2017

Spokesmen of Intellectual Decolonization: Shariati in Dialogue with Alatas

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/zeiny/25/

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...colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverse logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it (Fanon, 1974, p. 170)

**Introduction**

As one of the momentous historical events of the 20th century, decolonization of Africa and Asia altered the world entirely. In the immediate decades following the World War II, between 1945 and 1965, more than three dozen states gained autonomy and independence in both Asia and Africa. However, the process of decolonization was dissimilar in different regions; in some areas decolonization took place peacefully and orderly whereas in some other areas it was achieved after a protracted revolution and war between the natives and the colonizers. For instance, in 1946, France retreated from Syria and Lebanon after several ruinous encounters with the locals. In the Southern part of Asia, India gained its autonomy in 1947 after a series of social movements led by Gandhi. In fact, Britain’s decision to grant independence to India arose primarily out of essentiality and not to mention that Gandhi’s successful method of non-violent resistance such as civil disobedience had also played an important role in changing the perceptions of colonial powers. In West Asia, the British pulled back from Palestine in 1948 but left behind the new state of Israel with a larger portion of Palestine. Within two decades after the World War II, almost all European colonies in Africa became thoroughly independent. In countries such as Nigeria with only a few white residents, decolonization was carried out like in India. Reforms were made in the constitution and the Nigerians were given seats in the administration, and then the parliamentary election followed suit resulting in an independent Nigeria in 1960. In other countries like Kenya with more white settlers, decolonization did not occur rapidly as the colonizers and the colonized had engaged in confrontation which ultimately led to the independence in 1963.

Without a doubt, the aftermath of the World War II had a dramatic impact upon the formation and strengthening of nationalist movements in both Asia and Africa. Moreover, it solidified a worldwide sentiment against colonialism which coerced the imperial powers to begin to look for proper exit strategies. Melvin Goldberg (1986, p. 666-667) confirms this sentiment and argues that it was “only after the war did the powers begin to take decolonization seriously, and even then the speed at which it proceeded was neither anticipated nor welcomed in many quarters.” Therefore, it goes without saying that
what helped decolonization to gain more pace and momentum were the nationalist and the global disposition but has decolonization been really complete? The former empires of European powers seemingly disintegrated in 1950s and 1960s but still maintained their presence in some of their old colonies joined now by the United States for interests like controlling the production of oil. For instance in Iraq, the Anglo-American companies had an exclusive monopoly of the oil sectors until nationalization in 1972. But even then decolonization was not complete and has been still in process. The colonizers ostensibly left their colonies but have made a sad comeback with the soft weapons of neo-colonialism manifested through the cultural control. Out of the cultural control emerged the discourse of ‘modernity’ which was taken as the extreme opposite of ‘tradition’ by some intellectuals of the colonized nations. The dramatic impact of ‘cultural colonization’ translated itself through the belief amongst the elites that the colonized would not survive if they did not adopt modernity in their societies. At the other end of the spectrum, traditionalism emerged and encouraged returning to tradition to discard the West. On the complexity of interaction between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ in the colonized nations in West Asia, historian Albert Hourani writes:

It would be better … to see the history of this period as that of a complex interaction: of the will of ancient and stable societies to reconstitute themselves, preserving what they had of their own while making the necessary changes in order to survive in the modern world increasingly organized on other principles, and where the centers of world power have lain for long, and still lie, outside the Middle East (Hourani, Khoury, and Wilson, 2004, p. 4).

The decolonization, indeed, has been a very complex process. What raised a lot of eyebrows about Westernism applies mutatis mutandis to traditionalism. In both of these groups, there was a conspicuous dearth of creativity and originality. Quite obviously, the dichotomy between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ were overstated as old and new or ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ were not always antithetical and certainly cultures never remain static. As opposed to the two ends of intellectual poles, this paper explores a ‘third way’ in decolonization by drawing upon two Muslim intellectuals termed here as ‘spokesmen of intellectual decolonization:’ Ali Shariati from Iran and Syed Hussein Alatas from Malaysia. Before delving into the ‘third way’ in decolonization, this paper firstly reviews the issue of modernity and intellectuals’ take on it in the context of Iran. Unlike many developing countries, Iran has never been colonized and was briefly occupied by the Russians and the British before and during World War I and II, but still maintained its autonomy throughout history. However, like many other non-Western states, the Iranian culture has experienced close contact with Western civilization. Both Shariati and Alatas are against consuming the intellectual packages imported from the West wholeheartedly and they suggest intellectual abandoning of Western modernity through the concepts of ‘homeless intellectual’ and ‘captive mind.’ Utilizing Shariati’s take in returning to one’s authentic root and Alatas’ anti-captive-mind standpoint, I argue that these two concepts work in tandem to achieve an ideal intellectual decolonization. Anchored within such discourse, this paper examines how successful these thoughts were in challenging the naturalized assumptions of the Western self-fashioned narrative of ‘modernity.’

**Modernity and its discontent**

Before explaining the process of modernity in Iran, the definition of Modernization is in order. As a value-neutral and a multi-dimensional concept, modernization, inherently, is neither “good” nor “bad” but change is a sine qua non of modernization process which brings with it constructive and/or destructive
effects (Chekki, 1974). In this fashion, modernization is not a unitary, static and homogeneous concept and does not have the same impacts wherever it occurs. In other words, it is almost next to impossible for modernization to take place in the same way twice as timing, sequence and cultural milieus differ strikingly. The changes in Africa as the result of modernization could be of an essentially dissimilar character and have very different results from those changes which occurred in Asia. It is noteworthy to mention that there is a delicate distinction between ‘modernization’ and ‘modernity.’ ‘Many attributes of modernization, like widespread literacy or modern medicine, have appeared, or have been adopted, in isolation from other attributes of a modern society. Hence, modernization in some spheres of life may occur without resulting in ‘modernity’’ (Bendix, 1970, p. 311). Moreover, modernity is basically a state of mind—expectation of progress, inclination to growth, willingness to accustom oneself to change (Lerner, 1964, iix). Modernization here refers to a kind of social change that emanated in the industrial revolution of England between the years 1760-1830, and the French political revolution in 1789-1794. A distinction ought to be made between individual and societal modernization as well. Individual modernity and societal modernity are two different social phenomena; the former does not necessarily correspond with the latter and conversely the latter does not correlate with the former one. A modern individual is not indicative of a modern society and a modern society does not necessarily mean that all the individuals living in the society are all modern (Chekki, 1974). Modernization in the present study refers to societal modernization in the context of Iran although at some occasions reforms were implemented to modernize individuals.

Iran’s encounter with modern ideas and institutions dates back to the mid-nineteenth century but its early ties with modern Europe can be traced back prior to that in the sixteenth century at the time of Shah Abbas when Persia entered the community of nations. Yet Iran’s lettered strata were not affected by the European intellectual revolution between 1600 and 1800. Boroujerdi (2003, p.12) argues the West was considered “less as a philosophical threat and more as an exotic cultural edifice worthy of voyeuristic gaze” for the elite sect of Persia during the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century. However, this sentiment changed in the early nineteenth century with the interventions of Russia and Britain on the one hand, and Western interference and exploits on the other hand. Now the West was no longer a vague entity and turned into a real political foe, cultural adversary and ideological threat for Persians to the extent that even the king of Qajar, Naser ala-Din Shah, expressed his disapproval of European presence in Persia: “I wish that never a European had set foot on my country’s soil; for then we would have been spared all these tribulations” he continued, “but since the foreigners have unfortunately penetrated into our country, we shall at least make the best possible use of them” (Quoted in Haas, 1966, p. 35). Later in the Pahlavi’s era, the state-sponsored modernization during the 1960s and 1970s impacted the economic relations, social institutions and cultural patterns of the country.

Modernization programs such as land reform modified the existing structure of rural Iran and left the peasants with no choice but to migrate to urban areas and seek their fortunes in the cities as their hope to take their land back was crushed when the government seized the ownership of the land (Looney, 1982, p. 47-48). As the result, a major exodus of the rural populace to the urban centers occurred. The urban way of life was also profoundly transfigured by the reforms of those years and the traditional social structures had experienced serious tension as an aftereffect of the Pahlavi’s modernization programs (Mirsepassi, 2004). The reforms were enacted to transmute Iran from a poor traditional society and a decentralized state system into a centralized and industrialized country (Saikal, 1980). The motivation to industrialize Iran so rapidly after the Second World War arose in part due to Reza Shah’s foreign policy objectives.
The Shah desired to turn Iran into a world power by preventing the foreign powers to occupy Iran militarily (as it had happened during the two world wars) and by inserting some modifications in the everyday life structures and modernizing the country in a western manner. To expedite achieving his aims, the Pahlavi opted to institutionalize massive and dramatic industrialization projects in lieu of more practical ones that would help the traditional people. Western techniques and practices were so hurriedly accepted that the scarcity in skilled and semi-skilled laborers was overlooked. However, these reforms were not introduced in the political power structure and they, in fact, somehow helped the state have a more structured autocratic powerful government.

The country owed its rapid industrializations to the oil production revenue which was a source of income for the Shah and made him independent of popular taxation. Consequently, the grass roots were excluded from influencing development and they were repudiated to be given any political status. The economic, social and cultural relations of the country were rapidly changing without participation of the people troubled by these transformations. It was not only the ordinary people who could not have a say, but the oppositional intellectuals were strictly controlled not to exert much influence over the direction of the modernization process; thus, people were largely alienated from the process. The concept of modernization as used in this study is synonymous with the concept of Westernization because the sources for change came from the Western countries. Following the Westernization programs, the Pahlavi state made a great effort in breaching the society from tradition but without trying to offer the people any institutions to voice their grievances. Therefore, modernization in this respect “occurred without resulting in ‘modernity’” (Bendix, 1970, p. 311); this can challenge the assumption that modernization has systemic qualities. Contrary to this view, the different components in the process of modernization are historically distinct and therefore a progress along one aspect does not necessarily suggest a progress along another dimension. While applying those reforms, the Phalavi neglected to accommodate those social and economic changes in the context of Iranian cultural and historical experiences. The fast modernization policies established by the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran caused dissatisfaction amongst the popular and traditional forces. This progress and the displacement associated with it, along with the lack of institutions and organizations for public interest articulation, led to a mentality of resistance and even enmity towards modernization/Westernization.

**Iranian Intellectuals at the Crossroad**

The intellectual activity in Iran over the past two centuries deserves a pause for reflection. The 19th-20th century of Iran witnessed a tormented intellectual life. Indeed, this tormented intellectual life came from the clash between two sources of influence for intellectuals: the West and Islam. The older generation of intellectuals had mostly a clerical background and frequented the religious centers both in Iran and Iraq to study Islam. Later during the modernization period, the trend had changed and many traveled to Europe to further studies. These two groups of intellectuals gave birth to two different stands. For some, the West became the paragon of virtue and progress whereas for others, it was a symbol of colonialism/imperialism and they were highly critical of the West. Boroujerdi (1996) argues these intellectuals were not just observers of changes within the society; rather they were participants in the cultural transformation of the country as well. Undoubtedly, the intellectuals had served as “crucial intermediaries and interpreters between their own culture and that of the West” (Borojourdi, 1998, p. 21). Their active and dynamic contribution in the evolution of Iranian identity cannot not be neglected as their interpretation of the
Iranian past and present and that of the West have greatly shaped and impacted the Iranians’ attitude towards issues such as ‘nationalism’ and ‘modernity.’

Before going any further with the intellectual activity in Iran, the question to be raised here is who is an intellectual? Sreberny & Khiabany (2008) argue that the growing number of individuals ranging from feminists to leftists who are involved in recreating a public space of debate can be considered as intellectuals. This definition conjures up what Lerner (1964) observed of the over production of intellectuals in Iran during the 1950s. In a lecture entitled “Representation of Intellectual,” Edward Said believes the intellectual is an:

individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations and whose raison d’être is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug (Said, 1994, p. 11).

The task of intellectuals is therefore to recognize the vital position that they can adopt as a public awakening force in the society against the outsider plundering forces. As it has been mentioned earlier, the mentality towards modernity (reads westernization) and nationalism were hugely impacted and intervened by the intellectuals. As Shils states: “the gestation, birth, and continuing life of the new states of Asia and Africa, through all their vicissitudes, are in large measure the work of intellectuals” (1963, p.195). Put it simply, it is not feasible to study and analyze the trajectory of modernization, nationalism, and secularization in under-developed countries such as Iran without considering the social importance of intelligentsia. As bearers of such concepts as historical consciousness, modernism, nationalism, and culture, these intellectuals should have bridged the gap created by the process of modernization/Westernization and diminish the concomitant alienation. As instigators of ideas, they were expected to negotiate with the effective modernity while concurrently holding the West at bay in political sense of the term (Boroujerdi, 2003). Instead those intellectuals who embraced modernity and adopted its extensive vocabulary believed that the wholesale adoption of the Western civilization was the only single way to progress. On the other hand, the oppositional intellectuals had every reason to oppose the Pahlavi regime as in an age of “republicanism, radicalism and nationalism, the Pahlavis appeared in the eyes of the intelligentsia to favor monarchism, conservatism, and Western imperialism” (Abrahamian, 1989, p.17). This period of “nothingness,” “fatigue,” “loneliness,” and “darkness” compelled the progressive intellectuals to develop a critical attitude against modernity and resorted to nativism or local answers to decolonize the country completely. This shift of paradigm to native culture has manifested itself differently; some had embraced the pre-Islamic Iranian heritage like Meidi Akhavan Sales and many others romanticized the rural life to express their disapproval of the discourse of modernity (Mirsepassi, 2004). Blindingly following the tradition or imitating the West made intellectuals like Shariati and Alatas think of a ‘third way’ in decolonizing the Muslim societies.

**Intellectual decolonization**

That many scholars have studied the discourse of modernity in Islamic societies is suggestive of the significance of the question of modernity in Iran and other Muslim countries. In fact, since the 19th
century encounter with European colonialism, the question of modernity has been the most significant issue in many Islamic countries both at the theoretical and practical level. All through the 19th and 20th centuries and even today, the tension between modernity and Islamic tradition has been one of the key features of the primary social, political, philosophical, and cultural debates in the Muslim societies. Modernists often highlight the lack of progress in the country, attribute it to the absence of modernity and are in favor of an extreme change according to the current Western self-fashioned narrative of modernity. This group of Western-oriented and Western-educated elites called for the modernization of their country through the Westernization and top-down secularization. Contrarily, traditionalists often regarded the servility of Muslim societies to Western colonialism and imperialism as a repercussion of neglecting the Islamic heritage and traditional culture, and called for circumventing modernity and embracing Islam’s cultural and religious traditions. Aiming for an alternative to the both extremes of modernism and traditionalism, another group of intellectual came up with a new perspective of transformation for Muslim nations through an amalgamation of local religious/cultural traditions and Western norms and institutions. The hegemonic modernism and essentialist culturalism have been severely criticized by this group and they have been trying to negotiate a third way between the total acceptance and the total rejection of modernity.

As opposed to the dichotomous forces of modernism and traditionalism, these intellectuals have been seeking to develop a concurrent critique of modernity and local/traditional culture and have been trying to point out strategies for successfully being-in-the-(modern)-world and keeping the tradition in full swing as well. Shariati and Alatas are two of these intellectuals who opted for a third way. They could be considered as the earliest postcolonial thinkers who paid a great deal of attention to cultural and academic issues in the confrontation between the imperial West and the responses from the East. The concern of these two intellectuals in light of which their works as a whole can be understood is liberation from a condition of cultural, economic, political and academic oppression. Although Shariati’s primary frame of reference is Iran and Alatas’ is Malaysia, both of them develop ideas within the tradition of Islamic thought and since both of them situate their countries in a broader spectrum in the context of the Islamic and Third World, the relevance of their works goes beyond the Iranian and Malaysian society. For Shariati, the tragedy of modernism began when the intelligentsia accepted the colonialist ideas wholeheartedly. That the wholesale adoption of the Western civilization was the only road to progress, in Shariati’s view, is only Trojan Horse of Western imperialism. He criticizes reform-minded intellectuals such as Mirza Malkum Khan, the founder of the modern Iranian ‘enlightenment,’ who proposed the idea of ‘Western civilization without the Iranian identity’; and figures such as Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh, the first Iranian to suggest that ‘we must become Westernized body and soul’ (Shariati, 1981a).

However, I would like to depart from Shariati’s thought here and argue that even those intelligentsias, who favored modernization, were also reluctant to let go of traditional thinking and culture abruptly. A glimpse at the historical pedigree of Westernization discloses that these intellectuals did pay attention to tradition but for them modernity was more important than tradition because it offered them a better standard of living. This point has not skipped the attention of the historian, Mangol Bayat (1982) who argues that although the reform-minded intellectuals such as Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878), Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir (1807-1852), and Mirza Malkum Khan (1833-1908) were persuaded that the rationale behind the European power and prosperity lies in the Western scientific knowledge, they were not ready to forego the full panoply of their tradition. She writes “the so-called modernist thought of the turn of the century, despite its loud call for Westernization, was in spirit and form, if not in content,
deeply rooted in tradition.” She continues that this modernity was “bearing as much the mark of the Irano-Islamic heritage outwardly rejected by some of its spokesmen, as of the European system it strongly wished to emulate” (Bayat, 1982, p. 173-4). But Shariati is right to take umbrage at the fact that some of these intellectuals could not recognize the difference and even contradiction between modernity and civilization. What was imported into the country was not civilization but modernity as to Shariati civilization refers to a capacity for intellectual and material production and “a high level in society’s cultural and spiritual growth and an elevated state of human spirit and outlook” (Shariati, 1971b, p.140.). Taken this definition into consideration, civilization suggests alert actions of self-generation, volition and an innovative adoption which could neither be imitated nor imposed.

Shariati is of the idea that civilization only occurs if its foundation is based on the society’s own past and present cultural achievements (Navabi, 1988). Thus, what was accepted by some intelligentsia was by no means civilization but a process of modernization which made a cleavage between the peoples of a society and their history and culture. Modernity, Shariati argues, is not a pseudomorphosis of Western civilization in the East but rather it is a produce of Western imperialism consciously devised to stymie the progress of culture and civilization in the East. Shariati perceives the danger of losing faith in one’s own ability to produce the cultural and material values if non-Western nations turn into mere consumers of the West which is how the myth of perfect Western culture and civilization makes sense. Shariati (1982) continues that the West became interested in the history, culture and religion of the East only to reshape and reconstruct and represent them in a way that disgusts the native intellectuals. This is the cultural colonialism that he refers to which aims to generate a decultured individual without roots in their society and hollows out all historical and cultural contents longing to be replaced with meaning and substance by the West (Shariati, 1982). This modernity was neither authentically Western nor Iranian; it would not recreate and reconstruct the Irano-Islamic values and would not reproduce the Western values as well. Therefore, it lacked certain creativity and depersonalized an individual from history, culture and religion (Shariati, 1982). Modernity had, indeed, created a deep schism between the majority who still treasured past, culture and tradition and the minority who liked to see themselves and their society modernized.

The tension between modernity and tradition was too deep-seated for Shariati to be pacified by criticism. He diagnoses two major characteristics in every aspect of Iranian intellectual and artistic life: “alienation, or even in some instances “hatred” from “self,” from their own religion, culture, worldview, and character; and 2) a deep, obsessive, or even boastful pretension to attachment to the West, and rootless and vulgar modernism” (Shariati, 1971, p.35). To do away with the tension, he thinks the “responsible intellectual” should be awakened. Shariati categorizes the modernized populations into three groups of “the consumptionist assimile,” who are mindlessly imitating the West and are unable to judge or think independently and have no sense of social responsibility; the next one he labels as “pseudo-intellectuals” who were the right men for imperialism since they were trained to work with the administrative system of a modern society (Shariati, 1970, p.146). It is the third group whose ideas of Westernization, Shariati considers the most serious. He puts “the great tragedy is the assimilation of the intellectuals, namely thinkers who have responsibility for directing social ideas and for guiding society’s spirit, culture, and faith” (268-269). He continues, “our basic problem is not the illiteracy of the common people but the half-illiteracy of our intellectuals” (Shariati, 1971a, p.41). The problem of the intellectual who favored modernism was a “miscoception of social time” (Navabi, 1988, p. 25) as these intellectuals resided in a society that was like the 14th-15th century but took their ideas and notions from the 19th-20th century Europe. They practically and theoretically have a colonial approach in the name of scientific approach.
They discuss democracy and sciences where modern sciences have not fallen into place yet. They exercise their free thoughts not against the rulers of the country but against the traditional institutions (Al-e Ahmad, 1984). They thought of problems that never existed in their own society but proposed solutions. They were living in a country of centuries of stagnation but articulated the philosophical cynicism of the Europeans of postwar generation and represented that cynicism in their literature, arts and ideology. The most conspicuous consequence of the intellectuals’ misreading of social time was the misplaced anti-religiosity that troubled the grassroots (Shariati, 1971b, p.97).

Shariati is of the idea that both the culture of tradition and modernity had caused the social decay and spiritual poverty. While criticizing “the infatuated modernists and the retarded traditionalists” he calls the two groups passive imitators and instead he chooses a third way to describe his position “a homeless intellectual” (this is what I call intellectual decolonization on his behalf) who is neither satisfied with the tradition nor is happy with the modernism but at the same time does not discard them. In Shariati’s view, the cultures of tradition and modernity are the distorted representations of two higher forms of culture and civilization neither of which could be thrown away. Despite his attack on the culture of both tradition and modernity, in his view, tradition has the ability to produce a culture conducive to progress and in the other hand; he does not repudiate the idea of “Western modernity” in whole as he believes that a Muslim could learn a great deal from the West especially if they understand the foundation of progress in the history of the West. As a homeless intellectual, the third way for him is to take what is most, useful, significant and relevant from both the West and the tradition. Concurrent with his disdain for those who condemn the West without knowing it and its sciences, Shariati despises the traditional notion that independence and national resistance implies jettisoning the West in its totality. The West should not be rejected as a whole because they do not represent a monolithic doctrine. To Shariati, the only legitimate condemnation of the Westernization occurs when one has comprehensive knowledge of Western culture and civilization along with a deep understanding of their own society, history, culture and religion (1971a). He is not only interested in reading the major European authors but also uses them to achieve his goals.

Shariati utilizes both Marx and Weber to teach his students the economic infrastructure and superstructure. Yet he criticizes both of them for understanding “half of the social reality” as Marx emphasizes the primacy of the infrastructure which is one half of a society, and Weber highlights the significance of the latter which makes the other half (Shariati, 1981, p.126). A close reading of Shariati’s writings corroborates that his primary frame of reference, his notions of class, state apparatus, society, history, economy and culture are all highly influenced by Marxism. With regard to tradition, he concludes that to decolonize a country, a domestic and indigenous had to be sought and formulated; thus, he continues Al-e Ahmad’s critique of secular political culture of the time for neglecting the Islamic culture of Iran and proposed “returning to one’s root.” Shariati’s ideas on religion and Islamic culture become clear in his correspondence with Fanon. In his letter, Shariati expresses his disapproval and disagreement with Fanon over the essentiality for leaving religion in order for a nation to progress and conquer imperialism. He, instead, believes that a society must retain and regain its cultural and religious heritage as they can achieve the same ends. To him, religion or Islamic tradition is the most powerful element for uniting the peoples and guiding them towards progressive objectives (Mirsepassi, 2004). Shariati cogently argues for the essentiality of a rediscovery of the national psyche before fighting the West. It is only with a domestic and an inherent ideology rooted in its own political culture that Iran can gain its respect through resisting imperialism. Within such a discourse, religion finds its ties with the idea of “roots” and “roots are a conceptualized public ontology… (which) becomes a theory of authenticity” (Mirsepassi,
2004, p.122). Authenticity here can be a modern prescription for accepting modernity while maintaining the cultural and political independency. Shariati’s concern here is to adopt modernity according to the needs of our society and history without allowing it to master the society. In discussing the issue of “roots” in relation to Islam, he states:

When we say “return to one’s roots,” we are really saying one’s cultural roots… some of you may conclude that we Iranians must return to our racial roots [Aryan]. I categorically reject this conclusion. I oppose racism, fascism, and reactionary returns…[our people] do not find their roots in [pre-Islamic] civilizations… for us to return to our roots [means rediscovery of] our Islamic roots (Shariati, quoted in Abrahamian, 1989, p. 116).

The above passage demonstrates Shariati’s belief that only tradition and in this sense, religion can mobilize masses to create a new society free from the ills of the West. While discarding some traditional doctrines of the religion, in this case, Shiism, he manages to draw some ideologies from it and gives it a progressive aura to secure the faithfulness of the young revolutionary intelligentsia. However, this progressive aura had to be cautiously orchestrated to be in synch with the anti-colonial and anti-Western attitude. Homeless intellectuals like Shariati would not, therefore, blindly follow the legacy of their ancestors and would not become a mere consumer of the imported intellectual packages from the West. He admits once that “in the existing powerful bi-polar intellectual context, the third way intellectuals like me, will constantly be misunderstood and their message will not be comprehended correctly” (Shariati quoted in Ghaneirad 2011, p.39). That is why the traditionalists oftentimes refer to him as an anti-Western intellectual and draw upon his critique of the West in a one-sided manner and reduce him to an ideologue supporting a totalitarian traditionalism (Ghaneirad, 2011). His idea of ‘originalism’ and ‘returning to one’s roots’ have been turned into Nativism.

While Shariati tries to resist the cultural colonization through his notions of ‘returning to one’s root’ and ‘homeless intellectual,’ Syed Hussein Alatas, another spokesperson of intellectual decolonization, introduces ways to resist ‘intellectual imperialism’ in an era when knowledge of the rest of the world is highly impacted by the sheer power of western culture. Intellectual imperialism is, in fact, the “domination of one people by another in their world of thinking” (S.H. Alatas, quoted in S.F. Alatas, 2012, p. 209). Back in colonial period, the intellectual imperialism was imposed by colonial domination through setting up schools, educating people and raising up elites who could help control the colonized. Indoctrination through the colonial education system played a momentous role in this intellectual imperialism. However, intellectual imperialism today, argues Syed Hussein Alatas (2006), is a form of hegemony that is “not imposed by the West through colonial domination, but accepted, willingly with confident enthusiasm, by scholars and planners of the former colonial territories and even in the few countries that remained independent during that period” (p.7-8). Encounter modernity in terms of academia, he brings our attention to the less-noticed fact that while other forms of Western dominance such as political and economic dominance are almost always resisted, we welcome intellectual domination. We are ready to accept anything that originates in the West so much so that we become hesitant in trying to validate ourselves (Alvares, 2012). We are nonchalant to our own tradition, seek Western education, go by their standards and never question them, and boast of receiving a degree at the proximity of the rulers. This total capitulation is a sort of self-perpetuating academic imperialism. The predominance of the West through the power structure existing in the production and distribution of knowledge resources has led the non-Western scholars to think less of themselves and turn into passive
recipients of knowledge. Hence, they develop what Syed Hussein Alatas (1972) calls a ‘captive mind’ which arises from the “overdependence on the western intellectual contribution in the various fields of knowledge…” (S. H. Alatas, 2006, p.8). His ‘captive mind’ captures our attention about the production of scholarship described as colonial knowledge and its fundamental consequences on the ‘natives’ (Alatas, 1972).

Colonial knowledge and the captive mind are the twin concepts that inform each other (Nair-Venugopal, 2012). Alatas believes that the captive mind is a victim of Orientalism and Eurocentrism—hence the mode of knowing termed as colonial knowledge. The captive mind is defined as “uncritical and imitative mind dominated by an external source, whose thinking is deflected from an independent perspective (Alatas, 1974, p.692). It is an “uncritical imitation” that spread through “almost the whole of scientific intellectual activity” including “problem-setting, analysis, abstraction, generalization, conceptualization, description, explanation, and interpretation” (Alatas, 1972, p.11-12). The concept was first expounded by Alatas in 1972 which, in fact, led to the nature of scholarship in the non-Western world, especially its dominance in the social sciences and humanities. However, the problem of mental captivity was first put forth in 1950s when he referred to the “wholesale importation of ideas from the Western world to eastern societies” ignoring their socio-historical context as a primary problem of colonialism (Alatas, 1956 quoted in Alatas, S.F., 2004, p.60). Some of the characteristics of a captive mind includes the uncreativity and incapability of “raising original problems,” incapability of conceiving “analytical method independent of current stereotypes;” incapability of “separating the particular from the universal in science and thereby properly adapting the universally valid corpus of scientific knowledge to the particular local situation;” a captive mind is also “fragmented in outlook;” “alienated from the major issues of society” and “its own national tradition, if it exists, in the field of intellectual pursuit;” it is unaware of “its own captivity and the conditioning factors making it what it is” and it “is a result of Western dominance over the rest of the world” (Alatas, 1974, p. 691).

What Syed Hussein Alatas said of the mental captivity of intellectuals more than four decades ago still holds true as the captive mind is real and pervasive in our society today. Trained almost entirely in the Western sciences, the captive mind enjoys reading the Western authors, and is educated primarily by Western teachers either in the West or through their available works in local institutions of education (Alatas. S. F., 2008). Many of our intellectuals and university/college teachers read the works of Western authors and teach them; yet they are not aware of this academic dependency and those who are conscious of it do not bother to make an effort to change this. Our teachers use text books which are developed in countries very different than ours. They appear to have been total victims of the captive mind. Thus, Alatas’ concept of captive mind resonates perfectly with the notions of mimicry and repetition which has been considered as one of the most effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge (Nair-Venugopal, 2012). However, it should be noted that he is not against a “constructive imitation” which may lead to emulation. He argues that “no society can develop by inventing everything on its own. When something is found effective and useful, it is desirable that it should be adopted and assimilated, whether it be an artifact or an attitude of mind” (Alatas, 1974, p.692). He believes that the dominance of the Western science has both positive and negative effects. While the former should be maintained and used, the latter should be avoided. He criticizes those who reject the West wholeheartedly as he believes “ignoring a valuable contribution from the West is as negative as uncritically accepting whatever is served on the academic platter (2002, p.150). He is cognizant of the urgency not to reject the Western social science in toto but rather he selectively adapts it to local needs with caution.
The selectively adapted knowledge from the West is not based on the premises of originality but on criteria of relevance which are formed by virtue of “consciousness of the problems of academic imperialism, mental captivity and uncritical imitation” (S. F. Alatas, 2005, p. 240). He aptly understands that this academic imperialism is a soft power of the West and can be a more powerful base for imperialism than its hard power. To diffuse this academic imperialism, he proposes an autonomous Asian social science tradition be generated. The important element to include in forming a particular tradition is 1) “The raising and treatment of definite problems” 2) “the application of definite methodologies” 3) “the recognition of definite phenomena” 4) “the creation of definite concepts” and 5) “the relation with other branches of knowledge” (Alatas, 2002, p.151). The very first prerequisite in forming an autonomous tradition is a group of creative and independent intellectuals. The autonomy of tradition leans on studies of historical phenomena believed to be unique to a particular area or society. As Seyed Farid Alatas argues, autonomous traditions need to be “informed by local/regional historical experiences and cultural practices” as well as by alternative “philosophies, epistemologies, histories, and the arts” (2010, p. 37).

By proposing an autonomous Asian social science tradition, Syed Hussein Alatas has no intention of separating Asian social science from that of the West or the rest of the World. Rather he opines that a greater deal of attention should be paid to the development of knowledge elsewhere, especially in the West but the problem is to identify the “significant from the trivial” (Alatas, 2003, p. 153).

Alatas classifies knowledge into four categories that an autonomous social science should develop: 1) Foundational knowledge which refers to “knowledge of the foundation of Asian societies, their culture, religion and other crucial aspects of societal life” 2) consolidative knowledge which means “knowledge that consolidates and strengthen the foundation” 3) reactive knowledge refers to “knowledge that is required to react to ideas that tend to strengthen or corrode the basis of social life” and 4) developmental knowledge is “knowledge required to attain peace, justice, welfare and insight into human living” (2002, p. 154). All the above-mentioned types of knowledge are pertinent to making an autonomous social science tradition. By proposing an autonomous Asian social science tradition, Alatas strives for eradicating the dominance of the Western knowledge in Asian societies where almost all of the institutions of higher education follow the same path and have the same educational structure. The dominance of Western knowledge structure leaves little room for our people to get to know indigenous knowledge like in sociology the likes of Weber and Durkheim are more known than non-European social thinkers. The West, too, does not acknowledge the contributions made by non-Europeans in different fields and this, argues Syed Farid Alatas, is the ‘new orientalism’ of today which is “the neglect and silencing of non-Western voices” (2012, p. 199).

**Conclusion**

When the former European colonial power left their colonies, a neo-colonialism began to replace. This neo-colonialism has been aiming to colonize the culture of the Third World countries, hence appeared modernity. A great number of intellectuals from the non-Western world embraced it and argued that it is the only path to progress. At the other spectrum, oppositional intellectual turned to tradition to reject the West and Western ideologies. Homeless intellectuals such as Shariati and Alatas approached modernity from a ‘third way.’ While both of them are against being mere consumers of the imported packages from the West, they admit that the desirable and useful Western ideas should not be discarded. Both of them document how the rise of Western dominance can impoverish non-Westerners and suggest utilizing one’s own cultural and religious tradition to resist it. Shariati’s ‘homeless intellectual’ position and his ideas of
“returning to one’s roots,” and Alatas’ anti-‘captive mind’ stand along with his proposal on “an autonomous Asian social science tradition,” works wonder in intellectually decolonizing a nation. Unlike decolonization which is a process of confrontation, the relationship between intellectual decolonization and colonialism/imperialism is a dialogical process since in this way the voices of both the colonized and the colonizers carry equal weight. Shariati and Alatas, as two spokespersons of intellectual decolonization, choose the dialogue over confrontation with the West. But now the questions to be asked here is whether the post-1979 Iran is the society Shariati envisioned for his country? Whether Shariati and Alatas have been successful in challenging the Western discourse of modernity both in the fields of culture and academia? Their success has to be measured in terms of a growing audience during and after their active career. Scrutinizing the current condition of our society and its academia will also allow us to answer the question. Efforts at decolonizing the captive mind and resisting the West intellectually remains an unfinished project and needs attentive and creative intellectuals to follow their path.

**Bibliography**


