependent political trajectory. Since 1872, Iran was giving trade concessions to Britain and Russia. The country's mineral resources were being exploited by these foreign powers while Iranian statesmen barely preserved the sovereignty of Iran. In fact, the struggle between Britain

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[43] Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "Contesting Nationalist Constructions of Iranian Identity," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 7, no. 12 (1998): 47.

[44] Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999): 46.

[45] Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development," 53.

[46] Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development," 55.

and Russia had effectively reduced Iran to a *de facto* semi-colony.[47] The 1892 Revolt aimed to halt Iran's intensifying economic colonization and it actually succeeded to some extent by leading to the cancellation of the tobacco concession.

The 1906 Revolution – which is widely seen as a large scale continuation of the Tobacco Revolt – obtained wide support from the clergy, merchants and nationalist intellectuals. The loss of territories, increased economic and political influence of Western powers over policy-making and the seeming inability of governments to counter these pressures can be counted among the main drivers behind the 1906 Constitutional Revolution. As a response to the 1906 Revolution, Russia and Britain signed an agreement in 1907 – dividing Iran into respective spheres of influence which was seen as a "gross interference and unprincipled betrayal" by the Iranian nationalist movement.[48] The aforementioned clash between a constructed past and the bitter reality is most apparent in the reaction of Iranian intellectuals to the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement. This act completely marginalized the intellectuals and nurtured strong anti-Westernism as many Iranians reminisced about the lost glory of ancient Iran:

O... Iranians, Iran is in nuisance

The land of Darius is exposed to Nicholas [the Russian Czar Nicholas II]

The land of kings is at the mercy of monsters

Where is Islamic zeal? Where is patriotism?

My brave brothers, why such reticence?

Iran is yours, Iran is yours.[49]

Since the 19th century, Russia had been the primary enemy of Iran as the two countries fought several wars. There was never any popular sympathy for Russia in the country but Britain was perceived by some intellectuals as a country that could support the 1906 Constitutional Revolution. After all, British intellectual trends were very supportive of human rights and the

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[47] Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, 9.

[48] Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, 15.

[49] Yahya Aryanpour, *From Saba to Nima: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Persian Literature*, (Tehran, 1971) [in Persian]: 132.

idea of national emancipation.[50] A popular sentiment found in the works of reform-minded Iranian intellectuals of the time such as Sayyed Hassan Taqizadeh was the feeling of "betrayal" due to the Anglo-Russian pact that divided Iran into spheres of influence.[51] The massive contradiction between British foreign policy and intellectual narratives must have caused Iranians to feel that the Western civilization was violating its own principles when dealing with non-Western societies – highlighting the role of double standards in igniting anti-Westernism. From 1907 onwards, the Iranian intelligentsia became increasingly hostile to the West as a whole. The earlier secularist narratives that blamed the Arabs for the decline of Iran were replaced by a discourse of anti-imperialism. The entire Western civilization, Britain and Russia in particular, have become the "villains" of almost all mainstream Iranian political movements ever since.

Out of the political instability of the late 1910s came a series of military coups, the last one launched by Sayyid Tabatabai and Reza Khan in 1921. Within a short time, Reza Khan consolidated his position and styled himself as Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925. Reza Shah was an ardent nationalist, akin to the Kemalist Turkish Republic of these years, and initiated a series of radical westernization reforms in education, industry, transportation, military and communications. Reza Shah can be attributed for the elimination of foreign influence and the establishment of full sovereignty of Iran after decades of Western tutelage. The reign of Reza Shah was an important step for Iran's transformation to a nation-state.

Reza Shah's aim of building a strong Iran that is free of foreign influence was the very objective espoused by Iranian nationalists since late 19th century and during the 1906 Constitutional Revolution. The national education system was utilized to instruct the masses, creating a whole generation of anti-Western nationalists who would assert themselves later on (e.g. during the Mosaddeq era of the early 1950s). The glory of Iran's imperial past was emphasized by 19th century nationalist intellectuals and this view became a key element of Iranian national identity during the rule of Reza Shah (1925-1941). Even the name Reza Shah chose for his newly-established dynasty, *Pahlavi*, was an ode to ancient Iran – a reference to

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[50]   Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran.*

[51]   Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran, 53.*

the language of the pre-Islamic Sassanid Empire. The glorification of pre-Islamic Iran reflected on public education curriculum, architectural styles of new public buildings and state ceremonies.[52] The desire of the new state to "restore Iran to its former glory" was fully in-line with the political anti-Westernism of other Asian societies of the time such as Kemalist Turkey and Imperial Japan.

The earlier experience with foreign occupation during World War I shaped the Iranian nationalism of this era as Iranians (including Reza Shah) were convinced that Western powers were biding their time and Iran had to be strengthened to counter their potential claims.[53] The worst fears of Iranian nationalists were later realized during World War II – albeit Iran had declared its neutrality. In 1941, Britain and the Soviet Union invaded Iran and overthrew Reza Shah. As with the case of the first direct Western occupation during World War I, anti-Westernism reached extreme levels in the 1940s.[54] While Britain withdrew shortly after the end of the war in 1945, the Soviet Union made an unsuccessful attempt to continue its influence through establishing puppet governments in its controlled zone (i.e. in Iranian Kurdistan and southern Azerbaijan regions).

It can be argued that the main outcome of Western invasions of Iran has been the emergence of an "occupation syndrome" deeply established in the political culture of the country, namely the strong feeling of being under perpetual threat, besieged by enemies.[55] The Allied occupation of 1941 was followed by "fifteen years of economic disruption, inflation, food shortage, riot, assassination and rebellion."[56] In contrast, the country was enjoying political stability and rapid economic development during the rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi before the occupation. Before the political stability of 1925-1941, there was another two decades long instability and foreign occupation due to the regular interventions of Britain and Russia. In light of this, it should not be surprising that the Iranians blamed Western powers for their troubles.

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[52]   Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development," 61.

[53]   Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, 160.

[54]   Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* 113.

[55]   Atilla Sandıklı and Bilgehan Emeklier, "Iran at the Center of Chaos Scenarios," 2.

[56]   L. P. Elwell-Sutton, "Nationalism and Neutralism in Iran," *Middle East Journal* 12, no. 1 (1958): 20.

4. The Rise of Iranian Anti-Westernism as a Mass Movement

In a late year as in 1949, a scholar could write this about Iran: "The modern history of Iran is largely a history of Big-Power rivalry. Owing to this fact, Iran during the past century and a half has often appeared to be a pawn of international diplomacy."[57] Of course, the author of these words could not have possibly known how strongly the Iranian people would assert themselves to be a formidable force during the Oil Crisis (1951-1953). Today, if one was to write a history of modern Iran, one would not solely provide a narrative of big-power rivalry which downgrades the role of Iranian people to be an "extra" in the story. The story might have begun that way in the early 19th century but it has evolved dramatically throughout the 20th century, culminating in the formation of one of the most anti-Western regimes in the world after the 1979 Revolution. A key turning point of this – by no means inevitable – trajectory was the Oil Crisis. The dispute with Britain over the nationalization of the oil industry during the Mosaddeq era was beyond just a conflict over economic resources as it was seen by many Iranians as a "struggle for independence and national sovereignty."[58]

Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq, a veteran politician, was able to rally the Iranian public through challenging the ongoing economic exploitation of Iranian resources by Britain. The objective of Mosaddeq and the National Front of Iran (*Jebhe-ye Melli-ye Irān* in Persian) was to eliminate the remaining British influence over Iranian economy and build an independent Iran – much like the first Pahlavi (1925-1941) era but based on a democratic model this time.[59] While the British was profiting heavily from the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, there was widespread poverty in Iran.[60] In fact, despite the fact that the company was supposed to be a joint partnership, the Iranian government was not even permitted to audit the books.[61] Under these circumstances, Mosaddeq wished to nationalize the company. Mosaddeq was appointed prime minister in 1951 and quickly became an anti-Western icon due to his leading role in the Oil Crisis of 1952-53 with Britain,

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[57]   George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran, 1918-1948: A Study in Big-Power Rivalry*, (New York: Praeger, 1949): 1.

[58]   Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions,* 225-226.

[59]   Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development," 65.

[60]   Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men,* 2.

[61]   Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men,* 259.

albeit one must admit that the radical anti-Westernism that is commonly attributed to Mosaddeq's persona has more to do with his portrayals by others than his actual thoughts.

Even though the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran officially ended in 1946, the British influence remained particularly in the economy through the British Imperial Bank of Persia and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. These were powerful symbols of "Iranian impotence" in the eyes of Iranian nationalists.[62] Due to post-1941 occupation, anti-Western sentiment was very strong within a very large part of the Iranian public, mirroring the *zeitgeist* of the era as anti-colonial movements were challenging the authority of Western colonial empires all around the world, from Algeria and Egypt to India and Vietnam. The joy that Iranians felt with Mosaddeq's defiance of the British was shared by anti-colonial leaders and thinkers across Asia and Africa.[63] This shared sentiment can be explained only if anti-Westernism is evaluated as a political phenomenon that is the product of widespread frustration with the Eurocentric international political and economic system.

The 1953 coup that ousted Prime Minister Mosaddeq was organized by the CIA and MI-6.[64] Mosaddeq was a hero for many as he managed to nationalize the oil industry, the last obstacle to full Iranian sovereignty over its resources. The coup against Mosaddeq was perceived as the "most unforgivable insult" by nationalists, driving them towards further radicalization and militant anti-Westernism.[65] American involvement in this incident shaped the Iranians' perception of the US as it immediately came to be regarded as part of the "Western devils" aiming to destroy Iran. Over time, the US was given the role of the "main devil" in the nationalist imagination as the US consolidated its hegemony over the world and became heavily involved in Middle Eastern politics.

Just like the constitutionalists who sought the support of Britain in 1906, Mosaddeq initially desired to gain the support of the US against Britain. As such, the Iranian prime minister wrote letters to the US President

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[62]   Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* 130.

[63]   Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men,* 3.

[64]   Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*.

[65]   Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development," 66.

Harry Truman, hoping that Americans would be sympathetic to a society seeking independence from the very force the US itself fought and gained its freedom in the late 18th century. Akin to the disappointment of the constitutionalists with the British half a century ago, Mosaddeq and the National Front was unable to persuade the US as Washington chose to support Britain instead. This was a turning point for anti-Westernism in Iran as the subsequent behavior of the US and its support for the coup against Mosaddeq eliminated the last hope for positive relations between Iran and the Western world. In the following decades, the West as a bloc has been increasingly associated with conspiracy theories that portray Western powers as constantly trying to weaken Iran.[66] The CIA's much publicized role in the 1953 coup exacerbated the influence of conspiracy theories and anti-Westernism became a key element of the "mainstream" political discourse in the country.[67] The anti-colonial struggle of early 1950s has shaped the mind-set of contemporary generations of Iranian leaders while the overthrow of the popular nationalist leader Mosaddeq by foreign powers left a deep scar in the national psyche.[68]

The early forms of Iranian nationalism took an anti-Arab stance as well as anti-Western, however, the post-1953 narratives have exclusively focused on the West regardless of ideology as secularist, Marxist and Islamist factions shared a common enemy in the form of the West and its local ally, the unpopular regime of Mohammad Reza Shah. Following the overthrow of Mosaddeq, Mohammad Reza Shah emerged as the absolute leader in the country, bent on rampant cultural westernization without the support of the parliament or any noteworthy political faction. From the beginning, Mohammad Reza Shah was an unpopular figure, labeled the "lackey of the British" by numerous Iranian newspapers.[69] This lack of legitimacy within the population of Iran and dependence on Washington for support was to be the Shah's ultimate downfall in 1979.

The reign of Mohammad Reza Shah dramatically radicalized the clergy and conservatives as the emphasis on pre-Islamic Iran was seen as artificial and foreign by thinkers such as Ali Shariati who called for a

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[66]   Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* 140.

[67]   Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "Contesting Nationalist Constructions," 46.

[68]   Mahmood Sariolghalam, "Understanding Iran: Getting Past Stereotypes and Mythology," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2003): 71-72.

[69]   Stephan Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men,* 62.

return to the "real Shi'a roots" and tradition.[70] Ali Shariati also criticized the Western-dominated international system and Iran's subservient status within it, regarded as a cultural, political and economic dependency of the West.[71] Jalal Al-e Ahmad's famous cultural critique of Iran's state-led westernization under Mohammad Reza Shah, introducing the well-known derogatory term Westoxication (*Gharbzadegi* in Persian), depicted a Manichean struggle between the "Occidental West" and "Oriental East."[72]

In terms of the formation of the philosophical critique of the West by Al-e Ahmad and Shariati, the Pahlavi regime played the role of the antagonist. Shariati built on Al-e Ahmad's critique and articulated Islam as a revolutionary ideology for social and political change, one that has re-constructed Iran as a country based on the essence of Shi'a Islam.[73] These views later reflected upon the Islamic Republic as demonstrated in the revisionism of Iran's foreign policy and Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini's dualistic portrayal of the international system as *dar al-Islam* (the realm of believers and peace) and *dar al-harb* (the realm of non-believers and war).[74] The influence of these ideas has continued after the rule of Khomeini as his successor, Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei often makes references to the concept of *Gharbzadegi*, defining Western culture as an "illness that corrupts the soul of the Iranian nation."[75]

The role of cultural critiques has certainly been influential in shaping the mind-set of new generations in Iran, extending even to contemporary politicians such as Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the former Iranian President often made references to thinkers such as Shariati in his public speeches, however the role of cultural arguments as a "primary" source of Iranian anti-Westernism has so far been overstated in the scholarly literature on anti-Westernism. Shariati's ideas were very influential in mobilizing Shi'a

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[70]   Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development," 67.

[71]   Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, "Islamic Utopian Romanticism," 276.

[72]   Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, "Islamic Utopian Romanticism," 275.

[73]   Ali Mirsepassi, "Religious Intellectuals and Western Critiques of Secular Modernity," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 3 (2006): 427.

[74]   Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, "Islamic Utopian Romanticism," 279.

[75]   Shabnam Holliday, "The Politicisation of Culture and the Contestation of Iranian National Identity in Khatami's Iran," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 7, no. 1 (2007): 35-36.

Islam towards an anti-Western direction but the 1979 Revolution could have never been possible without the support of political anti-Westernists who were not necessarily affiliated with Shi'a conservatism but adhered to a variety of stances such as Marxism and secularist nationalism. "Down with the *American* Shah" was a popular slogan during the demonstrations of 1978-1979 and not just among the Islamist masses.[76] The form of anti-Westernism may vary from Jamal ad-Din's Islamist arguments to Dr. Mosaddeq's secular nationalism and the Pan-Islamism of Ayatollah Khomeini but there has been a great degree of continuity in terms of the political critique of the West among thinkers of different convictions and eras.

Arguably cultural critiques of the West have nurtured Khomeini's worldview, but the main source of anti-Westernism in the country has been the lessons Iranians have taken from their historical interaction with Western states. Khomeini's writings reveal the power of history in shaping the ideology of the Islamic Republic. For Khomeini, the clergy (*ulema*) has always been the main class that has served and led the Iranian masses in their struggle for emancipation, but they were "betrayed by machinations of foreign powers and their domestic allies."[77] Islam is defined as the first and last line of defense against the "imperialist West" and the US is regarded as the "Great Satan."[78] Khomeini's rhetoric makes constant references to Iran's historical experience with Western states, reminiscing of the Tobacco Revolt, the 1953 coup against Mosaddeq, the so-called pro-Western "puppet regime" of Mohammad Reza Shah – all of which are political events though cultural critiques of Western materialism are also used to further strengthen the anti-Western arguments. Nevertheless, the main analysis remains political rather than cultural.[79] It is doubtful if Khomeini could have successfully mobilized the Iranian masses against the Shah and Western powers as seen in the hostage crisis (though this was initially without Khomeini's will) with a purely cultural critique if not

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[76] Richard Cottam, "Nationalism in Twentieth Century Iran and Dr Muhammad Musaddiq," in *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism, and Oil,* edited by J. Bill and R. Louis (Austin: Texas University Press, 1988): 11.

[77] Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*, 196.

[78] Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* 197.

[79] See Ruhollah Khomeini*, Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981): 126-166.

for the widespread resentment and accumulated frustration that had been re-produced by nationalist discourses based on Iran's historical political events.[80]

Political Islam has become a key driving force of anti-Westernism, especially after the 1979 Revolution, but its role in forming anti-Westernism should not be overstated. Differences between secular and conservative nationalisms in terms of their approach to the West are not as notable as commonly imagined. Their difference is merely regarding the methods to oppose and challenge the West. While the Islamists oppose the West both culturally and politically, the secularists wish to build an Iran that can compete with Western powers while emphasizing their cultural similarities such as the shared Indo-European roots of Persian and European languages.

After the 1979 Revolution, the public education curriculum was dramatically changed as the new textbooks initially rejected nationalism as a "Western" ideology, foreign to "Islamic Iran" and a product imported by "Westoxicated" and "degenerate" local elites.[81] By 1981, only two years after the Revolution, Iranian scholars began to immediately shift from this early stance against nationalism towards more nationalist tendencies.[82] The Iraqi attack on Iran impacted on this process and eased the return of nationalism to the official doctrine. After Islam and nationalism were synthesized into the official ideology of the new republic, anti-Westernism has become stronger than ever – combining both the cultural critiques of Western lifestyle and the political frustration that is the product of the long modern political history of Iran.

Since 1979, the Iranian clergy has proved that it is the most anti-Western of all groups, particularly in the cultural realm; however, it is important to recall that political anti-Westernism was an ideology that was adopted by all major political factions that participated in the 1979 Revolution. Even though the post-1979 Islamist regime is sometimes defined as a unique

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[80] The decision of the Shah to visit the US for medical reasons after the 1979 Revolution sparked the occupation of the US Embassy in Tehran by Iranian students inspired by the fiery anti-Westernism of Khomeini. The hostage crisis and the Iraqi attack on Iran in 1980 further strengthened the anti-Western ideology as many Iranians believed that Iraq was attacking Iran as per the instructions of its alleged master, the US.

[81] Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development," 70.

[82] Kamyar Abdi, "Nationalism, Politics, and the Development," 72.

phenomenon in Iranian history, it has actually exhibited quite a high level of continuity with its predecessors in the 20th century, more so after the Iran-Iraq War as values such as nation, martyrdom and homeland have come to the foreground of official discourse and public imagination.[83] Whereas the nationalism of the preceding era had a more secular character, the Islamic Republic reformulated nationalism by synthesizing it with Islamic values based on ideas of Morteza Motahhari.[84]

Not unlike the secular nationalists who imagined a pre-Islamic glorious Persian Empire, the Islamist critics of the West have constructed their own "golden age of Iran" as an alternative to the modern world and Western hegemony. Both groups have had one common characteristic in their respective ideologies, namely a deep dissatisfaction with the Eurocentric world order – which has driven them towards constructing alternative worlds. This search for another world was the force that united all opposition groups against the regime of the Shah in 1979. Ultimately, the faction that gained political power and acquired the chance to build their "imagined Iran" based on an anti-Western foreign policy was the Islamists.

5. Conclusion

Contrary to the arguments of the mainstream scholarly literature that emphasized the role of cultural reaction to Western civilization as the key reason behind anti-Westernism, this article has argued that the origins of anti-Westernism are primarily the political interactions between non-Western countries and Western states. Although cultural critiques of Western modernity, mostly produced by Islamist thinkers, have also impacted on the anti-Western outlook of the post-1979 Islamic Republic, this factor has been over-stated in the existing literature. If one wishes to understand the deep roots of Iranian disillusionment with the Western world and Iran's revisionist foreign policy that challenges the international political system, the priority should be given to the series of path dependent political events that shaped the perception of the "West": the territorial losses to Russia in the 19th century, the subsequent British and Russian tutelage over Iranian

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[83] Richard Cottam, "Nationalism in Twentieth Century Iran."

[84] Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran,* 203.

politics and economy, the Allied occupations of the country during both World War I and World War II, the 1953 military coup against Iran's democratically-elected nationalist prime minister Dr. Mosaddeq and the unconditional American support for the authoritarian and corrupt rule of Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979).

As analyzed in the earlier sections of this article, the argument of "double standard" offered by Cemil Aydın in an attempt to explain anti-Westernism in the non-Western world certainly reflects reality in the case of Iran.[85] As the mind-set of Iranian intellectuals were shaped by the works of European Enlightenment thinkers who developed concepts such as national self-determination and universal human rights, the realization that the foreign policies of Western states such as Britain and the US were often violating these principles caused disappointment in these societies. In addition to the double standards, however, the clash between an imagined past and the realities of Western-dominated international system was also a main driver of anti-Westernism in Iran. As with many other non-Western nations, the Iranians have demanded respect and equality in global politics, and that they have been determined to acquire them regardless of the hardship of the process.

To sum up, the way in which the phenomenon of anti-Westernism is conceptualized in this article has the potential to shed light on the manifestation and continuing legacy of anti-Western sentiment across the non-Western world. As such, in-depth comparative studies among non-Western societies (e.g. Iran, China, Turkey, Egypt, Cuba, Venezuela, Japan) displaying notable trends of anti-Westernism could be helpful for us to better understand the workings of this potent political force in our age.

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[85]   Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia.*

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