

## *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beyg:* **Building a Nation Through Alienation**

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### **Abstract:**

Alienation is a concept that dates back to the Old Testament to define idolatry where man worships idols and kneels in front of his own creation, thus alienating himself from his potential and his true self-worth. The modern usage of the term identifies the individual as alienated and this can occur between any group of people, as long as there is some person(s) or thing(s) alienated from some other(s). In this paper, I use the concepts of self, other and alienation to look at *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beyg*, a fictional travelogue in Persian, often credited with creating a national consciousness among Iranians at the beginning of the 20th century, awakening the nation to the terrible conditions of the time and making the people aware of the need for political change. The main protagonist, Ebrahim, is an expatriate Iranian, born and raised in Egypt, who loves and adores his homeland. On his first ever trip to the country, however, he is disappointed with the state of the country and goes on to create images of self and other. I identify this process in the way he projects Iran as a country against all the other countries in the world.

**Keywords:** alienation, Iranian nationalism, fictional travel diary, self and other

### **Introduction**

The end of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mark the important era of nationalisation and nation building in Iran. This was the period when Iran as a nation changed from a feudal society to emerge as a constitutional monarchy. This period of nationalisation culminated with the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, while the years between 1905 and 1911 are considered as the period of the Constitutional Movement. During these years, “increased contact with the West, accompanied by a quickening tempo of modernization, the political awakening of the people, and the propagation of a need for change in the country’s political and legal life” are recognised as the causes of the movement (Kamshad 1966, 31). At the same time, literature also played an important role in the political developments of the period, culminating in the production of what has been termed by many as “literature of revolt” (Kamshad 1966, 35), which came into being before, during and after the Revolution of 1906.

This literature includes poetry and prose, and is seen in the form of the press, political and satirical essays as well as novels and prose fiction (Rypka 1968, 355; Hillmann 1988, 293). One notable work considered by many as responsible for awakening the nation is *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beyg*<sup>1</sup> by Zayn ol-Abedin Maraghe'i. The book appeared at the beginning of the 20th century and is often seen as a forerunner to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906. In what follows, *Travel Dairy* is examined with a look at the construction of Self and Other(s) in order to show how the main protagonist, Ebrahim Beyg goes on to alienate Iran and Iranians from the rest of the world. The Others looked at as points of comparison and contrast include Muslim countries, Europe and the West, third world and African countries, and Iran's past. In each case, Ebrahim laments the current state of Iran, and alienates Iran and Iranians from the rest of the world and even its own past.

### **Alienation**

Alienation is a concept that dates back to the Old Testament and was used to define idolatry where man worships idols and kneels in front of his own creation. Hence, instead of experiencing himself as a creator, he becomes a subject of his own creation, thus alienating himself from his potential. The modern usage of the term, however, dates back to Hegel who equated man's history with that of his alienation or *Entfremdung* (Fromm 1961, 47). According to Hagel, alienation is when the "finite spirit', the human self, 'doubles' itself, externalises itself, and then confronts its own other being as something separate, distinct and opposed to it". Both social and spiritual alienation are related to each other. The Self achieves its evolution first through alienation from itself and then recognising its own alienation, thus achieving "[s]ubjectivity, individuality, and freedom." In other words, the Self attains individuality and freedom through interaction with others, which can conquer its own alienation by becoming active in society and the world (Sayers 2011, 3-4).

An important aspect of alienation is the feeling of "becoming" alien to something. It is not enough when a person is alienated from something from the beginning. But rather, he/she should have "become" alienated to it. Therefore, there must be a period of time when the person feels at one with something, and then later it becomes alien to him/her. In Hegel's sense, it is the social substance that is alienated from the person, whereas today it is the individual that we consider as alienated (Schacht 1971, 36-41). This feeling has occurred in various stages and at different times throughout history, from the ancient period up to the modern times (Kaufmann 1971, xiv); and also between any group of people, as long as there is some person(s) or thing(s) alienated from some other(s) (Kaufmann 1971, xxii). Hence, even a country can become alienated from other countries and the rest of the world.

The definition used in this paper is that offered by Robert Ankony and Thomas Kelley (1991), wherein they define alienation as "a condition in social relationships reflected by a low degree of

integration or common values and a high degree of distance or isolation between individuals, or between an individual and a group of people in a community or work environment” (121).

### **Alienating Iran from the Rest of the World**

The idea of nationalism and Iran as a nation state was a novelty in Iran at the end of the 19th century. Despite many people bearing sentimental feelings for the country, Iran did not exist as a modern nation state, not in the sense defined by Benedict Anderson in his groundbreaking work *Imagined Communities* (Cole 1996, 37). Three groups are generally recognised as being responsible for the emergence and spread of nationalism and ultimately the Constitutional Revolution of Iran. They are the merchants, the clergy and the intellectuals. Each group had become tired of the terrible conditions in Iran for various reasons. For instance, the religious were worried about the increasing dominance of foreigners and the influence of their customs and practices; the merchants had grown tired of financial problems and the existence of no laws; government employees and the educated were angry because of the decline of the administrative apparatus and the autocracy of the incompetent government. To the point that both the court and the king became a subject of their severe criticism and disapproval (Dastgheib 2005, 61).

At the same time, a number of factors played a role in pushing Iranians to develop and modernise their nation. One such is the introduction of modern education and newspapers. The very first press entered Iran relatively late in 1817, followed in 1819-20 by another press from England; and then in 1824-25, a press house was opened in Tehran (Avery 2007, 818). The first newspaper in Iran, however, was opened in the year 1857. During the same year, the first Iranian modern school, the Dar ol-Fonun (Polytechnic) was also established. The Dar ol-Fonun was also the place for the State Printing Press which was in charge of publishing work on modern science and foreign languages. The scope of the work carried out by both the Dar ol-Fonun and the newspaper was, nevertheless, very limited (Avery 2007, 823; see also Fazeli 2006, 40). It was not until the end of the 19th century that more newspapers, often in opposition to the government, were introduced and journalism entered Persian literature (Atabaki 2008, 145).

All the non-official papers were produced outside Iran, and some had to be smuggled inside (Keddie and Amanat 2008, 193). There was also an increase in the number of newspapers bought and read among the public. This is true of both the period before and after the Constitutional Revolution. The majority of the population was illiterate at that time, and hence, in addition to reading, listening was considered as an important step in becoming aware of the news, or even books. There were also others who, despite being illiterate, would obtain the papers and take them back to their villages. The papers were, then, either read or heard by the general public in places such as coffee houses (Nabavi 2005, 317; Atabaki 2008, 150; Avery 2007, 829). This was not limited to newspapers only, and other works, such as fiction and novels, were also read and listened to by the public.

The introduction of journalism in Iran was also a helpful factor in the development of literature where journals and newspapers became a vehicle and medium for the publication of literature, especially poetry. Many poets published their work in the newspapers that were often produced by themselves. Toward the end of the 19th century, prose literature became the medium for fiction, and rivalled poetry. As a result, prose gained a simpler and plainer style and became the more suitable means of conveying the social and political aspects of literature. The writers were influenced to a great degree by the developments in the West. They did not, however, look at their own culture as the source of problems. For they believed in the superiority of ancient Iranian culture as compared with the West's (Avery 2007, 862). Journalism, on the other hand, became an important influence on the style of prose. Social and political reform was achieved mainly through journalism. It also became the medium through which dramas, short stories and novels were written and developed. They further helped in advocating national consciousness and social and political reform (Yarshater 1988, 33).

In addition, Iran's progress towards reform was considered very slow at the end of the 19th century. Furthermore, concessions and privileges granted to foreigners resulted in people's resentment and anger. Consequently, the king and the court were seen as responsible for handing Iran over to foreigners and "unbelievers". These led to a demand for the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and became pivotal in its establishment (Lambton 1961, 124-25; see also Dastgheib 2005, 64-65). On the other hand, the reformists lamented the present weakness of the country, comparing it with both its glorious past and the advancement of Western nations (Gheissari 1998, 20).

Along with a number of other works of fiction and newspapers, *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beyg* has been credited with awakening the nation to the terrible conditions of the time and making the people aware and in demand of political changes and social reforms. The work contains harsh criticism against Iranian society, and looks at society from an outsider's, and thus impartial, perspective (Balaý and Cuyppers 1987, 37). Accordingly, while highlighting the urgency of education using "imaginary conversations", the book discusses the causes of Iran's backwardness in terms of both economy and culture. Furthermore, both the Shah and the government are also severely criticised, calling for a reform of the government to limit and control their power, while also retaining Iran's independence (Zarinebaf 2008, 197). *Travel Diary* appeared in three volumes during the Constitutional Period.<sup>2</sup> Though all three offer criticism of the court and the country to various degrees, volumes 2 and 3 are much weaker in terms of their contents and plots and they did not have the same effects on the people as volume 1. Hence volume 1 is also the subject of the current paper.

*Travel Diary* has a two-fold goal which makes it unique compared to other works in the same period. One is to criticise the current conditions, and the other is "to create a utopian picture of modern society and political structure" (Akbari 2005, 76). Consequently, it can be seen to be the only work that criticises both the political power and society, while other works in the same

period focus only on one aspect – which is mostly social criticism (Akbari 2005, 93n16). The fact that the main protagonist is the son of an Iranian merchant born and raised outside of Iran, helps with “articulat[ing] wide ranging social critiques”. This allows Ebrahim to both belong to Iranian society, and at the same time be “alien enough to retain a critical view on [his] surroundings.” Thus “[t]hrough travel writing, in both its factual and fictive forms, emerges a new form of literary imagination carved from new social contexts” (Rastegar 2007, 99-100).

*Travel Diary* tells the story of Ebrahim, an expatriate born in Egypt to Iranian parents, who, despite not having spent any time in Iran, is a patriotic lover of his country. On his one and only trip to the country, however, he is much disappointed with everyone and everything he meets, and comes to criticise everyone, from the nobles and notables to the religious authorities and even the ordinary people. He complains of the condition he finds the country in, including the state of schools and education, the mistreatment of the people by the officials, the hypocrisy of the clergy men, and the lack of respect for law and order.

Maraghe'i, the author of *Travel Diary*, spent a large part of his life outside Iran in voluntary exile in the city of Istanbul. He was both a reformist and an optimist, hopeful for Iran to build a better future based on its glorious past (Fazeli 2006, 63). Similarly, Ebrahim, the main protagonist, has features that help to pinpoint Iran's social problems at the time. The fact that he is the son of an Iranian expatriate helps in making him part of Iran while at the same time “alien enough” to be able to criticise and hold a critical view of Iranian society (Rastegar 2007, 99). All throughout the book, Ebrahim compares and contrasts Iran with the rest of the world and on every occasion, he paints a somewhat negative and dark picture of Iran, asserting that “Iran, relative to the other countries of the world, is ruined” (77). However, instead of offering just one Other as a point of contrast against which to depict the Self, Ebrahim compares Iran with multiple Others.

He looks up to other Muslim nations and alienates Iran in terms of its backwardness and poor state. For instance, after going to the bath in Iran for the first time in the city of Mashhad, he is disgusted by the state he finds it in and is appalled by how the people accept the bath's conditions as Islamic and even clean. Lamenting the state of Iran, he compares it with other Muslim countries: “In the baths of other Islamic lands such as Egypt and Ottoman lands, the water for ablutions is protected and flows from a spigot so that a person performs ablutions on one side and on the other gets cold water from a spigot, which has a stream of warm water that is completely clear and sparkling and he drinks it” (39). Elsewhere, when Ebrahim is talking to the Foreign Minister, he finds the fees Iranians have to pay in Mecca when performing Hajj to be unfair compared with what people from other countries pay: “To rent a camel or donkey from Jidda to Mecca for which the others – that is, Muslims from the Ottoman lands, Egypt, Indonesia, and the Caucasus – pay thirty ghorush, he [the Iranian agent in charge] gets two hundred ghorush from an Iranian, which is thirty times more than theirs” (86). There are other instances in the book where Ebrahim presents the alterity of Iranians as compared with other Muslims in the world and draws a distance between them. In all these instances, Iranians are

shown as isolated and alone compared with others in the Muslim world, hence alienating them from the rest of the world.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Iran was still quite unknown to Western imperialism. This status, however, changed quite quickly because of the start of the Napoleonic wars and the emergence of imperialist powers in Iran (Paine and Schoenberger 1975, 3). During the 18th century, there were only a few Iranians who had been to Europe on business and they all held a sense of cultural superiority toward others (Ringer 2002, 147). At that time, the West was almost completely unknown to Iranians (Gheissari 1998 21). This is despite the fact that in the earlier centuries there had been relations between Iran and Western nations. In fact, since the 18th century, Europeans had become more aware of Iran than Iran could have been about Europe. With the downfall of Shah Soltan Hossein (1668-1727) in the early 18th century, the state of Iran had become too unsettled to allow Iranians to travel to Europe. Furthermore, the industrial revolution taking place in Europe was completely unknown to Iran and Iranians. However, Iran's contact with foreigners increased during the early 19th century, at least at the official level (Avery 2007, 821). Iranians gradually became aware of these changes starting with the many defeats of Iran at the hands of Europeans (Balajı and Cuypers 1987, 11). In addition, at the beginning of the 19th century, a number of conflicts took place between Europeans in Iran and Asia which led to the introduction of foreign economy and military in the court of Iran, introducing Iran into the world political area. Soon, Europeans competed over Iran in achieving concessions and privileges. Furthermore, the introduction of the telegraph connected Iran with India and Europe, thus increasing Iran's contact with the outside world, and in particular Europe. Iran's many military defeats in the wars with Russia and Britain, led Iranians to compare themselves with the West, and consequently make an effort to progress and pull themselves forward (Dastgheib 2005, 63). On the other hand, a number of Iranians were sent to Europe which led to the introduction of printing in Iran (in 1812) and thus ultimately brought a number of modern and scientific achievements into the country. This meant that more books and book production became available. At the same time, there was also an increase in the prose and poetry produced. The new simple writings as well as the translation of Western works led to the introduction of new ideas and ultimately the Constitutional Movement (Dastgheib 2005, 64).

Iran's contact with the Western world increased during Naser od-Din Shah's reign (1848-1896). Toward the end of the 19th century, there were a greater number of people who were aware of the West and the liberal movements in Europe. This group also increased its influence through their writings (Lambton 1961, 125) and did their best to enlighten the people and awaken them from ignorance and slumber (Balajı and Cuypers 1987, 12). Around that time, the three principles of nationalism, modernism and constitutionalism were very influential in Europe. Consequently, the Iranian intelligentsia looked to Europe as the source of modernism and nationalism, and thus regarded these ideas as the steps toward achieving a strong and modern Iran (Fazeli 2006, 29). At the same time, many of the intellectuals lived abroad and thus became

familiar with European languages, or had access to translations of great European works. They were to a great degree influenced by the modular form of nationalism. In addition, they were met with modernity taking place in Europe and thus became the resources needed to reform the Self. As a result, these intellectuals came to conceive of Iranian nationalism. They had, however, to struggle for self-respect caused by Iran's lack in terms of technology and military as well as economic inferiority (Cole 1996, 35).

Although Iran during the Qajar period was affected to a great degree by foreign policies and businessmen – especially those of Russia and Great Britain, and to a lesser extent France – it was never declared a colony, and was not “overrun” as much as some of its neighbouring countries (Keddie and Amanat 2008, 179). Hence, despite eventually coming to bear the status of a semi-colony (Foran 1991, 799), its independence was guaranteed, even if only on a formal level. Nation-building and nationalism in Iran, therefore, should not be looked at from a post-colonial perspective, but rather as a post-imperial process (Keyman and Yilmaz 2006, 435). Since Iran was never formally colonised, nationalist intellectuals were never pre-occupied with liberating Iranians from colonial rule. They were as such more concerned with Europe and its progress, and did their best to prove Iranians capable of such progress and advancement. While many early Iranian nationalists, such as Akhundzadeh and Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, held a superiority complex towards Arabs and Islamic culture, at the same time they felt inferior to Europeans (Zia-Ebrahimi 2011, 467-68).

The contrast between Iran and European countries was further outlined in the translation of books that were published in the 19th century. These works, many of which were translated under Naser od-Din Shah's order as a source of celebrating the monarchy, had the reverse effect of pinpointing the differences between Iran, its shahs and its poverty with European monarchies, its growth and its success, thus undermining the Qajar monarchy (Abrahamian 1982, 58). In addition, travelling became the means through which Europe and its civilisation became available to Iranians (Afshar 2003, 279). It was mainly through the traders and working class that liberal or radical ideas entered Iran. Many of them who travelled to nearby countries became aware of the reforms happening in places such as Transcaucasia, Turkey and even India. Subsequently, they moved to propose ways for changes in the government that would enable Iran to become a strong modern nation and free from foreign control (Keddie and Amanat 2008, 192). On the other hand, one of the important positive aspects expressed in these works includes the admiration of the advancement of the West in terms of science, technology and innovations. This aspect of the superiority of the West was expressed by Iranians as a desire to see Iran reclaim the glory of its past days (Ghanoonparvar 1993, 33-34).

Travel diaries are always regarded as “representations of the cultural ‘other’” (Lindsay 2015, 27). Hence many Persian travelogues came to define Iranians' dissatisfaction with the conditions in their own society, ultimately criticising Iran's backwardness compared with the West and its social and political advancements. (Ghanoonparvar 1993, 39). *Travel Dairy* is

considered as one of these works where European societies along with their new technologies and developments are used as points of reference when criticising Iran and Iranians (Akbari 2005, 76-77). On this point, Ghanoonparvar (1993) writes,

The author of *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beyg*, who like his protagonist had spent most of his life outside Iran, was relatively familiar with the progress made in Western countries. Like the writers of travel diaries on visits to the West, he also takes advantage of various opportunities to report on the progress made in Europe and to juxtapose it with the conditions that Ebrahim observes and describes in Iran. (42)

For instance, when Ebrahim is giving a short summary of his entire trip to Iran, he says: “From getting shoes to hats, they [Iranians] are perforce in need of Europeans. What did we do in the days when we didn’t have commercial intercourse with Europeans? Didn’t our business advance? Why did they overcome us in that intercourse of theirs and make us in need of them? It’s clear that their reason was our ignorance. We weren’t satisfied because of our narrowmindedness with respect to that we ourselves had” (230).

In various places and under different conditions, Ebrahim compares different parts of Iran with Europe and the Western world. When he is in Marand and learns of the number of children who died because of smallpox, he becomes aggravated and angry at people’s lack of knowledge when it comes to illnesses and the ways to treat them. He then goes on to speak of Germany and how they have treated their children to avoid them dying at a young age. He attributes “extreme laziness, indolence, and lack of knowledge and information” as the reasons behind people’s inaction towards and acceptance of the disease and its aftermath (219). Similarly, when in the city of Qazvin and going through the bazaar, Ebrahim compares the city with other cities in Europe, and presents a negative picture of both Iran and Qazvin, thus alienating the country and people. Speaking of European cities, he says: “A person can trace the splendor and commerce in those places because of the abundance of traffic of the people and the occupation with business.” He then brings in the cities of Iran as a contrast: “The cities are all dilapidated and like graveyards.” And goes on to paint a very negative picture of Iran (141).

Elsewhere, when talking about the population of Iran, he goes on to mention France, that even though it is smaller than Iran, it has four times the population of our country. He states this difference to be due to the emigration of so many Iranians to other countries caused by the cruelty and oppression of Iran’s rulers (230). Furthermore, he speaks of the labourers and their work, comparing the West with Iran. He mentions England as a country with prosperous printing houses and schools, as well as “a respect for knowledge” that he would very much like to see in his own homeland. Compared with this, he mentions his countrymen who “are employed in the lowly jobs of foreign nations,” who have left their home in the hope of finding a job, and all this caused by “ignorance” (242).

On the other hand, while giving a positive picture of the West, the Persian travel writers of the 19th century also expressed the images of the West in negative terms. Comparing and contrasting the Self and Other, these visitors applauded some features of the Westerners, while downgrading others such as their beliefs and customs (Ghanoonparvar 1993, 12). Similarly, Ebrahim maintains an approval of the West and Westerners while at the same time revealing a disapproval of the relations between the governments of Iran and Western powers that result in the West taking advantage of Iran and Iranians. For instance, when he comes to meet and speak with the Foreign Minister, he complains about how the foreign officials mistreat Iranians and the affairs in Iran, and all because the government of Iran accepts these matters and even treats the people in worse ways: “Perhaps the excesses that the foreign ambassadors and consuls do in Iran, they themselves have copied from the ambassadors and officials of Iran. When those who are the protectors of the rights of the subjects plunder them themselves publicly, what expectation can they have from foreign officials?” (85). Hence, the Westerners are portrayed with a positive image in terms of their progress, but negatively with regards to their taking advantage of Iran (Ghanoonparvar 1993, 42-43).

Although modernisation in Iran was expressed mainly using Europe – and to a certain degree Japan – as the example to look up to (Kurzman 2005, 147), in *Travel Diary*, Ebrahim also refers to third world countries as points of comparison against which Iran is shown to be backwards and behind. Hence, he presents an image of alterity that takes on manifold aspects. To emphasise Iran’s backwardness, he talks of the plus points of having railroads, and complains of their lack of existence in Iran:

Every person from foreign countries who passes along those roads will be surprised indeed at the hardiness of the Iranians and the ignorance of the state and the great men. As is well known, railroads have been built and stated up everywhere in the world today. The blacks of Ethiopia and the Sudan, and the wild people of Africa are profiting from the benefits of it. Only the unfortunate Iranians have remained bereft of that gift. (163)

He, therefore, presents Iran alienated from every country in the world, painting a grim picture of Iran and Iranians, separated and alone.

There are also numerous instances where he mentions Iran and Iranians as inferior to the rest of the world. For instance, towards the end of his travel diary, he goes on to explain the situation in Iran, comparing it with the rest of the world: “Today, all over the world, there is none more unfortunate that [sic.] the Iranian nation.” And then brings in African nations to show just how terrible the situation in Iran is: “There is even a measure of civilization among the blacks of Sudan and Ethiopia. They possess human rights to a degree, and day by day their inclination is towards progress” (228). The same idea was expressed in different formats and newspapers and by various people in the year 1906. For instance, a newspaper spoke of the backwardness of Iran which had positioned it behind other countries, while a preacher wailed

the lack of progress in Iran, declaring “the savages in Africa and negroes in Zanzibar” to be making progress and moving forward “towards civilization, knowledge, labor, and riches” (Kurzman 2005, 145).

The tendency to glorify ancient Iran was very common during the early stages of nationalistic feelings. For some authors and intellectuals, this meant a return to the pre-Islamic state which they used in their formation of Iran’s national identity (Kurzman 2005, 149). In their nationalist discourse, many regretted the current conditions of Iran, while maintaining a nostalgic view of Iran’s glorious past.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in *Travel Diary*, there are several dynasties and timelines to which Ebrahim refers when talking about a golden past. They range from the mythical kings, and the pre-Islamic dynasties, to the times closer to the Qajar dynasty, such as that of the Safavids (1502-1736) and Nader Shah (1688-1747). One of the four things he mentions as a point of glory and praise for Iran is the Caravanserais that, according to him, were built by “Shah Abbas the Great”, a Safavid king who ruled Iran between 1588 to 1629. On numerous occasions, he asserts these places to be “very impressive and splendid” (199), praising them highly for their “vast stores of water where, if a thousand pilgrims arrive, they can relax and drink some wholesome water” (46). He then goes to speak highly of Shah Abbas and “the laudable deeds of that great and just man” (48) over almost three and a half pages. In the process, he alienates Iran and Iranians from the past of the country, painting a glorious golden past and comparing it with the negative image of the present. On numerous occasions he speaks highly of Shah Abbas, calling him “great” (46), “noble”, “a lover of good works”, “high-minded”, “enlightened”, a “lion-hunting hero” (47), “just” (48), “kind” and “prestigious” (49). After recalling some of the deeds of Shah Abbas in terms of the roads and the caravanserais he had built, Ebrahim mentions how reading the summary he has provided of the past will make anyone sigh and cry, since “[t]oday, we have to envy those happy days” (50).

On another occasion, when in Ardebil, he goes to visit the tomb of Shah Esma’il, the founder of the Safavid dynasty, whom he considers to be “the adornment of the pages of our national and religious history”, and starts complaining about the present conditions (151). Here he combines kingship and religion: “Lift up your head from the dirt of mercifulness and see to what extent your vile successors have degraded and discredited that religion and state” (152). He further calls upon other kings and princes, complaining of the present situation. In Ardabil, for instance, he spends a day in “Narin Fortress”, an old castle from hundreds of years ago. While there, he suddenly becomes tired of the state in which the fortress has been left, uncared for and left to ruin. Upset and angry, he turns his face toward “the direction of Qom” and calls upon Shah Abbas and Abbas Mirza,<sup>4</sup> complaining of the present conditions, regretful of the state Iran has fallen in, and wishing for the old days (153-4). Hence in his presentation of the glorious past of Iran, he juxtaposes it with the present state and provides an altered image seen in contrast to the terrible conditions Iran has fallen in.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to show how the main protagonist of the novel, Ebrahim goes on to alienate Iran and Iranians from the rest of the world in order to create the sense of national consciousness and a national identity amongst its readers. It looks at the concept of Other presented in the book and uses it as a point of contrast against which to create the Iranian Self. The Other as presented in the work takes on multiple meanings: The Muslim world, Europe and the West, third world countries, and Iran's golden past. Each of these Others was used as a point of contrast with the present state of Iran, drawing attention to the conditions of the country as compared with the rest of the world.

The book's sharp criticism of society made it a favourite among the readers while at the same time a problem for the authorities. Such that for a long time, many read the book in secret. The work awakened national consciousness and made Iranians aware of the similar situation in which they had all been, so that reading it felt as if awakening from a slumber and realising that everyone in the country felt the same (Kasravi 2013, 52-53; see also Kamshad 1966, 17). In addition, the importance of the book also lies in the fact that for the first time in Iran a Persian travelogue had turned into "an instrument of communication", enlightening the public opinion. The purpose of the book was to educate the people against old habits and superstitions. Accordingly, the author who was well aware of other countries' progress and development, compares them with the terrible conditions of Iran and Iranians' backwardness. The protagonist, Ebrahim, teaches the readers how to criticise social and political conditions, giving the work a historical perspective and importance (Rahmanizadeh and Najafi 2016, 38-41). Through the use of alienation, the author of the book, Maraghe'i aimed to highlight the terrible conditions Iran was in at the time, and at the same time wished to project a more hopeful and positive picture of the country if his dream and utopia were to come true.

## Endnotes:

1. Unless otherwise stated, all references to the work are from the English translation of the book by James D. Clark, titled *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beg*, published by Mazda Publishers in 2006, from hereon shortened to *Travel Dairy*.
2. There are doubts about the exact date of publication of the first volume. According to Aryanpoor (2008), it "seems" to have been published first in Cairo and then in 1888 in Istanbul (309). For Kamshad (1966), however, the first volume was published without a date in Cairo (17). On the other hand, in the introduction to the book in Persian, 1903 has been mentioned as the date of publication (Maraghe'i 2014, 11), while in the forward to the English translation of the book, Ghanoonparvar states that it was published in Cairo between 1895 and 1902 (Clark 2006, ix). In the introduction to the third volume of the work, written in 1327 AH/1909 CE, Maraghe'i states that the first volume was written "12 years ago" (538). This would make the year 1315 AH/1897 CE as the year of publication. On the other hand, in the first volume, the narrator mentions reading *Ketab-e Ahmad*, a work by Talbov published in 1896. This would make the year 1888 as the date of publication incorrect. See also Balaÿ and Cuypers 1987, 38.

3. See Zia-Ebrahimi 2011, 465-67 for examples of this type of writing.
4. A Qajar crown prince and military commander who died in 1833.

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