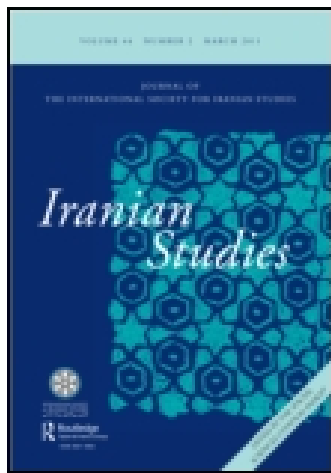


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Sina Mansouri-Zeyni and Sepideh Sami

The History of *Ressentiment* in Iran and the Emerging *Ressentiment-less Mindset*

Two dichotomies, one that resents the West and another that admires it, seem to have long polarized both Iranian intellectuals and the public imagination. Darioush Ashouri discusses this issue in terms of “ressentiment,” a term he borrows from Nietzsche. This study puts Ashouri’s scattered views within a Nietzschean framework to form a coherent theory, and places it against the background of a brief history of resentment in Iran. It then argues that signs of a resentment-less young generation, mostly university students, seem to be appearing, and a certain kind of social behavior on Facebook and a work by the Iranian musician Mohsen Namjoo are analyzed as evidence of this emerging mindset.

Introduction

The history of contemporary social movements in Iran seems to be the *histoire* of a historical vacillation between two poles: one cherishing Iran’s historical heritage and abhorring the West, the other looking up to the West and resenting the national heritage. Darioush Ashouri, among others, has discussed this issue. Ashouri’s discussion differs from that of others in that he directly addresses the dichotomy itself in his analysis (rather than being only aware of it) and diagnoses it as a case of “*ressentiment*” (*kintouzi*); what he suggests to be the root of this problem is a lack of what he calls “historical consciousness” (*hoshyari-e tarikhi*).¹ He argues that undesirable conditions cause a resentful look at either the past (the national heritage) or the “other” (the West). Ashouri borrows the term *ressentiment* from Nietzsche and develops it with regard to the Iranian case. In this light, the phenomenon has a long tradition in Iran and has afflicted both the intellectuals and the public of the country for much of modern Iranian history. We use “the intellectuals” and “the Mindset” to refer respectively to well-respected scholars and university students, many of whom

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¹Darioush Ashouri, “Hoshyari-e tarikhi: negareshi dar *Qarbzadegi* va mabani-ye nazari-ye an” [Historical Consciousness: A Look at *Westoxication* and its Theoretical Bases], <http://ashouri.malakat.org/archives/upload/2005/03/ashouri-gharbzadegi.pdf>. All the translations from Persian sources in this study are ours.

study at universities of higher ranking. The causes and manifestations of this historical *ressentiment* is part of what this study presents.

From the last decade of the twentieth century onwards, however, there have been a number of studies that have tried and, at least in part, succeeded in evading this dualistic, dichotomous attitude. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, Mehrzad Boroujerdi, and Hamid Dabashi, to name a few, have tried in one way or another to escape the dichotomy; Tavakoli-Targhi explores the process of the modernization and the making of modern Iranian identity not in terms of simple westernization (be it a positive “advancement” or a negative re/digression from the “grand heritage”), but rather in the context of a simultaneous, global process; Boroujerdi argues for “Orientalism in reverse,” which takes as its principal precept a “fundamental ontological difference separating the natures, peoples, and cultures of the Orient and the Occident” (and thus does not view the Occident and the Orient as simply opposed to each other); and Dabashi constantly talks of the need for “the most detailed attention to the [contextual] minutiae” (which Tavakoli-Targhi follows in his studies of Iranian historiography).²

Alongside these academic attempts, the public has also shown signs of an emerging “historical consciousness” that Ashouri considers necessary to cure this *ressentiment*. The Green Movement as a whole has consistently, and with good reason, been seen as a “third way,” that is, the people’s own way as distinct from those of the West and the Islamic Republic. The young generations seem to have tired of such polarized discourse and to be moving away from ideological views, what Dabashi characterizes as “the end of ideology,” toward a “practical disposition towards contemporary needs and desires,” in Reza Afshari’s words.³ The present study, too, argues that there are irrefutable signs of the emergence of a young generation in Iran that is becoming *historically conscious* and is eventually doing away with that historical *ressentiment*, that double-edged, resentful approach.

In what follows, Ashouri’s scattered comments are brought together to form a coherent statement of his position and theory regarding *ressentiment*. His ideas are then linked to and backed up by their Nietzschean legacy in order to provide a framework within which to better understand Ashouri’s ideas. This is followed by a discussion of the roots and causes of this *ressentiment* in Iran. Finally, the signs of an

²See Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York, 2001); Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse, NY, 1996); and Hamid Dabashi’s statement of purpose in the preface to his *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York, 1993). It should be noted that this is not to claim that all these studies achieve is an evasion of this dualistic attitude; that would be an over-simplification. Rather, what is meant is that these studies, in their attempt to show that this attitude is more than a simple case of “either–or,” are for the first time *aware* of the attitude in question.

³Hamid Dabashi, *The Green Movement in Iran*, ed. Navid Nikzadfar (New Brunswick, NJ and London, 2011), 45; Reza Afshari, “A Historic Moment in Iran,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (November 2009): 839.

emerging historical consciousness as found in certain recurrent social behavior on Facebook and in one of Mohsen Namjoo's songs will be discussed.⁴

Ashouri and the Case of Iranian Ressentiment

Ashouri has on numerous occasions talked about two polarized positions, each of which has invariably trapped any contemporary social movement in Iran. The earliest of such statements appeared in reaction to Jalal Al-e Ahmad's highly influential book, *Gharbzadegi* (*Westoxication*).⁵ In his critique, Ashouri argues:

The reaction of intellectuals and thinkers in colonized countries, including Iran, toward this historical issue [the issue of colonialism] consists of two stages: the first stage when these intellectuals themselves appeared as a result of the connections with the West and when all that existed was admiration [for the West], a running away from the self ..., a hatred for all the decadence that had surrounded ancient civilizations ..., and the false belief that blind imitation would take the Eastern societies to where the Western societies had arrived; and the second stage ... which is the stage of awakening from these false dreams.⁶

This is the gist of what Ashouri continues to develop regarding this issue in the course of his career. He believes that a situation like the one he describes above can only result in a kind of "schizophrenia, be it due to Westoxication or West-aversion ... Such a psychological state has either hatred or admiration for the West."⁷

The most coherent account Ashouri gives of his ideas on this issue appears when he formulates the problem in terms of a "transition from [the] Orient to the Third World."⁸ Through an archeology of the "Third World" question, Ashouri argues that "'Third World' as a term became prevalent in the early 1950s, designating,

⁴Soon after its release, this song became popular among a wide range of university students in Iran. Unfortunately, the current status of Namjoo in the Islamic Republic of Iran as a "heretic" does not allow any statistical research to be done to support the claim.

⁵Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Qarbzadegi* [Westoxification] (Tehran, 1962). All the translations are ours unless otherwise stated.

⁶Ashouri, "Hoshiyari-e tarikhi," 14.

⁷Darioush Ashouri, "Gofteman-e qarbzadegi: toqyan-e roshanfekri-e jahan-e sevvomi bara-ye bazgasht be 'khod'" [The Discourse of Westoxication: The Third-World Rebellion for a Return to "Self"], http://ashouri.malakut.org/2009/09/post_63.html. *Westoxication* is Mehrzad Boroujerdi's coinage as equivalent to *qarbzadegi* or *qarbzadegi*, which best renders the feelings of intoxication the term intends to convey. I have used *West-aversion* as equivalent to *qarbzadegi* or *qarbzadegi*, which describes the other pole's hatred for the West.

It should be noted that many, including Mirsepassi, argue that Fardid, Al-e Ahmad, and Shari'ati, who are consistently seen as intellectuals abhorring the West, had at the same time a latent fascination with the West (mostly through a Corbinian-Heideggerian dimension). However, this does not counter the present argument. Ali Mirsepassi, "Religious Intellectuals and Western Critiques of Secular Modernity," *Comparative Studies of South Asian, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 3 (2006): 420.

⁸Ashouri, "Gofteman-e qarbzadegi."

primarily, the neutral political situation of the countries not belonging to the two hostile blocs of power, eastern and western”; however:

[the] military powers of the Cold War era made the concept of the Third World devoid of its international political connotation as a third party in this relationship. On the other hand, [the] vast industrialization of a considerable number of the previously underdeveloped countries in East Asia and later, other parts of the world, to the point of the emergence of the great world economic powers among them, rendered obsolete the term “Third World” connoting a totality of “underdeveloped countries.”⁹

This shift from neutrality to bias in the meaning of the term “Third World” captures an “ontological” metamorphosis that most of the countries, included in this category, underwent. In pre-modern times, Ashouri argues, civilizations used to conceive of themselves as occupying the center of the universe; however, with the advancement in science and empirical geographical studies in the modern period came a demythologization of such perceptions. This *decentering* had shocking repercussions for the pre-modern people: “The demythologization of geography was the first step [to] putting all traditional human cultures out of their imaginary centrality and relocating them in the periphery of a scientifically Eurocentric world.”¹⁰

While Ashouri posits the transition from a mythological center to a geographical and political periphery in general, Tavakoli-Targhi refers to it in the context of Iran, though only in passing. He explicitly states that “Iran had been previously conceived of as the center of the universe in pre-modern Persian geographic imagination.”¹¹ Iran, too, fell from the center to the periphery.

Restating ideas from his critique of *Gharbzadegi*, Ashouri argues that this ontological fall first resulted in an imitation by “the early generations of the Oriental intelligentsia” of “their masters” way of life—in attire, worldview, and so forth—which “represented [an] in-depth resentfulness ... from [*sic.*] their own historical past.” Nevertheless, the rise of anti-colonial spirits after the Second World War “turned the previous fascination for everything European into a sense of anger and resentment toward it.”¹² The present study focuses on two types of resentment, one aimed at the historical past and the other at the West; it should also be noted that, although both in his article, “Transition from Orient to the Third World,” and in his critique of *Gharbzadegi*, Ashouri conceives of these feelings of resentment as consecutive stages, one following the other, he talks of them elsewhere as simply two poles that can exist

⁹Darioush Ashouri, “Transition from Orient to the Third World,” http://ashouri.malakat.org/2010/07/post_67.html.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 97. Tavakoli-Targhi himself cites Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, trans. Nancy Pearson, Bollingen Series xci: 2 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1977), 17–24.

¹²Ashouri, “Transition from Orient to the Third World.”

alongside each other. This central concept of “resentment,” referred to by Ashouri more often as “*ressentiment*,” is derived from the philosophy of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche.

To many Iranians, Darioush Ashouri is “the translator of Nietzsche’s *Chenin goft zardosht* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*),” a project that took him several years. Ashouri himself talks on multiple occasions of Nietzsche’s enormous influence on his thought. In order to better understand Ashouri’s ideas, they must be seen in the context of Nietzsche’s philosophy.

Nietzsche: Metaphor, Active and Passive Nihilism, and Ressentiment

In “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” Nietzsche proposed his then-radical notion of truth: each “truth” is but a metaphor, or, more precisely, a regimen of dead metaphors, metaphors whose origins have been forgotten.¹³ Nietzsche, then, in anticipation of abundant theories in (post)modern philosophy, rejects the idea of truth being true in itself, lying out there waiting to be discovered. Rather, he believes truth to be the “effect” of certain human relations, and therefore created rather than discovered:

What, then, is truth? A movable army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration, and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical and binding; truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensual vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins.¹⁴

While Nietzsche’s highly charged and poetic language might make the idea not quite accessible to the modern reader, this would not sound too unfamiliar if viewed in the context of modern philosophy. Ludwig Wittgenstein views language not as pointing to an outer world or an inner self, but rather as a sum of conventions by means of which everything is *locally* determined in language-games; therefore, truth is no longer something language points to or even mediates; it is rather what is locally and conventionally accepted *as* truth and may, and probably will, differ in different language-games.¹⁵ A very similar, but perhaps more elaborate, attitude toward language and truth is taken by Jean-François Lyotard in his theory of phrases and his investigation of the role of

¹³Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense,” in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. Ronald Speers (Cambridge, 1999).

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁵See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E. Anscombe (Oxford, 1963), especially §§26–36 and 243–75.

narratives in human knowledge.¹⁶ Thomas Kuhn, too, approaches the issue when he sees the history of science not as a series of evolutionary movements toward perfection, movements which take us closer to some truth, but as a succession of different “paradigms” which, more often than not, are not even compatible with each other; Kuhn thus believes truth is not out there but temporally agreed on.¹⁷ This is also in line with Michel Foucault’s idea that the different discursive conditions of different ages and localities result in fundamentally different epistemes, or regimes of truth.¹⁸ Richard Rorty proposes an interesting synthesis of Wittgenstein, Kuhn, and Foucault where he believes that truth is actually “the property of linguistic entities, of sentences,” which are themselves made possible by and articulated in “vocabularies-as-wholes,” which are a Wittgensteinian rendition of the Kuhnian idea of paradigms.¹⁹ While these thinkers expand on this notion of *created* truth in their own ways, Nietzsche makes it the basis of his idea of active nihilism, which itself is the transition to his philosophy of “the Overman”—of principal interest to the present study.

The conception of truth as having been created, according to Nietzsche, results in a critical situation where any belief in the value of existence is missing; with the twilight of the idols comes a nihilistic attitude toward life:

The feeling of valuelessness was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of “aim,” the concept of “unity,” or the concept of “truth.” Existence has no goal or end; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking; the character of existence is not “true,” is false. One simply lacks any reason for convincing oneself that there is a true world. Briefly: the categories “aim,” “unity,” “being” which we used to project some value into this world—we pull out again; so the world looks valueless.²⁰

This is one point where Ashouri’s ideas intersect with those of Nietzsche. What the “transition from Orient to the Third World” and the demythologization of the nation’s pre-modern imaginations create, in Ashouri’s view, is very similar to this “valuelessness”: values, which used to be beyond doubt, but have now been lost; peoples have gone from being at the center of the world to the periphery. The consequences following these situations, thus, are similar.

¹⁶See, respectively, Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, 1985) and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1984).

¹⁷See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago and London, 1996), especially Chapters V and X.

¹⁸See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1973).

¹⁹See Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, 1995), especially “The contingency of language.”

²⁰Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York, 1968), 13.

The nihilistic attitude toward life that Nietzsche talks about, however, is what he diagnoses only as “passive nihilism,” the baser of two possible attitudes that can be taken after the setting of values and truth, the one that represents “the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals.”²¹ This attitude follows the dreadful, at least at first sight, consequence that “every belief, every considering-something-true, is necessarily false because there simply is no true world.”²² In sharp contrast with this is what Nietzsche calls “active nihilism.” What passive nihilism sighs at, active nihilism rejoices in. The latter, therefore, welcomes the humans’ creative role in the constitution of truth since within this attitude it is realized that there actually is nothing to regret, but a vista to exult at, a life of one’s own to affirm, an unlimited array of values to create. According to Nietzsche:

Man first implanted values into things to maintain himself—he created the meanings of things, a human meaning! Therefore he calls himself: “Man,” that is: the evaluator.

Evaluation is creation: hear it, you creative men! Valuating is itself the value and jewel of all valued things.

Only through evaluation is there value: and without evaluation the nut of existence would be hollow. Hear it, you creative men!²³

As a result, once this creative man “feels *himself* to be the determiner of values,” he starts to create his own values.²⁴ This he calls “a *divine way of thinking*.”²⁵

Closely related to all this is Nietzsche’s idea of *ressentiment*. As opposed to this creative man, also known as noble man or “Overman,” who creates his own values, Nietzsche conceives of a kind of “slave morality” that is impotent and unable to create its own values. Consequently, the slavish nature is forced to concentrate the “evaluating glance” on an outside world that is superior (merely because the noble nature outside is able to create its own values). This is when the slavish nature starts to take an “imaginary revenge” on the noble nature; this attitude is what Nietzsche refers to as *ressentiment*.²⁶ Thus, *ressentiment*, rather than an active process like that of the noble nature through which values are created, is a *reactive* one, which Nietzsche despises.

Here one comes across another point of intersection that is of major importance to the present study. The way out of the double-edged *ressentiment*, according to Ashouri, is “historical consciousness,” which he maintains “has no fixed form.”²⁷ Nevertheless, he provides a general definition for the concept as follows:

²¹Ibid., 4.

²²Ibid., 14.

²³Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, 1969), 85.

²⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, 1990), 195.

²⁵Nietzsche, *The Will To Power*, 15.

²⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge, 2000), 21.

²⁷Ashouri, “Gofteman-e qarbzadegi.”

in its modern sense, [historical consciousness] is the interpretation of history and of man's ontological relation with it in general (or with a universal history), or on a smaller scale, the writing and interpretation of a local and national history within a universal one.²⁸

Ashouri links it to *ressentiment* in the following definition:

In other words, it is a liberation from "*ressentiment*"—which I borrow from Nietzsche. *Ressentiment* toward [our] selves, past, and history as responsible for "our" present [undesirable] conditions ... Or, *ressentiment* toward "the West" and Western imperialism and colonialism, or even from another point of view, Western Humanism and its "moral decadence."²⁹

Clearly, what Ashouri is talking about is a rendition of Nietzsche's discussion of "slavish natures" as opposed to "noble natures." In sum, after the fall of civilizations from their pre-modern position at the center of the world, a state of "valuelessness" emerged. In Iran's case, two types of slavish natures emerged out of this situation: those who focused the evaluating and blaming glance on their past and those who fixed this glance on the West. However, the way out of this predicament is in the noble nature's way: creating one's own values, interpreting local histories in the context of global histories in order to actively create one's own new position in the new world.

Ressentiment and the Discourse of Westoxication

Of the two poles of *ressentiment* as defined above, admiration for the West was the first to emerge. This should come as no surprise since, according to Ashouri's argument, *ressentiment* appears as the first of the two consecutive stages of uncritical admiration for the West followed by aversion towards the West. Significant admiration for the West began, most probably, with the Qajar rulers' fascination with Europe and found its way into the Pahlavis' rule as well as a portion of the intelligentsia, as will be discussed. To use the terminology of *ressentiment*, this "Westoxication" was the result of focusing the resentful glance partly on the Arab "other" and partly on national traditions. A strong reaction to this attitude followed in the form of West-aversion, or the discourse of "Westoxication" as articulated by Al-e Ahmad, which was the result of focusing the resentful glance on the western "other." What follows is a short survey of such attitudes.

Fascination with the West. The Qajar rulers' travels to Europe were both a result and a cause of the embryonic admiration for western culture. Europe was considered to be the source of advancement: the polytechnic college of *Dar al-Fonun* was established in

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

1852, where “instructors were mostly recruited from France”; the telegraph and the postal system were introduced in 1856 and 1876 by the British; the Government Theater (*takveh dowlat*) was built in 1873, allegedly “inspired by London’s Albert Hall”; top graduates from *Dar al-Fonun* “received scholarships to study in Europe”; numerous books by European authors were translated, running the gamut from medicine through army to literature and, “most significant of all, ten histories of Iran, including pre-Islamic Iran, written mostly by Europeans”; “thus,” in Abrahamian’s words, “Iranians began to see their own past as well as world history mainly through western eyes.”³⁰

Such admiration for the West went on to appear during Reza Shah’s rule—though in a much more complicated and sometimes self-contradictory way. His “modernization” of the country, for example, was according to many nothing more than mere “Westernization.”³¹ Despite his apparent resistance to European influence manifested in acts like the annulling of capitulations, and despite his honoring the national heritage, especially pre-Islamic Iran, Reza Shah seems to have had in mind Europe as an example of successful government and Iranian traditions and conventions as an obstruction on the way to development. His efforts at eradicating tribal life, in which he had succeeded by 1927 according to the British minister of the time, is only one example of looking down upon the past and up to Europe.³² Introducing “democratic law from modern Europe,” encouraging men “to be clean shaven, or, if they insisted on moustaches, to keep them modest—unlike large ones sported by Nasser al-Din Shah and the famous or infamous lutis,” and women to denounce the Islamic veil (promoting a western dress code in general), allowing women to enter law schools, basing Tehran University on “the Napoleonic model” and *Farhangestan* (the Academy) on the French Academy are some other examples that reveal such attitudes.³³

The issue was even more complicated among the intelligentsia: although they claimed to be promoting nationalist values, such intellectuals had an implicit fascination with the West. Tavakoli-Targhi provides a helpful example:

Malkum [Khan] argued, “The ignorance of the people of Islam and their separation (from present-day progress are caused by the defectiveness of the alphabet.” As Bernard Lewis observed, “In the inadequacy of the Arabic alphabet, Malkom Khan saw the root cause of all the weakness, the poverty, insecurity, despotism, and inequity of the land of Islam.” Despite Akhundzadah and Malkum’s nationalist enthusiasm, their argument against the Arabic script was similar to that of the British promoters of Romanization, who considered *Devi Nagari* and Arabic scripts as “barbarous characters.”³⁴

³⁰Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge, 2008), 8–33.

³¹*Ibid.*, 91.

³²*Ibid.*, 73.

³³*Ibid.*, 72–91.

³⁴Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 110.

All in all, whether implicit or explicit, there was a sort of fascination with the West.

West-aversion. The term *qarbzadegi* (*Westoxication*) was most probably coined by Ahmad Fardid—though this use of the suffix *zadegi* “to indicate a pathological affliction” was probably introduced into the Persian language by Khalil Maleki.³⁵ But it came into circulation only after the first publication of Al-e Ahmad’s book with the same title. Al-e Ahmad was among the first of many Iranian “intellectuals” to resent the West.

Al-e Ahmad’s *Qarbzadegi* was, in Mirsepassi’s judgment, “the most radical book to appear in Iran in the 1960s, one that helped considerably to alter the country’s future.”³⁶ This is in part because it provided the vocabulary for the new discourse; words and phrases like “rootlessness” and “return to the self” came thenceforth into considerable circulation, abounding works that argued for and defended a “nativist” position.³⁷ Al-e Ahmad, under the influence of Fardid, founded the polemical anti-West discourse, to which Shari’ati, the early Shayegan, Reza Davari, and others both belonged and contributed.

Shayegan, in this regard, is an interesting case since his personal career roughly (though only roughly) represents the relationship between Iranian intellectuals and *ressentiment*. Shayegan’s early writings, hugely influenced by Fardid and Henry Corbin, fall within the discourse of Westoxication; however, his recent works have come to adopt a less resentful and more cosmopolitan, pluralistic position. His *Asia dar barabar-e qarb* (*Asia vis-à-vis the West*) sees a kind of divine value in the “Orient” as opposed to the nihilism of the West, which reflects the fascination with Iranian heritage and the nativist longing for a “return to self” he shared, respectively, with French Orientalists and with his allies in Iran.³⁸ The editor of *Asia dar barabar-e qarb*, to the consternation of the reader of the present study, was none other than Dariush Ashouri, which is an indication of the extent to which the resentful approach had entrapped thinkers of the time. While his *Qu’est-ce qu’une révolution religieuse?* (*What is a Religious Revolution?*) along with some of his other works of the time share their principal ideas with *Asia dar barabar-e qarb*, Shayegan takes up a different position in his *Le regard mutilé: schizophrénie culturelle, pays traditionnels face à la modernité* (translated into English as *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West*): here he abandons, at least in part, the resentment against the West and tries to analyze the pathology of the clash between the Orient and the West.³⁹ In this regard, Shayegan somehow represents all contemporary intellectual trends in Iran.

³⁵Qtd. in Ashouri, “Gofteman-e Gharbzadegi”; Homa Katouzian, “Khalil Maleki: The Odd Intellectual Out,” in *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran: A Critical Survey*, ed. Negin Nabavi (Gainesville, Florida, 2003), 36.

³⁶Mirsepassi, “Religious Intellectuals and Western Critiques of Secular Modernity,” 420.

³⁷For a discussion of Iranian nativism, see, Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*.

³⁸Dariush Shayegan, *Asia dar barabar-e qarb* [*Asia vis-à-vis the West*] (Tehran, 2003).

³⁹Dariush Shayegan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une révolution religieuse?* [*What is a Religious Revolution?*] (Paris, 1982); Dariush Shayegan, *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West*, trans. John Howe (London, 1992).

A different manifestation of this historical *ressentiment*, apart from individual intellectuals, can be seen in the long-standing attempts to “purify” the Persian language from foreign words, mostly Arabic. The constitution of the Persian Academy (*Farhangestan-e zaban va adab-e farsi*) explicitly states that this replacing of “foreign words” with “Persian” ones is among the Academy’s main tasks and that the Academy “has replaced ten thousand equivalents for foreign words over the past ten years.”⁴⁰ These attempts represent the West-averse, or more precisely, the *other*-averse side of the *ressentiment*.⁴¹

An alternative view might be that the Academy’s attempts have had more to do with nationalism and nation-building. Nevertheless, while nationalism does contain an element of standing up to the “other,” it would be misleading to single out this factor, as seems to be the case with the Academy. This claim is supported by Fanon’s and Said’s warning when they talk of, respectively, the “pitfalls of national consciousness” and the possibility of a nationalist consciousness leading “very easily” to “a frozen rigidity,” or even “chauvinism and xenophobia.”⁴²

The Academy, however, only follows earlier, much more passionate attempts to “purify” the Persian language from “Arabic” words, which date back to the nationalistic attempts in the nineteenth century.⁴³ For these attempts the *Shahnameh* served as a model—this was also the time when new nationalist narratives were read into the *Shahnameh*. Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, as only one of many nationalists, went far enough to say that:

If it were not for the *Shahnameh* of Firdawsi, the language and the race of the Iranian nation/people [*lughat va jinsiyat-I millat-e Iran*] would have been at once transformed into Arabic after the domination by the Arab tribes in Iran. Like the peoples of Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, the Persian speakers would have changed their race and nationality [*milliyat va jinsiyat*].⁴⁴

What is important here is that these attitudes, as part of the whole nationalist agenda, had great admiration for the national heritage and blamed all misfortune on the Arab domination: they concentrated the resentful, evaluating glance on the “other.”

⁴⁰Farhangestan-e zaban va adab-e farsi, *Osul va zavabet-e vazhegozini* [The Principles and Rules of Word Replacement], 3rd ed., <http://www.persianacademy.ir/userfiles/file/osoul/310488.pdf>, 7.

⁴¹It is important, we believe, to note the falsity of the belief that an Arabic-derived word can be considered as actually *Arabic*—in post-Saussurean times that would be an egregious fallacy. In the context of Saussure’s linguistics and Wittgenstein’s philosophy, and indeed that of almost all post-structuralists, it can be convincingly argued that these words have now Persian identities, and that all that can be justly said is that they were originally derived from Arabic.

⁴²Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth, 1964), and Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993). For a discussion of nativism in Iran, see Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*.

⁴³Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 22.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 99.

Ressentiment could also be seen in the case of Khalil Maleki. This “odd intellectual out,” to use Katouzian’s ironic epithet for him, spent almost all of his life on political activity and analyses, but “died in isolation and depression.”⁴⁵ In Katouzian’s view, as well as in that of many others now, Maleki “tended to be far ahead of the existing political fashions in his diagnoses and prescriptions,” which means that, personally, he could have possibly surpassed the *ressentiment* that predominated his age; yet it does not mean he could not be a victim of it.⁴⁶ The fact that he somehow lived and certainly died in isolation probably results from the fact that he never adhered to one or the other pole of *ressentiment*. While he was obviously not “Westoxicated,” he nevertheless campaigned against the “conspiracy theory of politics”—the prevalent idea that any undesirable condition was caused by imperialism and colonialism, a different expression of West-aversion:

He noted that he did not at all wish to underrate the power, influence, interference, and unequal position of the great powers, past or present, in Iran or in other colonial and semicolonial countries. But he opposed commonly held views regarding the great powers, namely, that (a) all the country’s ills were due to colonialism and imperialism.⁴⁷

Khalil Maleki had sensed the ongoing *ressentiment* in the discourses of his time.

For a long time, Iranian intellectuals seem to have been entrapped by the double-edged *ressentiment*. In recent times, however, they seem to be coming to take their evaluating, resentful approach away from either their past or the “other” and starting to conceive of themselves and their “ontological” position within a cosmopolitan context.

The Emerging Ressentiment-less Mindset

As was mentioned before, there are signs of a *ressentiment*-less young generation emerging in Iran today. This new trend can be detected through examples on social media as well as in popular culture. To this end, a certain kind of recurrent Facebook activity and one of Mohsen Namjoo’s songs, each of which in its own certain way shows signs of liberation from the *ressentiment* in question, will be highlighted here. These, however, have not been chosen arbitrarily: for one thing, the warm reception given by young university students demonstrates the students’ approval; for another, and more importantly, the simple fact of their existence, especially in the case of the Facebook pages, points to a move away from resentful sentiments, be it widespread or nascent.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Katouzian, “Khalil Maleki,” 33.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁸See note 3. As for the Facebook pages, one of them (namely *biaid*) enjoys, as of this article, 9,400 followers, of whom more than 80 percent are students at high-ranking universities within Iran. This is a significant number if compared to Kurosh-e Kabir, to use an example that is related to the resentful pole

The new social behavior on Facebook. Recently some pages on Facebook have been publishing materials that poke fun at the two poles of the historical *ressentiment* at the same time. Two of these are referred to here: *Biaid* (literally, Let's/Come in), and *Khaterat-e pas az marg-e porofosor Hesabi* (*Professor Hesabi's Posthumous Diary*).⁴⁹ It is important to note from the outset that these pages do not simply create the materials all by themselves, but rather, for the largest part, they only *share* the materials that are created by *individuals*. While they seem to be busy with different activities at first sight, they share the simultaneous mockery of the two resentful poles.

Professor Hesabi's Posthumous Diary fakes stories, told from Mahmoud Hesabi's point of view. Mahmoud Hesabi (1903–92), born in Tehran, received his BA in Civil Engineering and PhD in Physics from the American University of Beirut and the Sorbonne respectively, and taught physics at the University of Tehran afterwards. Although evidence points to the contrary, a majority of people believe him to be one of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century; some say that Hesabi proposed a crucial principle called the “Infinity of Particles” (*asl-e binahayat budan-e zarrat*)—although there is no such thing. He is also believed to have had informal meetings with Albert Einstein, of which there is, once more, no evidence.⁵⁰ In the stories that the mentioned Facebook page fakes, Hesabi is in the company of some great scientists of the world, mostly physicists and mathematicians. The stories are fake in an obvious way: some involve scientists that did not even overlap in time with Hesabi while others take place in extremely traditional/religious settings (e.g. Nowruz). As a result, the stories have comic and satiric effects.

The page has actually been created mainly in reaction to Professor Hesabi's biography entitled *The Master of Love* (*Ostad-e eshq*), by his son, Iraj Hesabi, which does indeed relate “questionable” stories about Professor Hesabi being with great scientists.⁵¹ However, it is not reacting to the book itself—it cannot be denied that there are many books in which questionable stories are published. What is special about *The Master of Love* is that it has implanted in people's minds that Hesabi has been in the company of the world's greatest scientists of his time. There are numerous blogs where pictures can be found that are claimed to be pictures of Hesabi and Einstein, though the person standing beside Einstein differs from picture to picture—the most (in)famous case is a picture of Einstein and the Austrian

that cherishes the national heritage (*Kurosh-e Kabir*). The latter has 12,000 followers, only a small portion of whom are students at elite universities. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/کوروش-کبیر/?fref=ts>.

⁴⁹See Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/BIAEED> and <https://www.facebook.com/Prhesabimemories>.

⁵⁰For a recent and rare discussion of the international status of Hesabi, see Interview with Zia Movahed, <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/242085>. Movahed argues that Hesabi was nothing more than an average professor, who did not even publish any important articles. The occurrence of such an interview shows the predominance of reverential stories about Hesabi.

⁵¹Iraj Hesabi, *Ostad-e eshq* [*The Master of Love*] (Tehran, 2011). The inquiry into the validity of the stories in *The Master of Love* is beyond the scope of the present study. As a matter of fact, their validity is not the most important point since it is the people's attitude to have uncritically believed them that is relevant here. This study does not level any charge against *The Master of Love*.

American Mathematician Kurt Gödel. The important point is that people and their historical, collective unconscious are quite open to believing such stories, which glorify their past, their heritage. (It may be worth mentioning that the book has been reprinted thirty-eight times.) Therefore, it could be said that the Facebook page is reacting to people's attitude—that is, one of the two poles of the *ressentiment*. Importantly, the implied idea behind such an attitude is that it is an “honor” that someone from Iran could merely *be* in the company of western scientists; therefore, by mocking this attitude, such activities also expose this implied idea and thus poke fun at the other pole—unreasonable admiration for the West—at the same time.

Biaid, on the other hand, publishes fabricated stories that, in a rather obviously fake way, link far-fetched, quite irrelevant inventions or celebrities to some Iranian sources, and cite fake webpages to lend verisimilitude to the stories. For example, one, which is in no way special, states that ice cream was first made by Iranians and provides the following argument: there was one Karim Bastani (both of the A's in *Bastani* are pronounced /ɑ:/, which make the word mean *ancient, relic*) who sold ice and cold drinks. Later, he invented a new kind of cold drink that the English ambassador, one of his regular customers, who was in the habit of calling him “Ice Karim,” liked very much; as a result, Karim was awarded a store, the sign of which bore Karim's family name in his honor: Bastani. This Iranians came to pronounce in the wrong way by pronouncing the two A's as /æ/, hence the Persian word *bastani* meaning *ice cream*.⁵² It can be argued that this is a *ressentiment*-less rejection of the two poles since it pokes fun at both sides of the *ressentiment* by downplaying the western emissaries and the excessive glorification of the national heritage at the same time.

Indeed, it would not be too odd to argue that the emerging society in Iran feels “colonized” by the long-standing *ressentiment*. If one replaced, metaphorically, *ressentiment* and *Iranian society* respectively for the *colonizer* and the *colonized* in Homi Bhabha's discourse, the result would be that the society feels psychologically colonized by the old resentful attitudes as it is reacting to it through something very similar to Bhabha's conception of “mimicry”: this colonized society is imitating the colonizer's behavior by constructing stories glorifying the national heritage; however, the self-denigration or the irony that is built into the stories is “what emerges between mimesis and mimicry,” that is, “a writing, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable.”⁵³ These new social behaviors are very close to “the discourse of mimicry [that] is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.”⁵⁴

⁵²Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=512992912060405&set=o.125128144253558&type=1&relevant_count=1#!/photo.php?fbid=512992912060405&set=o.125128144253558&type=1&permPage=1.

⁵³Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), 87–8.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 86.

While these pages could have been started and run by anyone and to any end, their reception and circulation (the number of *likes* and *shares*) support the present argument here. The emerging Mindset is freeing itself from an historical affliction.

Mohsen Namjoo's music. In one of his superb works called “Deylaman,” Namjoo presents a very interesting combination of Iranian classical and western music.⁵⁵ Namjoo differs from his predecessors like Javad Ma’roufi, who composed Persian pieces and arranged them for piano, in that he combines Persian and western music in his composition, in a way that makes it impossible to say with certainty whether it is a Persian or western piece, while the latter only arranged and played musical compositions that were undoubtedly Persian on a western instrument. In Iranian classical music, there are seven *dastgahs*, which are roughly equivalent to scales in western music; these consist of a number of tonal and rhythmic patterns, called *qet’ehs*, that are similar to each other in both atmosphere and technical features; some *dastgahs* are subdivided into *avazs*, which are grouped together to *qet’ehs*. Namjoo’s work is a variation on *deylaman*, which is a *qet’eh* in *dashti*, itself an *avaz* in the *dastgah* of *shur*; however, it has been creatively mixed with the (western) blues scale.

The most salient features that define each *dastgah* or *avaz* are the intervals between the notes, as in scales, and the notes that are played more than the others. Figure 1 shows the musical notation that defines *deylaman*. Figure 2 shows a major blues scale. As can be seen, the two scales (to avoid unnecessary complications, *deylaman* is referred to as a scale here) share their two ends—F and G, on the one hand, and C on the other hand—but differ slightly in their middle parts.

Namjoo takes advantage of this similarity and incorporates both scales in his composition by playing and singing the notes from both. By playing on the closeness of the middle parts, he creates, one could say, an uncanny effect: it sounds as if both *deylaman* and blues were actually being played simultaneously. It is important to note that Namjoo does not simply play/sing in *deylaman* at some moments and in the blues

Figure 1. The *Deylaman* Scale



Source: *Dastgah in Iranian Music*.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Mohsen Namjoo, *Alaki*, CD. Stanford, CA, 2011.

⁵⁶Hormoz Farhat, *Dastgah in Iranian Music*, trans. Mahdi Purmohammad (Tehran, 2007), 71. The Figure has been simplified to avoid complication.

Figure 2. The Hexatonic Blues Scale in D



scale at others (which would make it possible for the listener to say “now this is *deylaman*, and now this is the blues”); he plays both at the same time.

If one takes Iranian classical music and the blues as, metaphorically, representing the Iranian heritage and the West—which is not a far-fetched analogy if one is closely acquainted with the discourses surrounding Mohammadreza Shajarian—the result would be that Namjoo exceeds the other instances so far discussed in being *ressentiment*-less: not only does he set himself free from being resentful toward any of the two poles, he also avoids mocking them. Namjoo, metaphorically, takes whatever he finds fit both from his national heritage and from the West and puts them into the making of a piece of art that is in many ways unique.

Conclusion

Ashouri’s sporadic discussions of a *ressentiment* that has entangled Iranian thought become clearer and much more coherent if put within their Nietzschean context. Getting out of this predicament, Nietzsche’s texts reveal, is a first step on a people’s way to creating their own values and compromising for the so-called fall. While a number of Iranian academics (mostly living in exile) have been trying to dispel the resentful attitude for a while now, the young generations within Iran, too, seem to be starting to take this step. It falls upon critics and academics to be watchful of these signs, to “bear witness” to them, in order to promote the emergence of this new mindset.