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Jalal's Angels of Deliverance and Destruction: Genealogies of Theo-politics, Sovereignty and Coloniality in Iran and Israel

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*This article discusses the historical context of the famed dissident intellectual Jalal Al-e Ahmad's (1923–69) travelogue documenting his visit to Israel in early 1963, posthumously titled *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il (Journey to the Province of the Angel of Death)*, focusing on (1) the political and intellectual context and reception of his controversial essay, in particular the brief infatuation of Iranian anti-Soviet socialists in the League of Iranian Socialists with socialist Zionism; (2) Al-e Ahmad's discussion of political sovereignty and theo-politics in modern Israel and the important insights and observations provided therein; and (3), finally, the shifting sands of Al-e Ahmad's engagement with Israel and Zionism and their relation to how he understood the politics of anticolonialism in the context of modern Iran following the 1953 coup d'état, which overthrew the nationalist government of Mohammad Mosaddeq, the Shah's "White Revolution" and the Arab–Israeli War of 1967. The development of his views from ones of curiosity, fascination and ambivalence to condemnation echo less a simplistic and psychologized "return to religion" or "quest for authenticity" than an integration of the category of coloniality in relation to a wider field of struggles then unfolding across the global South during the 1960s, and provided the basis for a critique of not only Iranian social democrats, but several leading lights of the French left.*

Introduction

Without doubt Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923–69) is one of twentieth-century Iran's towering activist intellectuals. Both in life and following his premature death he was seen to embody those pristine attributes of the *engagé* calling power to account.¹ During his history of activism, Al-e Ahmad saw what he took to be the Soviet Union's pernicious designs on Iran in the course of the Red Army's occupation of northern Iran between 1941 and 1946, provoking him, along with his long-standing mentor and leading socialist activist and thinker Khalil Maleki (1901–69), to secede from the communist Tudeh Party in 1948. A mere five years later, he experienced in all its immediacy the MI6–CIA-orchestrated overthrow of the nationalist prime minister Mohammad Mosaddeq, who pioneered the nationalization of the

¹Reza Baraheni, *The Crowned Cannibals: Writings on Repression in Iran*, with an Introduction by E.L. Doctorow (New York, 1977), chap. 5.

Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, today known as British Petroleum.² As a member of the Toilers Party of the Iranian Nation (Hezb-e zahmatkeshan-e mellat-e Iran), which also suffered divisions and ultimately broke into two distinct groups, one for and another antagonistic to Mosaddeq, Al-e Ahmad once more sided with the elder Maleki in favor of the beleaguered Mosaddeq. The Mosaddeq government faced severe pressure due to a British-enforced oil embargo in a calculated endeavor to strangle one of its key sources of revenue. Following the successful *coup d'état* and installation of General Fazlollah Zahedi as premier, Al-e Ahmad and an entire generation of activists and intellectuals underwent one of the great traumas of a generation, witnessing the full-throated repression of his one-time comrades in the Tudeh Party, along with the arrest and imprisonment of many luminaries in the national movement. After three weeks in hiding Al-e Ahmad would himself be arrested and condemned to prison without trial.³ And it was upon the ashes of the movement to which he had wholeheartedly subscribed that he saw the erection of a seemingly impervious police state built with the support of the United States, the ascendant imperial power of the day.⁴

This troubled history impressed itself on the engaged writer's consciousness and political commitments, in tandem with a sensitivity to similar struggles against imperialism and neocolonialism the world over. Anticolonialism, non-alignment and the quest for national self-determination came to be touchstones of his political formation and identity, and impressed themselves upon his best-known work, *Gharbzadegi* (1962), usually translated as "Westoxification" or "West-struckness." Al-e Ahmad's contributions to literature, the history of ideas, and political struggle have been discussed and analyzed by several scholars, as has the subject of this specific article, his sojourn in Israel.⁵ This article's contribution resides both in its novel reading and interpretation of Al-e Ahmad's writings on Israel and the political vision which emanates therefrom, and in the examination of these writings within the broader context of Iranian socialism during the 1960s. We draw upon a number of key sources, including two other Israeli travelogues authored by Iranian social democrats, which have not been seriously explored until now. Reading these in conjunction with Al-e Ahmad and in their appropriate historical context permits us to argue for the distinctiveness of Al-e Ahmad's insights in contrast to prominent Iranian social democrats. The latter uncritically accepted the role of "socialist Zionism," perceiving it as the benevolent agent of a civilizing mission in Palestine—much like how socialist Zionism imagined itself. We argue that Al-e Ahmad's intervention is notable

²Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.–Iranian Relations* (New York and London, 2013). Ali Rahnama, *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks* (Cambridge and New York, 2015).

³For further biographical details and analysis of his works see Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New Brunswick, 2006), chap. 1. Robert Wells, "Jalal Ale Ahmad: Writer and Political Activist" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1982), 7–8.

⁴Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (Harmondsworth and New York, 1979).

⁵See Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 67. Samuel Thrope's introduction to Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, trans., with an introductory essay, by Samuel Thrope (Brooklyn, 2013). Lior B. Sternfeld, *Between Iran and Zion: Jewish Histories of Twentieth-Century Iran* (Stanford, 2018), Loc 1830.

and worthy of wider consideration because of the manner in which he relates what he takes to be a *sui generis* manifestation of sovereign expression in the founding of a Jewish state to the Shi'ite notion of *velayat*, or “guardianship,” even as he never loses sight of Palestine as a site of colonial violence, subjugation and exclusion, and a means by which European imperial powers have sought absolution for their role in the Judeocide. We argue that what distinguishes Al-e Ahmad from his fellow Iranian social democrats who became enamored of socialist Zionism is his cognitive incorporation of the category of coloniality.⁶ His understanding of coloniality not only allowed him to see certain dynamics of dispossession and expropriation missed by others, namely those who, in the words of Frantz Fanon, had been flung into a “zone of nonbeing,”⁷ but also facilitated his tethering of colonial social relations across multiple scales, traversing the local, the regional and the global.

Historical and intellectual context of Al-e Ahmad's visit to Israel

Al-e Ahmad and his equally distinguished wife, the intellectual and novelist Simin Daneshvar, visited Israel for two weeks in February 1963 at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁸ The motivations behind the visit were complex, but the confluence of two factors is of note. First, as recounted by Israel's political representative to Iran at the time, Meir Ezri, there was a concerted effort at cultural diplomacy in a bid to shape Iranian public opinion, with a direct focus upon the intelligentsia, students and political figures.⁹ Ezri and his colleagues in Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs saw it as incumbent upon them to invite and host influential Iranians in what might be considered the “soft-power” counterpart to Ben-Gurion's periphery doctrine. Second, and more importantly in the specific case of Al-e Ahmad, were the writings and engagement of Iranian socialists of an anti-Stalinist orientation and their search for an alternative model of socializing the relations of production, above all in the agricultural sphere. Crucially, this period coincided with Iran's experience of a major, albeit profoundly uneven, transition from a predominantly rural society to an increasingly urban and capitalist one.¹⁰ To be sure, Iranian anti-Soviet socialists were looking for an alternative that would be free of the heavy human toll, authoritarianism and violence unleashed by the Soviet policy of agricultural collectivization which had begun in earnest in 1928 under the leadership of Joseph Stalin. But there were also very local reasons for their search for socialist alternatives to the Soviet Union.

The curiosity of Iranian socialists, above all those close to Khalil Maleki, of whom Al-e Ahmad had long considered himself a disciple, regarding socialism in Israel and the kibbutzim, had been piqued in the early 1950s. These socialists'

⁶For further information on the ontology of coloniality see Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality” *Cultural Studies* 21/2–3 (2007), 168–78.

⁷Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann, Introduction by Paul Gilroy (London and New York, 2017), Loc 257.

⁸Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il* (Tehran, 1373), 15.

⁹Meir Ezri, *Yadnameh*, trans. Ebrahim Hakhami (Jerusalem, 2000), 177.

¹⁰Halliday, *Iran*. Bizhan Jazani, *Tarh-e jame'eh shenasi va mabani-ye esterezhzi-ye jonbesh-e enqelabi-ye Iran: bakhsh-e avval (eqtesadi)* (Tehran, 1358).

profound distrust of the Soviet Union and the Tudeh Party of Iran had led Maleki and Al-e Ahmad, along with several other leading members, to secede from the latter in 1948. Maleki would subsequently establish the Third Force Party (Hezb-e niru-ye sevvom), propelling its committed members to search for alternative laboratories in socialist politics, which they believed could safeguard Iranian independence while furnishing it with a more humane and just way of organizing both economy and society. Over the years several Iranian socialists associated with Maleki's Third Force and a subsequent incarnation in the form of the League of Iranian Socialists, including Maleki himself, would visit Israel to investigate what Israel and the kibbutz system had to offer (see below).¹¹ Visits by Iranian intellectuals and political activists, such as Maleki, Al-e Ahmad, Dariush Ashuri and even the first and future president of the Islamic Republic, Abolhasan Banisadr,¹² who was a young activist in the Second National Front at the time, were generally initiated and facilitated by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As mentioned above, these visits were part of an attempt to strengthen cultural ties between Israel and Pahlavi Iran. It should be emphasized that these figures were by no means alone in taking up this offer to visit Israel, and as Ezri's memoir demonstrates, many journalists and politicians were more than happy to accept the invitation.¹³ Moreover, Iranian communists in the Tudeh Party also harbored mixed feelings regarding the Israeli state. As Lior Sternfeld has persuasively demonstrated, though there was certainly severe criticism of the Israeli government in newspapers associated with outspoken members of the Tudeh Party, there was also no escaping the fact that the Soviet Union had supported the UN partition plan in 1947 and was the second state to officially recognize the Israeli state on 17 May 1948.¹⁴

The timing of Al-e Ahmad's visit is all the more fascinating in that only a month earlier Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran, had convened a national referendum on the six points of his much-regaled "White Revolution," an explicitly anticommunist and preemptive reform measure under the sway of American modernization theory,¹⁵ which had land reform at its heart. Incidentally, the minister of agriculture at the time, Hassan Arsanjani, who is often credited with almost single-handedly crafting the Amended Land Reform Law of 1963, had especially close relations with Israel. Israeli prime minister Golda Meir even honored him with a gala dinner upon one of his visits to the country.¹⁶ The shah's patience with Arsanjani's populist outreach to the Iranian peasantry rapidly wore thin and he would dismiss the minister in the same month as Al-e Ahmad's visit to Israel. Nonetheless, Iranian socialists of all stripes would struggle to make sense of what the shah's reforms meant for socialist politics and how they ought to be interpreted in the broader sweep of Iran's transition to a capitalist economy.

¹¹Homa Katouzian, *Khalil Maleki: The Human Face of Iranian Socialism* (London, 2018), Loc 3062.

¹²Interview with Dariush Ashuri, 19 Dec. 2018.

¹³Ezri, *Yadnameh*, 178–9.

¹⁴Sternfeld, *Between Iran and Zion*, Loc 1113.

¹⁵W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-communist Manifesto*, 3rd edn (Cambridge and New York, 1990; first published 1960). Nils Gilsman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore and London, 2003).

¹⁶Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran, 1941–1979*, Kindle edn (Syracuse, New York, 2008), Loc 2294.

Another important point to foreground is the impact of Hungarian British journalist and lapsed-communist-turned-Cold-War-warrior Arthur Koestler (d. 1983), whose novels and essays upbraiding Soviet communism had a huge impact on Iranian socialists of the “third-way” persuasion. Indeed, the periodical *‘Elm va zendegi* (Science and Life) (2nd run) and its predecessor *Nabard-e zendegi* (Life’s Battle), affiliated with Khalil Maleki and his associates, had proven instrumental in initially translating Koestler’s writings and introducing him to an Iranian audience. Some of these articles originally appeared in center-left and anti-Soviet publications such as the now infamous *Encounter* magazine, which was later revealed to be partially funded by the CIA, and to be playing a notable role in the so-called Cultural Cold War.¹⁷ Koestler’s well-known contribution to *The God That Failed* (1950) and his seminal antitotalitarian novel *Darkness at Noon* (1940) were known to Iranian audiences, and the latter, perhaps Koestler’s best-known novel, had been translated into Persian by a former Tudeh member who subsequently joined Third Force, ‘Ali-Akbar Khobrehzadeh. Koestler’s novel *Thieves in the Night: Chronicle of an Experiment* (1946), an idealistic account of the Zionist settler movement based on his experiences of living in a kibbutz, had also been encountered by Iranian intellectuals and is explicitly mentioned by Al-e Ahmad in his own Israeli travelogue.¹⁸ By Al-e Ahmad’s own admission, it was because of his initial engagement with *Darkness at Noon*, which made waves amongst a generation of Iranian socialists disillusioned with the Tudeh and by extension with the Soviet Union, that he came across Koestler’s enthused and partisan defense of the nascent Israeli state: “Like us, when he broke with Stalin, Koestler was drawn to the kibbutz,” he recalls.¹⁹ Maleki and Third Force’s rejection of the Soviet Union and the Tudeh Party,²⁰ alongside the emergence of a highly visible anti-Soviet socialist intellectual current which counted Koestler, André Gide,²¹ Sidney Hook and Ignazio Silone amongst its leading lights, defined much of the context of Al-e Ahmad’s visit and evaluation of the Israeli state. It should be made clear that here we are not interested in the question whether Maleki and other critics of the Tudeh Party are either fair or accurate, or in the “true”

¹⁷*‘Elm va zendegi* translated Koestler’s “An Essay on Snobbery,” which was first published in *Encounter* magazine in September 1955. Arthur Koestler, “Tajziyeh va tablili az senobism,” *‘Elm va zendegi*, Farvardin 1338 (March–April 1959), 79–97, at 79. Its predecessor publication *Nabard-e zendegi* similarly published the writings of other famous Cold War anticommunists such as Sidney Hook. Sidney Hook and Bertrand Russell, “Akharin tasmim zende mandan ya chizi balatar az an?”, *Nabard-e zendegi* (Dey 1337 (Dec. 1958–Jan. 1959)), 24–31, at 24. For details concerning the role played by Koestler, Hook and many others in the cultural Cold War see, Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York, 1999).

¹⁸Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 439.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, Loc 451. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’il*, 57–8. Shams Al-e Ahmad, in *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’il*, 16, claims that the unsigned articles about the kibbutz published in *‘Elm va zendegi* were written by Maleki.

²⁰This rejection is readily evident in much of Maleki’s writings from the early 1950s onwards, but is perhaps best demonstrated in his polemic and critique of the Tudeh Party following the 1953 coup. Khalil Maleki, *Dars-e 28 Mordad: az lahz-e nehzat-e melli-ye Iran va az lahz-e rahbaran-e kha‘en-e hezb-e Tudeh* (Tehran, 1394 (2015)).

²¹Al-e Ahmad had translated Gide’s *Return from the U.S.S.R.* (1333 (1954–5)) and *The Fruits of the Earth* (1343 (1964–5)). Ehsan Yarshater has contended that the translation of the latter text was particularly poor and that Al-e Ahmad had only a rather tenuous grasp of French. Mandana Zandiyan and Ehsan Yarshater, *Ehsan Yarshater dar goftogu ba Mandana Zandiyan* (Los Angeles, 2016).

nature of the party's relationship with the Soviet Union. Rather, we are concerned with how these negative perceptions and appraisals diffused amongst members of the Iranian intelligentsia and conditioned their views of socialist Zionism.

The Socialist League and Israel: the cases of Ashuri and Maleki

Two Israel travelogues, written by fellow anti-Soviet socialists and published briefly before that of Al-e Ahmad deserve special attention, for they undoubtedly influenced his own intention to visit, and played a role in shaping his view of Israel. These travelogues are Maleki's own detailed account of his visit to Israel published in February–March 1962 under the title “Didari az ‘arz-e mow’ud” (Journey to the Promised Land) in *‘Elm va zendegi*,²² and Dariush Ashuri's “Safarnameh-ye Esra’il” (Travelogue to Israel), published in *Ketab-e mah* (Book of the Month) at the request of Al-e Ahmad himself a couple of months later in May–June 1962.²³ Incidentally, Ashuri's travelogue would appear in the very same issue as Al-e Ahmad's landmark essay “Westoxification” (*Gharbzadegi*).²⁴ And, despite the fact that he was not formally a member of the Socialist League, with which *‘Elm va zendegi* was affiliated, Al-e Ahmad would regularly publish in the journal.²⁵

Maleki's trip to Israel took place following his attendance of the Seventh Congress of the Socialist International convened in Rome in October 1961. It was at this conference that he first met representatives of the Israeli center-left party, the Mapai (Workers' Party of the Land of Israel), and one of its most prominent leaders, Moshe Sharett, Israel's second prime minister, with whom he quickly hit it off. During his trip he would lunch at Sharett's home with officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,²⁶ and meet then Foreign Minister Golda Meir, upon whose grasp of world affairs he would admiringly remark.²⁷

Maleki's essay conveys his uncritical embrace of socialist Zionism and regurgitation of several founding myths of the Israeli state. In his words,

a distinguished number of the most dedicated and compassionate individuals with the ideal of bringing into existence a center of national independence in the land of Israel and through incomparable self-sacrifice they named it the miracle of Israel. They made a barren desert verdant, exuberant and bounteous. They brought into existence village cooperatives where life, production

²²Khalil Maleki, “Didari az arz-e mow’ud,” *‘Elm va zendegi* 2 (Esfand 1340 (Feb.–March 1962)), 17–32.

²³Interview with Dariush Ashuri. Dariush Ashuri, “Safarnameh-ye Esra’il,” *Ketab-e mah*, Khordad 1341 (May–June 1962).

²⁴As evidenced by published SAVAK records, Al-e Ahmad was still in regular contact with Maleki and the membership of the League of Iranian Socialists and would participate in their meetings. *Jalal Al-e Ahmad beh revayat-e asnad-e SAVAK* (Tehran, 1379 (2000)), 20.

²⁵See, for example, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, “Varshekastegi-ye matbu’at,” *‘Elm va zendegi*, Farvardin 1338 (March–April 1959), 1–19, at 9.

²⁶Khalil Maleki, “Didari az arz-e mow’ud,” *‘Elm va zendegi*, 2 (Esfand 1340 (Feb.–March 1962)), 21.

²⁷Maleki would even try and justify his meeting with Meir at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by citing his deep respect for women's rights. *Ibid.*, 29.

and distribution are collective and are the best and most democratic example of socialism in the world today.²⁸

The decisive support of imperial Britain in the form of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, or subsequently during the colonial Mandate period, are passed over without consideration.²⁹ The well-known Zionist trope of making “the desert bloom” appears on several occasions, whereby the social and agricultural life of Palestine’s Arab population is expunged from the historical record, and Zionism’s “civilizing mission” is seen as a vehicle for progress and industry and the modernization of an otherwise desolate and “backward” (*aqab mandeh*) hinterland.³⁰ Maleki is absolutely taken with what he sees as Israel’s technological advances and technocratic expertise and their implications for socioeconomic development and speaks of newly independent nations in Africa and Asia which eagerly look to Israel for training and support. Maleki’s visit also occurred at a time when Mapai and the Histadrut (General Organization of Workers in Israel), Israel’s national federation of unions, had been making a conscious effort to cultivate political relationships in the African continent in exchange for technical assistance and expertise, and thereby establish their presence in the developing world.³¹ In Maleki’s words, the Histadrut and its Afro-Asian Institute, which provided training to African and Asian students, “is doing something which the socialists of the advanced European countries still haven’t done until today.”³²

In Maleki’s view we find the confluence of a profoundly Eurocentric conception of development in tandem with a valorization of an image of developmentalism found widely within the decolonizing world and often associated with the principles of independence and self-determination. Maleki was unable to see or analytically come to terms with the systematic expulsion and displacement of the indigenous population upon which such “development” was predicated. His obliviousness on this point appears to attest to Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s contention that “recognition precedes cognition.”³³ In other words, Maleki’s unapologetic Eurocentricity and consequent invisibilization of the Palestinians prevented him from understanding how Israeli developmental prowess emerged out of a settler colonial project defined by the ever-increasing expansion of control over territory and the concomitant expropriation of the native.³⁴ This colonial dimension was

²⁸Ibid., 18. Ashuri echoes this sentiment when he declaims that the Jews of Israel “have created the greatest exemplars of socialist society on the basis of village life.” Ashuri, “Safarnameh-ye Esra’il,” 133.

²⁹See Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London and New York, 2016), chap. 7. Bernard Regan, *The Balfour Declaration: Empire, the Mandate and Resistance in Palestine* (London and New York, 2017).

³⁰Maleki, “Didari az arz-e mow’ud,” 19–20. Manuchehr Safa, “Ma’saleh-ye esra’il a’rab,” *Nabard-e zendegi*, Dey 1337 (Dec. 1958–Jan. 1959), 32–50. The latter article, while still deeply problematic on several counts, offers a more sober-minded and critical assessment.

³¹Maleki, “Didari az arz-e mow’ud,” 28.

³²Ibid., 28.

³³Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham, NC and London, 2018), 3.

³⁴The settler colonial paradigm and the specific relations of power in the case of Palestine, dynamics which simply do not show up or present themselves to Maleki, were delineated and analyzed by Palestinian and other Arab intellectuals in the course of the 1960s. A classic example is Fayeze

not only self-evident to contemporaneous Palestinian and Arab intellectuals, but also to Iranian Islamists.³⁵

This blind spot is also evident in Maleki's effusive celebration of the Histadrut and kibbutzim, which emerged as archetypes of socialist practice, without the slightest grasp of its history—including the earlier campaigns of the "Conquest of Labor" or "Hebrew Labor" during the 1920s–1940s—where the industries of the Yishuv were actively discouraged from and boycotted for using Arab labour.³⁶ In the words of Patrick Wolfe, "the campaign for the Conquest of Labour underpinned core Zionist institutions such as the kibbutz and the labour organisation Histadrut, striving for a totally insulated Jewish-only capsule that really would conduct its affairs (at least, its non-military ones) as if nobody else were around ... Israel was founded on a boycott."³⁷ Indeed, according to Ben-Gurion himself when general secretary of the Histadrut in 1922, "We are conquerors of the land facing an iron wall, and we have to break through it ... The creation of a new Zionist movement, a Zionist movement of workers, is the first prerequisite for the fulfillment of Zionism. Without such a movement, our work in this country will come to nothing."³⁸ On this view, the Histadrut was indispensable to the realization of the territorial ambitions of the Zionist movement itself. Furthermore, even though the rhetoric, tenor and emphasis of some Histadrut policies vis-à-vis Palestinian citizens of Israel changed after the establishment of the new state, significant forms of exclusion and discrimination persisted throughout the 1950s and 1960s,³⁹ the analysis of which is completely absent in Maleki's rose-tinted evaluation.

Maleki's understanding of Israel and socialist Zionism was also skewed by the democratic socialist and parliamentary system he envisioned for Iran, and the kind of institutions he deemed necessary to realize it in practice. This explains his deep fascination with the political organization of Mapai, the party's labour college for training cadres, and the Histadrut.⁴⁰ Throughout his travels he marvels at the Histadrut's huge national membership, the recognition of housewives as workers with attendant rights, the vibrant role of cooperatives, and the provision of universal health insurance. On Maleki's view, the Israel of Mapai was an island of

A. Sayegh, *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* (Beirut, 1965). The settler colonial framework would find itself further developed in subsequent decades, most notably by Nur Masalha and Patrick Wolfe. Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonizing History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (London and New York, 2012), chap. 1. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8/4 (2006), 387–409. Maldonado-Torres sees invisibility and dehumanization as the primary expressions of the "coloniality of being." Quoted in De Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 20.

³⁵See Hadi Khosrowshahi, *Zendegi va mobarezeh-ye Navvab Safavi* (Tehran, 1386 (2007)).

³⁶Steven A. Glazer, "Picketing for Hebrew Labor: A Window on Histadrut Tactics and Strategy," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30/4 (2001), 39–54.

³⁷Wolfe, *Traces of History*, Loc 5279. Zachary Lockman, "Land, Labor and the Logic of Zionism: A Critical Engagement with Gershon Shafir," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2/1 (2012), 9–38, at 12.

³⁸Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, 1998), 21.

³⁹Maha Nassar, *Brothers Apart: Palestinian Citizens of Israel and the Arab World* (Stanford, 2017), 79, 90, 93.

⁴⁰Maleki, "Didari az arz-e mow'ud," 22–3.

civility in an otherwise inhospitable region, and in key respects it was everything that Iran was not: democratic, socialist, and progressive—undoubtedly an important factor in socialist Zionism’s seductive appeal for him. But Maleki simply did not entertain the possibility that Palestinians might not be treated equally by Israel’s national trade union center, or that Mapai’s welfarism also harbored a colonial component excluding and institutionalizing discrimination against Palestinians. Instead he reiterates that “the fundamental principle of the Histadrut has always been this: no exploitation, self-help, mutual aid.”⁴¹ There is thus little doubt in the words of Ezri that Maleki “became enamored [*shifteh*] of the Israeli labor movement.”⁴²

Maleki ends his essay with a visit to the Chaim Weizmann Institute of Science and a hagiographic biography of Israel’s first president, Weizmann himself. Maleki admiringly identifies with Weizmann and his marriage of careers in science and politics. Maleki had studied chemistry as a student in Berlin in the 1920s, just as Weizmann had done in the 1890s. During his tour of the institute Maleki is taken to Weizmann’s old office, where he marveled, “this simple and modest room had far more effect” upon him than St Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican, which he had seen during previous tours of Europe.⁴³

Dariush Ashuri visited Israel as a student representative of the League of Iranian Socialists, and though he did not initially plan to write up an account of his visit, a curious Al-e Ahmad prevailed on the young man, who would go on to become a prolific literary critic and translator in his own right, to write about his experience.⁴⁴ His essay is rather short and minimal, but nevertheless contains several interesting observations, which echo those of his mentor, Maleki. Immediately taken in by the austerity of Tel Aviv airport, he asserts that “there is no dominant exploitative class that can take the bulk of national income for itself,” and observes the absence of glaring differences of living standards amongst Israelis.⁴⁵ Like Maleki, he is impressed by what he views as Israelis’ humble lifestyles and modest apartments, and the ready availability of social housing and public transport. “I didn’t see one big luxury American car,” he proclaims.⁴⁶ “One point that is clear in Israel is the society’s proclivity towards socialism,” he avers.⁴⁷ Ashuri traveled widely, spending time in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Tiberias, and the Negev. While in West Jerusalem he comments on the bullet holes and barbed wire, physical markers of the 1948 war, even while the Palestinians are almost entirely absent from his narrative.

The young student visitor speaks of the “Buddhist quiet” during Shabbat, adding, “even though most intellectuals don’t have clear religious beliefs, they give special importance to religious rituals because they are the most important factor of solidarity for this people [*qom*].”⁴⁸ Amusingly, however, he is thoroughly underwhelmed by those sites which are supposedly the stuff of biblical legend. Upon seeing Mount Zion

⁴¹Ibid., 27.

⁴²Ezri, *Yadnameh*, 184.

⁴³Maleki, “Didari az arz-e mow’ud,” 31.

⁴⁴Interview with Dariush Ashuri.

⁴⁵Ashuri, “Safarnameh-ye Esra’il,” 122.

⁴⁶Ibid., 123.

⁴⁷Ibid., 132.

⁴⁸*Qom* also carries the connotations of family, nation, race, and ethnicity. Ibid., 126.

and the river Jordan he remarks, “I feel sorry for these Israelis who don’t even have one proper mountain so as not to call any steep incline a mountain! This sense of pity is also felt upon seeing the river Jordan.”⁴⁹ Ashuri continued his journey with a visit to the Knesset and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he met with a German Jew teaching Persian. He speaks highly of students’ sizable role in university management and generous student aid. Finally, he mentions in passing the university’s Arab students even as he admits that “in proportion to the Arab population of Israel it’s a small number. I wanted to speak with them, but the means to talk were not available.”⁵⁰ Much like when Maleki recounts his failure to raise “the issue of the Arabs” in his meeting with Golda Meir, because “the simple, friendly and interesting” discussion of Iran had already “taken too much of the foreign minister’s valuable time,”⁵¹ the university’s Palestinian students were hardly deemed a priority or as warranting explicit concern.

Perhaps most revealing is Ashuri’s description of the kibbutzim he visited in the north of Israel and the Negev desert. Although he is unable to actually see it in such terms he provides a vivid account of the settler colonial project and its frontiersman ethos, and like Maleki he swallows wholesale the myth of a desolate land awaiting redemption: “The promised land is very small without water or greenery ... In this land to which Moses brought his chosen people from Egypt, there was neither water nor prosperity.”⁵² Almost incidentally he notes that many of the kibbutzim along the border where he was able to see the military outposts of the Jordanian and Syrian armies were not only for the purposes of agriculture, but also “to defend the country.” In the Negev he describes the Israeli government’s efforts to irrigate the desert by diverting water from the Sea of Galilee, and a young generation of Israelis and the kibbutzim they have founded. Despite dutifully noting the kibbutz’s school, food hall, and music auditorium, he cannot help but notice the fact that the residents are heavily armed and surrounded by fortifications.⁵³ Palestinian Arabs are either absent, except as recipients of Israeli largesse, or spectral threats to an otherwise peaceful and egalitarian society. Even when he acknowledges that Israel is “a country of immigrants; countries made up of immigrants like the United States, Canada, Australia, until two centuries ago there was no sign of development [*towse’eh*] or civilization [*tamadon*].”⁵⁴ He either unconsciously or unknowingly reprises the “color line” famously delineated by W. E. B. Du Bois,⁵⁵ seemingly oblivious to the fact that all of the white settler societies he enumerates were profoundly marked by histories of either ethnic cleansing or genocidal violence in the process of their founding and that manifold iterations of the “civilizing mission” were repeatedly invoked to justify settler colonial violence and its concomitant drive for territorial expansion.⁵⁶

⁴⁹Ibid., 126.

⁵⁰Ibid., 129.

⁵¹Maleki, “Didari az arz-e mow’ud,” 29.

⁵²Ashuri, “Safarnameh-ye Esra’il,” 130.

⁵³Ibid., 130.

⁵⁴Ibid., 131.

⁵⁵W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, 1996), Loc 173.

⁵⁶Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge and New York, 2008), Introduction. Eve Tuck

Ashuri, however, does pick up on the intra-Jewish cleavages running through Israeli society. In this respect he contends that

in Israel a complete and pure national integration has still not come into being, in the sense that every group of Jewish migrants has its own characteristics and traditions and they live separately ... These differences in lifestyle, manners and traditions exist particularly between immigrant groups from Asia and Africa on the one side and Europe and America on the other.

When Ashuri visits an Iranian Jewish neighborhood and speaks to an Iranian immigrant he speaks to him in Persian, only remarking that his Jewish countryman was “not very satisfied,” quoting him as saying, “the Iranians don’t get along with the [Jewish] Iraqis and Kurds.”⁵⁷ This is an issue which Al-e Ahmad’s essay would also address, albeit in a manner that was more cognizant of the real cleavages and differences separating Ashkenazi and Mizrahi (or Sephardic) Jews in terms of history, language and traditions, restating how Sephardim had at one time or another lived alongside Muslims (a history occluded in the neologism of “Judeo-Christian civilization”), and even differentials in power internal to Israeli society: “Solving this basic conflict between two types of manners and cultures is the primary difficulty of the state of Israel.”⁵⁸

Jalal’s Angel of Death

Al-e Ahmad’s account of his two weeks in Israel is provocative and ambivalent throughout, sharing a number of commonalities with, but also differing at key points from, the travelogues of Ashuri and Maleki.⁵⁹ As mentioned above, Al-e Ahmad’s visit also took place under the aegis of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was organized and hosted by a young Israeli official by the name of Zvi Rafiah, who was based in Iran between 1961 and 1963.⁶⁰ Al-e Ahmad’s complete disillusionment with Israeli socialism was inseparable from his similarly critical reassessment of the French left, which became fully rancorous in the aftermath of the Arab–Israeli War of June 1967. The war and the French intelligentsia’s response provoked him to write another essay, which was subsequently added to the original travelogue and posthumously published as *Safar beh velayat-e ezra’il* (Journey to the Land of Azrael) (hereafter *SVE*). This is not to say that Al-e Ahmad was naively uncritical of Israel and the dispossession of Palestinians upon his first and only visit to the country, but rather that his views at this stage were far from settled and were still in a state of fluidity and motion. This

and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1/1 (2012), 1–40.

⁵⁷ Ashuri, “Safarnameh-ye Esra’il,” 131.

⁵⁸ Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 601–6; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’il*, 74.

⁵⁹ The *New York Times*’s review of the novel is revealing in this regard and in its reservations regarding Koestler’s partisanship in favor of the Zionist settler enterprise: “there is never a time when he questions the right of his people to dominate the land in which the Arabs are and have long been in a majority.” The same can be said for Maleki and Ashuri’s travelogues. Richard Watts Jr, “Koestler’s Novel of Zionism,” *New York Times*, 3 Nov. 1946.

⁶⁰ This has been detailed by Samuel Thrope in his introduction to the English translation of Al-e Ahmad’s travelogue, *The Israeli Republic*.

ambivalence would turn into what can only be described as revilement in the aftermath of 1967 (see below).

Before analyzing the text and its insights for how it understands political theology in Israel and potentially Iran, some preliminary comments on the history of *SVE* are in order. Al-e Ahmad's travelogue was initially published in September–October 1964 in the journal *Andisheh va honar* (Thought and Art), whose editor was another former Tudeh member by the name of Naser Vosuqi. The final chapter of *SVE*, entitled "The Beginning of a Hatred" ("Aghaz-e yek nefrat") which Al-e Ahmad published under the cover of a letter from an Iranian friend in Europe, is said to have appeared in *Jong-e honar-e emruz* and *Donya-ye jadid* on 24 June 1967, a mere two weeks after Israel's devastating defeat of the Arab armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria and the beginning of an occupation and ongoing process of colonization that continues until today.⁶¹ According to his brother Shams Al-e Ahmad, the concocted letter resulted in the permanent closure of *Donya-ye jadid*. It was accurately construed as a blistering indictment, harboring implications not only for the Pahlavi regime's low-level diplomatic and economic ties with Israel, but also for the shah's broader regional policy, seen to be fundamentally in step with the strategic interests of a declining British Empire as well as the new post-World War II imperial hegemon, the United States. Copies of the article were reportedly gathered and destroyed by the shah's security apparatus, the notorious SAVAK (Sazman-e etela'at va amniyat-e keshvar). According to Shams Al-e Ahmad, however, it was taken up and reprinted in the city of Qom, home to many of Iran's preeminent Shi'i seminaries, as a thirty-two page booklet with a three-page introduction by someone with the pen-name Abu Rashad, under the title of *Israel, Agent of Imperialism*.⁶²

Reception of *SVE*

For the sake of simplicity, we can speak of two historiographical appropriations of *SVE*. The first under the auspices of Shams Al-e Ahmad, who sought to downplay his brother's apparent fascination with the new state of Israel and the kibbutz, in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. By this time, Jalal Al-e Ahmad had been enshrined as one of the leading lights of Iran's "Islamic revival" and as one of the few intellectuals to speculatively forecast the triumph of the Shi'i clergy's organic leadership in the struggle against the shah's regime.⁶³ Al-e Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi* proved a crucial source of intellectual and political inspiration for a

⁶¹Hamid Dabashi in his classic volume *Theology of Discontent* has cast doubt on the authenticity of the final chapter of *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*. Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 69. There does not appear to be much by way of concrete evidence for these doubts, and despite not being able to locate the original, Dariush Ashuri recounted his memory of the article's publication following the 1967 war. Furthermore, Al-e Ahmad's wife Simin Daneshvar never publicly repudiated it. Finally, the article's denunciation of the Israeli state as an agent of Western imperialism is in keeping with the rhetoric prevailing on the Arab left during this period, and, as we argue below, the difference between the two essays should not be overstated or exaggerated. What can be said, however, is that the title of the posthumously published book was certainly not of Al-e Ahmad's choosing. Interview with Dariush Ashuri.

⁶²Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 41.

⁶³Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran* (Tehran, 1388 (2009)).

generation of oppositional activists in a way few other texts could rival. It traversed the permeable and largely contrived boundaries between secular and religious forces, and secular and religious modalities of critique. The book was read by none other than Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who had organized a memorial service upon the death of Al-e Ahmad's father in 1962.⁶⁴ Just as the term *gharbzadegi* would gradually find itself seamlessly assimilated into Khomeini's populist lexicon, it would at times be deployed as a cudgel with which to castigate liberal intellectuals and Marxist-Leninist organizations and cast them as beholden to foreign ideologies and agents of cultural imperialism and domination.

Following the revolution, Shams Al-e Ahmad became a member of the Council for Cultural Revolution (Setad-e enqelab-e farhangi) tasked by Khomeini with overhauling Iran's university system and ensuring that it conformed to the diktats of the newly established Islamic order.⁶⁵ It was thus essential to draw a stark line between Jalal Al-e Ahmad and fellow members of the League of Socialists such as Maleki and the latter's half-brother Hossein Malek, who would go on to become a close aide of the shah's last prime minister, Shapur Bakhtiar. Indeed, Shams Al-e Ahmad felt compelled to include an account by Iran's current supreme leader and then president, Hojjat al-Islam 'Ali Khamenei, who upon reading the first essay *Safar beh velayat-e esra'il* as a young and politically engaged seminarian felt it necessary to telephone the author of the much-admired *Gharbzadegi* and, "in the manner of disciple" (*moridaneh*), voice his protestations.⁶⁶ That being said, while Shams Al-e Ahmad perhaps understated his brother's genuine curiosity and the way he was impressed by aspects of Israeli society, there is little doubt that profound ideological and political cleavages divided Al-e Ahmad from his counterparts in the League of Iranian Socialists. These cleavages were not only thrown into stark relief with the publication of *Gharbzadegi*, but also irreparably deepened following the brutally repressed uprisings of June 1963, where Khomeini entered the national consciousness for the first time.⁶⁷

The second historiographical appropriation pertains to a not uncommon Israeli view epitomized in the work of Eldad Pardo, that saw in Al-e Ahmad's *SVE* a "forgotten encounter of mutual understanding" in which one of the fathers of so-called Islamic nativism speaks about Israel in well-nigh glowing terms. While none of Al-e Ahmad's works have yet been published in Hebrew in full (most nonspecialists in Israel have not even heard of him), his visit to Israel and the travelogue clearly captured the imagination of some Israeli writers and journalists as reflecting a bygone era and the tragic loss of Israel's "natural" ally in a sea of unmitigated bellicosity. *SVE* harkens back to a time when the Cold War-era periphery doctrine remained a tenable proposition and non-Arab states aligned to the United States might

⁶⁴Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (London, 2014; first published 1985), Loc 5201.

⁶⁵Shahzad Mojab, "The State and University: The 'Islamic Cultural Revolution' in the Institutions of Higher Education of Iran, 1980-87" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991).

⁶⁶Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 40.

⁶⁷Negin Nabavi, *Intellectuals and the State in Iran: Politics, Discourse and the Dilemma of Authenticity* (Gainesville and Tallahassee, 2003), chap. 3.

unite against the tide of a virulent and ever-threatening Arab nationalism.⁶⁸ In this sense, such treatments are commonly shot through with nostalgia and longing for a return to a now-lost epoch.

This might be seen as a more sophisticated thread of a wider narrative of the good old times, a yearning for the “wondrous love affair” between Israel and Pahlavi Iran,⁶⁹ when Israeli businessmen, politicians, military and security advisers, and intelligence officers played a not insignificant role in Iran, subverting the Arab opposition to Israel and facilitating an elaborate trade relationship while enjoying a luxurious lifestyle reserved for the wealthy and the jet set.⁷⁰ Most significantly, this nostalgia had a heavy ideological bent, as it was motivated by a sense of vindication of Zionist nationhood. As Haggai Ram convincingly argues, to understand this nostalgia “we need to direct our attention to the cultural values at work [here].” Ram adds,

monarchical Iran assumed a special place in Israeli imagination because it seemed to vindicate the innermost spatial, temporal, and civilizational assumptions of Zionist political theology. As both states shared a common space in the “imaginative geography of the ‘our land–barbarian land’ variety,” Israel drew hope from Iran that its fantastic undertaking of constructing a Euro-American enclave in the heart of the Orient was a feasible task.⁷¹

Read in this context, Al-e Ahmad’s travelogue is seen by some Israeli scholars as manifesting an outsider’s appreciation of a miraculous Zionist undertaking. The nostalgia here is dual: it yearns both for the return of a positive, advantageous relationship with Iran and for a renewed appreciation of a “pure,” almost naive, Zionism. Pardo’s treatment (given as an introduction to the Hebrew translation of *SVE*’s first chapter), for example, reads Al-e Ahmad’s text as vindicating what the author calls Ben-Gurion’s “practical utopia” in which the Zionist project redeems not only the Jews but also the world at large.⁷² Published in 2004, in the context of the waning of Zionist ideological fervor in Israel itself, this treatment of Al-e Ahmad renders him an authentic proponent of Zionism, who may remind his Israeli readers of the ideological commitments they themselves have long neglected. Reading *SVE* alongside other similar Iranian reports from Israel, the author concludes that these texts “teach ... that what the Iranian visitors have found in Israel was primarily a society that is well aware of its path, a practical and moral society, working quietly and securely toward the accomplishment of its goals, while happily sharing its achievements with others.”⁷³ Reading *SVE* ultimately leaves its Hebrew translator with a sense of a tragic, unfortunate loss that is both internal and external: a loss of an Israeli, Zionist manifestation of a utopian

⁶⁸Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* (New Haven and London, 2007), chap. 2.

⁶⁹Haggai Ram, *Iranophobia: The Logic of an Israeli Obsession* (Stanford, 2009), Loc 750.

⁷⁰This has been captured, for example, in a documentary on the lives of Israelis in pre-revolutionary Iran. Dan Shadur and Barak Heymann, *Before the Revolution* (Israel, 2013).

⁷¹Ram, *Iranophobia*, Loc 750.

⁷²Eldad Pardo, “Yisrael kemofet be’eini hasmol hairani bishnot hashishim: maamar vete’uda,” *Yyunim bitqumat yisrael* 14 (2004), 341.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 343.

ideal, in which what used to be “a symbol of naivety and solidarity” became simply “normal ... and the magic evaporated.”⁷⁴

The guardianship state and sacred sovereignty

Al-e Ahmad's original essay *Safar beh velayat-e esra'il* (Journey to the Land (*velayat*) of Israel) opens with a semantic ambiguity. In his words, “Jewish rule [*hokumat-e yahud*] in the land of Palestine is a kind of ‘guardianship’ [*velayat*], and not a government [*dowlat*]. It is the rule of the new guardians [*owliya'*] of the Israelites over the promised land, and not a state [*hokumat*] of the inhabitants of Palestine over Palestine.”⁷⁵ As noted by Samuel Thrope, Al-e Ahmad is playing on the notion of *velayat*,⁷⁶ which can mean both “province” or the authority in control thereof, and “guardianship,” implying both spiritual and worldly authority. Given Al-e Ahmad's upbringing in a clerical family and his own unrealized attempt to take up the clerical mantle of his father in the seminaries of Najaf, Iraq, this is clearly a conscious and provocative choice of terminology on his part. It is thus of paramount importance to consider the manifold meanings of the term *velayat* in Shi'i Islam. The Arabic *wilaya* from which the Persian *velayat* derives, alongside the notion of *walaya*, is essential to the Shi'i faith and the way in which spiritual authority is conceived. As Vincent J. Cornell argues, *wilaya* and *walaya* are “semantic fraternal twins that co-exist symbiotically.”⁷⁷ The two terms are related in meaning, but nevertheless different. *Wilaya* has historically connoted authority, power, or the ability to act, while scholars of Islamic studies have generally translated *walaya* as “sainthood” because in mystical literature it has signified a relationship of friendship, love, and intimacy with God.

The doctrine of Imamate in Twelver Shi'i Islam contends that there is a designated lineage of infallible descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, beginning with his son-in-law 'Ali ibn Abi Taleb and the progeny born from his marriage to the Prophet's daughter, Fatemeh. The Imams are not only figured as the temporal and spiritual leaders of the Shi'ites, but belief in their sacred status is itself integral to the believer's salvation. In the words of Amir-Moezzi and Jambert, “*walaya* is the indispensable complement of prophecy.” The Imam's *walaya* relates to his ontological status and reality as a theophany of the revealed God.⁷⁸ Moreover, *walaya* had been figured as a dualistic concept, insofar as love for the Imam has come to be seen as inseparable from hatred of his enemies: “*walaya* (sacred love for the Guide of all knowledge) is inseparable from its opposite, *bara'a* (sacred disassociation from the forces of ignorance).”⁷⁹

The *vali Allah* (pl. *owliya'*), a staple of Sufi literature and later Shi'i iterations in 'erfan, as the bearer of *wilaya* or *velayat*, can be said to derive their authority from their unrivaled piety and spiritual devotion and status as one of the “friends of

⁷⁴Ibid., 343.

⁷⁵Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 53.

⁷⁶Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 37.

⁷⁷Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, 1998), Loc 321

⁷⁸Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Christian Jambert, *What Is Shi'i Islam? An Introduction*, trans. Kenneth Casler and Eric Ormsby (Abingdon and New York, 2018), 72.

⁷⁹Ibid., 73.

God.”⁸⁰ Hence their designation as saints. When Al-e Ahmad uses the term *owliya*’ to describe the new rulers of Israel, he is not only drawing attention to the Zionist leaders’ claims to constitute a legitimate political authority in their capacity as the rightful rulers of the Jewish people, but also speaking to the supposed divine mandate which forms the basis of the political order and its sovereign claim.

Al-e Ahmad does, however, simultaneously move to demystify any such politico-theological claim and appeal to divine providence by contending that Israel’s establishment “was thanks, in fact, either to the force of time, the necessities of politics, the clear vision of their guardians, or the dictates of economics and unfettered capitalism.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, he continues to irreverently interweave what he takes to be the political and religious *velayat* and guardianship of Israel’s founders:

Ben-Gurion is no less than Enoch, and Moshe Dayan no less than Joab: these new guardians, each one with his own prophecies or—at least—clear-vision, built a guardianship state in the land of Palestine and called to it all the Children of Israel ... like it or not, [the guardianship state] now governs and acts in the name of all the twelve million Jews scattered around the world.⁸²

He thus takes the Zionist leaders claim to political and theological guardianship over Jews the world over as an inescapable conclusion of the guardian state’s constitution in the Holy Land.

Al-e Ahmad exudes palpable admiration for this sense of divine mission, which refuses to be bound by norms not of its own making. This mission and sense of purpose casts its guardians as “those who march onward in the name of something loftier than human rights declarations.” In this respect Al-e Ahmad can be seen to be enunciating a deeper point about the structure of sovereignty and its theological origins.⁸³ The *owliya*’, the saints and guardians of the new sovereign polity, are those who are willing to decide on the exception to the norm in the constitution and affirmation of sovereignty. “Israel, with all its faults and all the contradictions concealed in it, is a base of power, a first step, the herald of a future not too far off.”⁸⁴ Not unproblematically, he observed the potentialities of what Michel Foucault would later name in his reportage on the Iranian Revolution a “spiritual politics,” which sought to announce a rupture with the soulless bureaucracy and tedium of the administrative state and bring about a transformation of self and

⁸⁰See Ata Anzali, “Mysticism” in *Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept* (Columbia, SC, 2017). Alexander Knysh, “Irfan Revisited: Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy,” *Middle East Journal* 46/4 (1992), 631–53.

⁸¹Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 351; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’ il*, 47.

⁸²Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 360; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’ il*, 48.

⁸³In light with this idea of theo-sovereignty, Al-e Ahmad mentions the trial of Adolf Eichmann, which had been convened only a couple of years prior to his visit. In certain respects, he appears to echo the conception of justice held by the special tribunal of the Jerusalem District Court famously described by Hannah Arendt, namely that “only a Jewish court could render justice to Jews, and that it was the business of Jews to sit in judgment on their enemies.” Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, 1977), 7. Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’ il*, 48.

⁸⁴Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 382–3; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’ il*, 50.

society in the process.⁸⁵ This logic of sovereign constitution lies at the heart of Al-e Ahmad's admiration for the Israeli state, even while he understands full well the grim exclusions, bloody expulsions and militarism upon which it is founded and that arguably perpetuate its existence in its present incarnation: "it is a source of power and also—on that very account—a source of danger ... in the Jewish spectacle of martyrdom, the memorialization of the war's murdered and gone, I see the other side of the coin of fascism and a dependence on the racism which replaced it."⁸⁶ Such ambivalence and double-sidedness are entirely absent from the effusive accounts of Maleki and Ashuri and their wholehearted embrace of socialist Zionism. Where they saw a socialist haven, Al-e Ahmad already observed an eventuality where the persecuted has emerged as the persecutor, and the entanglement in coloniality has become inexorable.

Al-e Ahmad's initial essay of 1964 remains laced with admiration, ambiguity, and at times caustic asides. This ambivalence has been understated by even his more perceptive interpreters, who tend to almost exclusively focus on the more enthusiastic pronouncements. Al-e Ahmad senses a historical and constitutive power in what he refers to as the Israeli guardianship state, and espied potentialities, much like Foucault would a decade and a half later in Iran. This is while always acknowledging what he took to be the Israeli state's conduciveness to aid the internationalization of capital and forms of capitalist exchange and exploitation as well as cooperate with and abet the imperial powers' self-aggrandizement and domination of the non-European world. As he remarks, "Israel is the veil [*hijab*] Christianity drew between itself and the world of Islam in order to prevent me from seeing the real danger."⁸⁷ Indeed, as is evident from his earlier *Gharbzadegi*, Al-e Ahmad clearly sees the "real danger" to be emanating from Euro-American economic, political, and cultural imperialism as it hollows out any prospect for Iranians and their counterparts in the decolonizing world to reflect and envision themselves beyond the terms and categories set down in the epistemologies and political ontologies forged in the West, and the very same imperial heartland seeking to dominate them.

The guardianship of the jurist and theo-politics in contemporary Shi'i Islam

For the contemporary reader, *velayat* is significant for another reason, since it appears to echo with the theological doctrine underpinning the post-revolutionary Iranian state, to wit, the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*. While the "Guardianship of the Jurist" had a historical precedent in the nineteenth century, it was not until 1970, a year after Al-e Ahmad's death, that Ayatollah Khomeini's conception of hierocratic rule would be delivered in a series of lectures from exile in the hallowed shrine city of Najaf. For several reasons, including the latter, it would be mistaken to draw the conclusion that Khomeini's theory directly informed Al-e Ahmad's travelogue or that he

⁸⁵See Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment* (Minneapolis and London, 2016).

⁸⁶Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 377-402-404; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 52.

⁸⁷Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 394-5 (translation modified); Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 51.

could have possibly envisioned the Islamic state and clerically led constitutional order that would, to nearly everyone's dismay, emerge in 1979. The *velayat* spoken of by Al-e Ahmad never receives a jurisprudential rationale or expression; rather it is a kind of generative power harboring sovereign potentialities capable of summoning new modes of life and being-together into existence. It was not a precursor to the Islamic Republic *in concreto*, but rather a call for a new political order beyond coloniality.

An argument for direct clerical rule and seizure of the modern state apparatus would have to wait until Khomeini's intervention, and even then it would take a popular revolution and unforeseeable conjunction of events by which it would find itself enshrined as part of the Islamic Republic's constitutional order. The much-bemoaned paucity of literature regarding Shi'i theories of government was in large part because the idea of an Islamic state had been largely deferred in Shi'i theology and jurisprudence in anticipation of the Imam's millennial return. But in his essay, Al-e Ahmad is expressing his wonderment for what he takes to be a theo-politics which had refused forbearance to establish a sovereign power in the present. Al-e Ahmad's theo-politics of *velayat* was never systematically articulated. Indeed, Al-e Ahmad always abjured any form or inclination to system building or systematic explication, in a fashion that would later find concrete realization in the world. While patently not the *velayat* of the jurist, or the secular nation-state, it stands as a horizon and intimation of a politics-to-come.

As indicated above, the core difference delineating Al-e Ahmad from his friends in the League of Iranian Socialists is his position vis-à-vis the category of coloniality. Unlike Ashuri or Maleki, Al-e Ahmad never lost sight of the Palestinian *Nakba* (catastrophe):⁸⁸ "for more than ten years these same Palestinian refugees have been paying the penance for someone else's sin in that hellish cauldron."⁸⁹ Indeed, he pointedly reminds his interlocutor in the kibbutz he visits, "It is true that this is your fabled promised land. But do not forget that you took this territory by force and you do not get along with the true owners [*saheban-e asli*]."⁹⁰ Thus even while he could admire Israel as a "guardianship state," he still was of the view that Israel's emergence was conducive to the spread of Western capitalism and penance for Europe's long and gruesome history of anti-Semitism, culminating in the mass extermination of European Jewry. "From my perspective as an Easterner," he wrote,

the current government of Israel, on the one hand, is the sure bridgehead of Western capitalism, which reappeared in the East in a different form and in other garb following the Second World War. I have grounds for debate with this aspect of Israel. And, on the other hand, Israel is a coarsely realized indemnity for the fascists' sins in Dachau, Buchenwald, and the other death camps during the war. Pay close attention: that is the West's sin and I, an Easterner, am paying the price. Western man exported the capital for this indemnity, whereas I in the East provided the land.⁹¹

⁸⁸Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba*, chapt. 5.

⁸⁹Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 397; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 51.

⁹⁰Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 662-3; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 79.

⁹¹Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 392-3; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 51.

European anti-Semitism, native expulsion, and colonial racism by Al-e Ahmad's lights are profoundly intertwined and ultimately inseparable.⁹² Despite being practically and phenomenologically distinct, they are driven by comparable ways of envisioning the Other with their corresponding logics of degradation, subordination, and occlusion.

Othering Arabs, awakening Islam

From the above extract, we see Al-e Ahmad clearly identifying himself as an "Easterner" alongside Palestinian Arabs. But at other points he appears to reprise anti-Arab prejudices, which have been a staple of Iranian nationalism. These prejudices were given new prominence in the late Qajar period and amongst modernist intellectuals such as Fath-'Ali Akhundzadeh and Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani,⁹³ also influencing the process of authoritarian nation building undertaken by the Pahlavis between 1925 and 1979.⁹⁴ In actuality, Al-e Ahmad's position is somewhat more complex and convoluted. He does not dismiss Iran's Arab neighbors as "barbarians" who foisted their religion and alphabet on an otherwise pristine Persian *ethnos* and homeland,⁹⁵ as Akhundzadeh might have. Rather he declares his status as a "non-Arab Easterner," and his own sense of exclusion and having been relegated to the category of the uncivilized by "the Arabs": "With all that I have borne the burden of Islam on my shoulders, and still bear it, they still consider me a 'barbarian' [*ajam*]. They call me a 'rejectionist' [*rafezi*]. They do not respect Shiites' right to exist." He appears to place blame at the door of an enveloping abstraction and blame all Arabs in his indignation at sectarian discrimination. The term *rafezi*, however, is a well-established sectarian denigration of Shi'i Muslims, which would also extend to Arabs of the Shi'i faith.⁹⁶ Al-e Ahmad identifies as a non-Arab Easterner, while as a *sayyid* his father and ancestral forebears would

⁹²The influence of Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948), but more likely his famed preface to Frantz's Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) as well as the work itself published a couple of years earlier, in addition to Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957) are palpable. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, trans. George J. Becker (New York, 1948). Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 2004). Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfield (London and New York, 2003). According to Ali Rahnema, Al-e Ahmad charged 'Ali Shari'ati with translating Memmi's classic work, but he was unable to finish it "apparently because it was too difficult." The French-trained leftist historian Homa Nateq would eventually translate it. Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London, 1998), 190–91.

⁹³Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation* (New York, 2016), 60. Al-e Ahmad was familiar with the writings of Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani and alludes to his *Three Letters to Jalal al-Dowleh* in Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, trans. R. Campbell, Introduction by Hamid Algar (Berkeley, 1984), Loc 933.

⁹⁴See Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870–1940* (Seattle, 2008).

⁹⁵One only has to look at his comments vis-à-vis Kasravi and the question of "language purification" to see his rejection of such ethno-nationalist chauvinism or secularizing zeal. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Mokalemat: Gofteh-ha va shenideh-ha* (Tehran, 1374 (1995)), 82.

⁹⁶Thrope translates '*ajam*' as "barbarian" and '*rafezi*' as "sectarian." The former is generally understood as a racial pejorative, meaning those whose mother tongue is not Arabic. We have amended the translation in the case of *rafezi*, a well-known sectarian denigration used in reference to Shi'i Muslims and their rejection of the leadership of the first three caliphs, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman. Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, 461–2; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 59.

have traced their genealogy all the way back to the Prophet Mohammad and his family, the *ahl al-bayt*, a great source of pride and reverence in Shi'i culture.

What the reader soon realizes, though, is that much of this digression is symptomatic of, even if by no means reducible to, resentment of those Arabs, fellow Easterners, whom he takes to be enthralled to the United States, and its commodity fetishism and consumerism. It thus can be said to amount to a rather easy swipe at Arab rulers and those who directly benefited from this clientelist relationship in the Persian Gulf: "I am the only 'barbarian' [*ajam*] in the world to these Arabs driving Cadillacs by the shores of the Gulf! All the other 'barbarians' have turned into princes and oil magnates."⁹⁷ This contempt for the Arab states of the Persian Gulf and their newfound oil wealth, as well as for their absolutist monarchies' close association with the United States and their obeisance to the hegemony of the dollar, is overlain with a thinly veiled Persian chauvinism, which saw its neighbors as lesser and inferior on an imagined cultural–civilizational hierarchy: "If there was a day when my pilgrimage and the pilgrimages of Easterners like me provided the cost of living for a year for all the Bedouin of the Hejaz, now it is from the crumbs of the feast of oil that the Saudi progeny fulfill their every desire, and the camels lack nothing either."⁹⁸ Though tinged with irony, for all its crudity and racialized stereotypes (many of which Iranians have also found themselves subject to), Al-e Ahmad is trying to interpret sectarianism and anti-Shi'i bigotry as part of a neocolonial predicament of "divide and rule," fragmenting and dividing the Islamic world. When Al-e Ahmad speaks of "ignoble and rootless Arabs" (*a'rab-e bi-esalat*) he is speaking of those elites who are buoyed, even pleased, by Israel's presence in the region.⁹⁹ This is why at the same time he argues that perhaps only the presence of Israel, almost in terms reminiscent of an existential enemy, in the East might engender the circumstances whereby the Islamic world might reawaken and refashion itself anew. He observes,

The skin that has remained at the foot of the old but robust tree of Islam in this arid desert—as the remnant of a lizard who lived once upon a time—must be uprooted by the hurricane of the fear of the existence of Israel in order for me, the Easterner, to be able to be freed from the tyranny of the puppet petro-regimes and feel the presence of Islam now crushed under the tracks of American tanks throughout the East.¹⁰⁰

In his own visit to the kibbutz upon observing a parade of arms and weapons, and quite unlike Ashuri, who appears to have hardly questioned his Israeli interlocutors, Al-e Ahmad poignantly asks, "How long will it be necessary to motivate people with fear?" In a prescient remark, he elaborates upon how the cycle of threats and militarism is likely to become never-ending and ultimately distracts from more emancipatory political projects that have the potential to unite Israeli Jews and their adversaries, "You yourselves are constantly playing with fire. When you

⁹⁷ Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 471–2; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 60.

⁹⁸ Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 498–500; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 62.

⁹⁹ Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 62.

¹⁰⁰ Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 508–10; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 63.

frighten their side [i.e. the Arabs] you yourselves have to become frightened as well. And in place of eliminating your class differences, you spend your resources building shelters.”¹⁰¹ He even mentions the Austrian-born philosopher Martin Buber and his well-established support for a binational state.¹⁰² Moreover, unlike Ashuri and Maleki, who revel in what they see as a socialist utopia, Al-e Ahmad is far more skeptical regarding the longevity of the kibbutz, as he declares, “In the days when kibbutzes were first founded—and we mentioned Koestler’s *Thieves in the Night*—the residents had a sort of military lifestyle and worked in a barracks environment. But now those days are gone and I am certain that when the Arab threat has passed, the kibbutz will be abolished.”¹⁰³ In this way he sees the connections between socialist Zionism, militarism and colonialism in a way Maleki never could and convincingly foresees how a society consumed by fear will steadily unravel from within.¹⁰⁴

The anticolonial cognoscenti and the politics of recognition after 1967

Al-e Ahmad’s understanding of the figure of “the West” and colonial modernity, in comparison to that of leading intellectuals of the League of Iranian Socialists examined above, clearly sets him apart.¹⁰⁵ He was attuned to and able to *recognize* manifold occlusions and oppressions in ways which Maleki and Ashuri simply could not, and this led him to have a far more complicated and nuanced view of the Israeli state.

While undoubtedly influenced by Maleki, both politically and intellectually, Al-e Ahmad was by no means constrained by him, and articulated positions which often little resembled those of his erstwhile mentor. Unlike Maleki, Al-e Ahmad was comfortable and at ease moving between the ostensibly religious and the secular, and this comfort surely fostered a proclivity to see profound energy, verve and power within Iran’s Shi’i Islamic heritage, cultural practices and institutions. Indeed, the differences separating them on this issue were thrown into stark relief in their respective reactions to the 15 Khordad (June 1963) uprisings in Qom and several other Iranian cities, where Al-e Ahmad controversially came to see the political clergy as a potential bulwark against imperial encroachment.¹⁰⁶ Just as he saw certain political-theological potentialities and dangers in the establishment of Israel, he came to appreciate the sovereign resources of Iran’s own Shi’i Islamic tradition.

Al-e Ahmad’s views on Israel have often been split into a cut-and-dried pre- and post-1967 binary: awe and deep affection for Israel prior to the Arab–Israeli War of June 1967, and disgust in its aftermath. From the exposition above, it should be apparent that his views were in fact far more complicated. Moreover, unlike much of the secondary literature, which is inclined to reductively psychologize Al-e

¹⁰¹ Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 659; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’il*, 79.

¹⁰² Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 714; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’il*, 84.

¹⁰³ Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 676–8; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’il*, 79–80.

¹⁰⁴ Afshin Matin-Asgari rightly argues that despite his lifelong respect and admiration for Maleki, Al-e Ahmad rejected his “total identification with European cultural models.” Afshin Matin-Asgari, *Both Eastern and Western: An Intellectual History of Iranian Modernity* (Cambridge and New York, 2018), 187.

¹⁰⁵ Hamid Dabashi, *Iran without Borders: Towards a Critique of the Postcolonial Nation* (London and New York, 2016), Loc 1451.

¹⁰⁶ Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, 225.

Ahmad's evolving views on Israel in terms of a personal "search for authenticity" or "return to Islam,"¹⁰⁷ it is instead crucial to appreciate his long-standing rejection of the colonial domination of the non-European world. Likewise, it is important to appreciate the influence of Maleki's theorization of nonalignment, despite the latter's infatuation with socialist Zionism and complete blindness to the settler colonial matrix, of which the Zionist movement was indubitably a part. The article Al-e Ahmad published two weeks after June 1967, however, which ultimately came to constitute *SVE's* final chapter, appeared on Iran's literary scene as the conflict's transformative impact on the Middle East was still barely understood. Al-e Ahmad achieves some distance by attributing the "nonsense and beard-pulling" to himself and the "reasonable speech" to a "friend" living in Paris. Whether it was based on his conversations with real-life colleagues in Paris is unclear. The book's editor, Shams Al-e Ahmad, was clearly incentivized to attribute it exclusively to his brother, given the uncompromising nature of the criticisms contained therein, while Jalal Al-e Ahmad himself was probably concerned about retaliation by SAVAK given how it reflected on the shah's regime and its foreign policy.

What is most striking in this final chapter is the linkages it makes between deep-seated racism in the metropole, specifically France, and imperialism abroad, and the immense failure of the left-wing French intelligentsia to understand the colonial dimension of the Israeli state vis-à-vis the Palestinians and the broader Middle East. He unambiguously links the violent anti-Arab racism heard on the streets of Paris following the war to the French, British, and Israeli bid to invade and occupy the Suez Canal in 1956,¹⁰⁸ and to the brutal colonial war fought by France in its own settler colonial enterprise in Algeria between 1954 and 1962.¹⁰⁹ Contemporary racism in France is depicted as the outgrowth of colonial racism abroad, and the defense of Israel's coloniality is framed as the circuitous result of the French intelligentsia's failure to come to grips with its country's own ignoble history of imperialism in the Middle East and elsewhere. Finally, he connects Israel's role in a global and vast counterrevolutionary rearguard, mentioning General Moshe Dayan's "internship" in Vietnam,¹¹⁰ and alleges that he had gone "to observe how the so-called civilized Americans are massacring the hungry, savage people of Vietnam with napalm, firebombs and flamethrowers!" Al-e Ahmad quotes none other than the Martiniquais poet and intellectual Aimé Césaire in a searing denunciation of those writers he had once revered and partially translated, namely Sartre, Ionesco, and Claude Lanzmann, whose vehement pro-Israeli sympathies were hardly a secret:¹¹¹ "All these animals of various colors are belligerent troops of colonialism. They are all slave traders and they are all

¹⁰⁷Though biographical information of this sort can hardly be said to be irrelevant, it would be a mistake to reduce the political dimension of Al-e Ahmad's positions to such. Even Simin Daneshvar does this on occasion in her writings about him. Simin Daneshvar, *Ghorub-e Jalal* (Tehran, 1360 (1982)), 6.

¹⁰⁸Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization* (Chicago and London, 2018), 243.

¹⁰⁹Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 733; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 87.

¹¹⁰Dayan visited the American forces in Vietnam in 1966, just before he assumed the role of minister of defense prior to the June 1967 war. Moshe Dayan, *Yoman Vietnam* (Tel Aviv, 1977).

¹¹¹Claude Lanzmann, *The Patagonian Hare: A Memoir*, trans. Frank Wynne (London, 2012), 225. Di-Capua documents in meticulous detail Lanzmann's many efforts to influence the older Sartre's views

debtors to the revolution.”¹¹² “All rushed together to the aid of civilized Israel in its war against the backward and savage Arabs,” Al-e Ahmad adds in his own voice.¹¹³

Israel’s recent incorporation into the relatively novel confection of “Judeo-Christian civilization” represents the latest attempt of colonialism and its intellectual defenders’ struggle to efface the “color line” and racialized hierarchy dominating and defining the international system.¹¹⁴ In the original Israel travelogue, Al-e Ahmad juxtaposes two watershed moments in the ontology of coloniality subsequently theorized at length in the work of Sylvia Wynter, among others—namely the expulsion of the Jewish community from Spain after the defeat of the last Arab emirate at Granada and Christopher Columbus’s landing in the Americas in 1492 and the violent depredations and genocide of indigenous peoples that followed.¹¹⁵ And in doing so, he forcefully throws into question European statesmen’s and intellectuals’ pretense to solidarity with the Jewish victims of fascism and the recent vintage and ultimate hollowness of their public pronouncements on the virtues of the “Judeo-Christian West.”

In another reprise of Césaire, Al-e Ahmad argues that Hitlerian fascism was merely an instance of what “Christian bourgeois” civilization had long wreaked across the non-European world.¹¹⁶ He acidly declaims,

While the illustrious European intellectuals were accomplices in Hitler’s crimes, and at that hour did not say a word in protest, now they have given those same Jews a bridgehead in the Middle East so that the nations of Egypt, Syria, Algeria, and Iraq can be scourged, and so that they will not nurture a thought of struggling against Western colonialism in their heads, and they can never again close the Suez Canal to the civilized nations!¹¹⁷

Al-e Ahmad vitriolically rails against the abject hypocrisy of the European intelligentsia and condemns their silence during the Judeocide, as he censures their present-day they support for what he plainly regards as the Israeli colonial beachhead in the Middle East. Whereas in the earlier essay of 1964 he posited that support for Israel had been in part a quid pro quo for Europe’s shameful role and complicity in the mass extermination of European Jewry, he now, in line with much radical Arab writing at the time, denounces Europe’s support for a colonial endeavor of a different kind, even as he at times brazenly regurgitates a number of well-worn

on the Arab–Israeli conflict during their trip alongside Simone de Beauvoir to Israel in 1965. Di-Capua, *No Exit*, chaps. 1, 9.

¹¹²Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 736; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’il*, 87.

¹¹³Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 755; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’il*, 88–89.

¹¹⁴Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York, 2004), 10–14.

¹¹⁵Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 593; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’il*, 72. Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View,” in Vera L. Hyatt and Rex Nettleford, eds., *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View* (Washington and London, 1994), 5–57, at 13. Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation. An Argument,” *New Centennial Review* 3 (2003), 307–8.

¹¹⁶Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham, Kindle edn (New York, 2000; first published 1972), 36.

¹¹⁷Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 770; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e ‘ezra’il*, 90.

anti-Semitic tropes.¹¹⁸ His main focus, however, is how Israel, the Pahlavi state, and the US's Arab allies perpetuate and metastasize a global imperial system, "the Americans who without Iranian and Persian Gulf oil would not be able to endure one moment in Vietnam,"¹¹⁹ and thereby further entrench the "world color line."¹²⁰ The vestiges of anti-Arab prejudice which marked the earlier essay had disipated and were supplanted by a new binary, the forces of radical anticolonialism standing off against those of the global counterrevolution.

Despite the overflowing rage and venom characterizing this chapter, Al-e Ahmad ends his diatribe by calling on Israel to separate its fate from that of Zionism, which he now regards as irremediably racist and wedded to Western imperial machinations in the Middle East. He mocks and forcefully rejects demagogic threats by Arab leaders pledging to throw Israeli Jews into the sea and instead, once again, cites the example of Martin Buber,¹²¹ and the ideal of a binational state of Arabs and Jews living alongside one another: "The only solution to the problem is forming a federal government of Arabs and Jews called Palestine," he intones.¹²²

Concluding remarks

This article has sought to investigate Jalal Al-e Ahmad's shifting views of Israel and the Zionist movement and the intimations of a new kind of generative theo-politics unconstrained by norms or the international legal order. As we have shown, his politico-theological account of Israel as a "guardianship state" evinces hopefulness, as well as ambivalence, as he thought it harbored immense potentialities and generative effects to summon into being a new kind of politics as well as forms of sociality, which ultimately elude the colonial form of the nation-state. What distinguished Al-e Ahmad's encounter with Israel from that of his counterparts in the League of Iranian Socialists was his uneasy relation to the stadial and Eurocentric conceptions of modernization and progress. The assumptions that still animated Al-e Ahmad's one-time mentor Maleki stood in stark contrast to his own cognitive integration of coloniality, predicated on a prior recognition of the logics of subjugation and expropriation—logics which he perceived to lie at the very foundations of the Zionist enterprise.¹²³ These critical tendencies which run through his best known work, *Gharbzadegi*, as well as his 1964 essay, come to a head in his caustic intervention of 1967 where he denounces, in line with the cresting wave of anticolonial movements of the late 1960s, the unholy alliance of counterrevolutionary regimes, including the Pahlavi state itself, Israel, and the United States. But rather than call for Israel's abolition he calls for a binational state in Palestine, thereby repudiating ethnocracy and the colonial form of the

¹¹⁸ Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 892.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Loc 844; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 95.

¹²⁰ Bill V. Mullen, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Revolutionary across the Color Line* (London, 2016), Loc 563.

¹²¹ For more on Buber's cultural Zionism and political advocacy of a binational state in Palestine see Samuel Hayim Brody, *Martin Buber's Theopolitics* (Bloomington, 2018), chap. 7.

¹²² Al-e Ahmad, *The Israeli Republic*, Loc 919; Al-e Ahmad, *Safar beh velayat-e 'ezra'il*, 101.

¹²³ Amy Allen has recently sought to critique how teleological-cum-normative commitments of this kind continue to shape and inform European critical theory. Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York, 2016), 3.

nation-state, a fate he would also firmly reject for Iran,¹²⁴ and the templates first set down by Europe, which in his mind only entrenched imperial domination of the Middle East, while precluding a priori any possibility of meaningful coexistence. Through Al-e Ahmad's writings on Israel, one can espy glimpses of a subversive challenge to the way in which sovereignty and the political have been articulated, structured and enforced in the modern West and the colonial world. We contend that a more nuanced view emerges through our contextualization of Al-e Ahmad's visit alongside similar visits by fellow Iranian socialists, bringing to the surface not only his coming to terms with the myriad entanglements of colonial modernity entirely missed by his comrades, but also the lineaments of a possible exit.

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¹²⁴Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khedmat va khiyanat-e rowshanfekran*, 291.

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