

WESTERN MODERNITY ENCOUNTERS ASIAN TRADITION: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND NATIONALISM IN IRAN

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Abstract

Iran and Iranians experienced an Islamic political upheaval after the Revolution of 1979, which led to national, ethnical, and religious modifications. After that process, the open-end question was raised in which course the Iranian nation will move on: western multiple modernity vs. Iranian tradition? The Iranian nation, which has a heterogeneous composition, does not differ significantly from its neighboring nations and the region around Western, Southern and Central Asia: We only think of the same languages, religions, and everyday social cultures that one can detect in Iran and its surrounding area. Territorially embedded in West Asia, but bordering Central and South Asia, Iran is bounded and equally populated by Turkish, Russian, Arab, Pakistani, Persian-Afghan and other nations. Only in a balanced - i.e. democratic, civic and inclusive relationship - Iran can assert itself in the long-term economically, culturally and religiously with its many ethnicities, languages and religions, and neighbors. This article seeks the question what and how the Iranian nation displayed superiority, say nationalism: Especially, the case of representation, (re-)construction of identity through different politicians active in cultural affairs or just diplomats are matters of fact in this article. The work and reflections of politicians and diplomats were to this point parameters of inclusion and exclusion to and in the Iranian nation. Finally, the following text centers on the last 20th and the current 21st century.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1935, the year when the country was renamed from Persia to Iran, statesmen have intended to give Persian absolute priority as an expression of the concept of a nation, which was evoked from the hardship and territory losses by the dynasty of the late Qajar. The preservation goal of an Iranian proper identity in the aftermath of the Qajar Dynasty was much a challenging and hybrid factor, as well. In the shape of a nation-state with political confined borders, institutions, education system and under the provisions of this 'new world order' Iran was without a doubt searching for its in-depth presence in the first part of the 20th century. Through the decades the notion of nation, nation-state and nationalism were an unseparated part of Iran. Hence, the national pride was adjusted for the de novo nation. Nationalism, or let us argue taking pride of one's ancient past, strengthened through the cultural and educational politics were based exclusively on the Persian art, music, and literature.¹ Instruction was given to the Iranian people from elementary school to university in Persian. The language of the institutions, the media or place appellations were therefore and despite other regional languages for the most part Persian. On these twilight of modernity and its historical grounds the newborn Western

¹ cf. Nasrin Rahimieh, *Marking Gender and Difference in the Myth of the Nation: A Post-revolutionary Iranian Film*, p. 239; The author Bani-Shoraka shares the same viewpoints throughout her researches (cf. p. 74).

idea of nation-state (territorial-political), nation (cultural-social) and nationalism (territorial-political-cultural-social) was carried out in the 20th century at full speed by Iranian authorities to compete with the international world.

Defining national identity and nationalism in Iran contains some open questions. There have been insufficient scientific contributions to the concept of Iran's national identity in the past.² In contrast to the 20th century, contemporary research on Iran about nationalism in the 21st century is more advanced,

There were two other consequences of importance to the development of modern Iranian nationalism. One, which has received relatively little attention, was the way in which history, and its retelling, was henceforth removed from the popular realm and relocated as a prerogative of the intellectuals and professional historians.³

Ashraf addresses some of the categories and approaches he has formed that could possibly explain Iranian nationalism. These categories are 'civilizing and romantic', 'conservative and traditional', 'liberal', 'religious and Shiite' and 'ethnic and cultural'.⁴ Ashraf is trying to find an answer to Iran's national identity. The concept of an Iranian national identity is interpreted, understood, and implemented differently by diverse groups (Iranian nationalists, monarchists, leftists, liberals or Islamists, etc.). Among these groups, the characteristic of the Iranian nation and national identity is reduced to few factors that are necessary to be described. Having said that is it right to speak of an ethnically heterogeneous nation? Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, cultural policy seems to have tended towards religious homogenization, while other affiliations and belongings are to be subordinated. This cultural-political initiative with a religious tendency seems to have been enacted by a modern Iranian concept of nation. Nationalism is scientifically proven, defined in a way that implies a homogeneous nation, "Nationalism describes an ideology that exaggerates the characteristics of one's own ethnic community (e.g. language, culture, history), sets it as something absolute and results in the exaggerated (usually aggressive) desire for unity between people and space."⁵

The phenomenon of Iranian national identity and nationalism of the past forty years must be understood in the changing and mutual influence of external and internal factors. The war on Iraq can be seen as an external factor of a different nationalism, which means, that the 'holy' defense policy of Iran's borders has created a national collective memory,

With the onset of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, it became apparent that the people could not be mobilized by religion alone. Confronting an Iraqi regime that had a clear interest in defining the struggle in ethnic rather than sectarian terms, the Islamic Republic was quick to adapt. The 'nation' became sacred.⁶

Rafsanjani's pragmatic economic policies brought about after the war, can be mentioned as internal factors and elements of again an innovative Iranian identity, which could lead to some extent to an updated national identity. The 'Dialogue of Civilizations', implemented as a policy by his successor Khatami, was an additional cultural and spiritual opening in and outside Iran.⁷ A third point was the recourse to pre-Islamic history and culture by Ahmadinejad's so-called 'Maktab-e Irani' (English: Iranian School of Thought),

² cf. Ahmad Ashraf, *The Crisis of National and Ethnic Identities in Contemporary Iran*, p. 159.

³ Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*, p. 24.

⁴ Ahmad Ashraf, *The Crisis of National and Ethnic Identities in Contemporary Iran*, p. 160.

⁵ Klaus Schubert and Martina Klein, *Das Politiklexikon*, p. 203; See also: Ernest Renan, *What is a nation?*.

⁶ Ali Ansari, *Iranian Nationalism Rediscovered*.

⁷ Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*, p. 247f.

Through the decade of the 1990s to the present, there has been a gradual synthesis of the various narratives of Iranian history - drawing on developments in modern historiography and the rehabilitation of traditional mythologies of descent as encapsulated in the national epic, the *Shahnameh (Book of Kings)*. It is a view of Iran's place in the world, which has been reinforced by the apparent reality of the [growing] Iranian influence in the region. This renewed Iranian national project is ongoing and far from complete.⁸

ATTEMPTS AND TEMPTATIONS TO DEFINE IRANIAN NATION

In its own developmental history, as a language, New Persian has a writing tradition of 1250 years, which extends beyond the current national borders of Iran. The cities of Samarkand and Bukhara can be referred to as the first center of New Persian. Persian has historically grown into a polycentric transregional Asian language before the advent of nation-states, thus it became a lingua franca with its own specific variety concept (genres). As a language, it accordingly has to date many urban centers that can be found not only in Iran, but also in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Azarbaijan and throughout the Caucasus, Pakistan, India and Iraq.⁹ It follows that it is too simple and misleading to restrict the development of Persian language history to today's Iran alone. In the history of Persian as a language many aspects should be taken into consideration to develop an updated multiperspective standpoint in the postmodern times of advanced digitalization. In consideration of the fact that in the early days of the Islamic Republic of Iran the nation-state was distorted, ethnic minorities were firmly convinced that they would still be able to preserve their cultural rights through a federal system,

Visions of a future Iran were diverse, ranging from an Islamic regime to a democratic socialist state. Activists among the non-Persian peoples, especially in Kurdistan, Turkman Sahra, Baluchistan and Khuzistan, sought a federal state, allowing extensive autonomy in administration, language, culture and economics.¹⁰

It is widely assumed, as explained already, that an alleged Iranian nationalism could have a purely Persian orientation value. To put this prediction in perspective, it is easier than never before to get into contact through social media with the same ethnicity, nation, religion and language beyond the political confined border at daily basis. But for all that cultural content shapes yet everyday life, particularly, through the instrument of the Persian language. This leads to indications by certain social classes about Iranian nationalism and national identity,

A large group of intellectuals see the Persian language as the fundamental element of Iranian identity. They argue that Persian conforms closely to the ways of thought and expression of Persian life and manners, a special symbol of national spirit, a major expression of Persian culture, personality and national character, and a unifying factor even before the advent of the modern state. Furthermore, the rise of the middle class, which identifies itself with Persian as the national tongue, has also helped the language to play a pivotal role in the formation of a national identity.¹¹

⁸ Ali Ansari, *Iranian Nationalism Rediscovered*.

⁹ cf. Bert Fragner, *Die Persophonie*, p. 40.

¹⁰ Hamid Riza Sadr, *Iranian Cinema*, p. 191.

¹¹ Ahmad Ashraf, *The Crisis of National and Ethnic Identities in Contemporary Iran*, p. 163.

The cultural oeuvres that should influence Iran's national identity since the beginning of the 20th century include the Persian national epic *Shahnameh* by Ferdousi from Tus.¹² He tells numerous stories of myths and heroes about the pre-Islamic period in Iran. The monument of the poetry of *Shahnameh* does not exclusively incorporate the current space of Iran. Rather, the *Shahnameh* is a legacy from another time, when the term 'Iran' was a few centuries old. Today's Iran had pursued its own and native models of rule before the Western idea of nation-state.¹³ For instance, Iran had always been a 'local empire' in its geographic evolution and persistent existence. It can therefore be said that Afghanistan and Tajikistan can regard the *Shahnameh* as their national key epic work, sharing a common and continuous historical Iranian identity of the pre-nation-state period. It adds up, when one is taking the Indo-Iranian languages in general terms as a historical linguistic continuity of Iran and its cultural sphere which spans beyond modern Iran. Likewise, the New Year's Festival (Persian: Nowruz) is another element of the Iranian national culture, but also that of the neighboring countries in West Asia, the Caucasus and the geostrategic region of Central Asia.¹⁴

Beyond that, a contemporary exposed Iranian nationalism has its particular domestic dynamics, which marginalizes often repeated the cultural peculiarities of the ethnic minorities in a multiethnic and multilingual nation-state. The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran invokes to respect other native ethnic groups or people, but to what degree in practice is this legal expert testimony granting freedom? The Iranian constitution states in Article 15 about the country's official language, scripture, calendar and flag,

The common language and script of the Iranian people is Persian. Official documents, correspondence and texts as well as textbooks must be written in this language and writing. However, the use of local languages and dialects in the press and other media, as well as the teaching of the corresponding literature in schools, is optional alongside the Persian language.¹⁵

In the current reign of Hassan Fereydoon Rohani (2013-), one of the highest objective was to give ethnic minorities a political, social, scientific, cultural-political and economic voice within policymaking. In reality, for the government other issues, such as foreign policy and the 2015 nuclear deal, were given a higher priority to.¹⁶

IRANIAN ETHNIC MINORITIES WITHIN THE NATION

Unlike the legal guarantees, given by the Iranian constitution, the reality for ethnic minorities in the country is different. The individual ethnic groups pass their language by

¹² cf. Monika Gronke, *Geschichte Irans*, p. 38.

¹³ Many scholars of Iranian studies from Persian-speaking countries (Persianate World), such as Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan shares the opinion that the term Iran as a state name is not by its nature exclusive (geographical-political), but more inclusive (geographical-civilizational). As Persian-Afghan, Persian-Tajik and Persian-Tajik-Uzbek scientists and historians of the history of the Iranian linguistic, cultural and civilization area - since 1935 when Iran was renamed from Persia to Iran - have been demanding a just gait of today's Iran towards them. Many scientists, poets and thinkers from the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad (AD 750-1258) came from today's countries of Iraq, Iran, Azarbaijan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Turkmenistan. However, in the 20th century, compared to the other two countries, namely Afghanistan and Tajikistan, Iran produced and received works most in the Persian language.

¹⁴ cf. Edward Wastnidge, Siddharth Saxena and Roy Allison, *Central Asia in the Iranian geopolitical imagination*, p. 12.

¹⁵ cf. *Enzyklopadie des Islam*, Offizielle Sprache, Schrift, Zeitrechnung und Flagge des Landes.

¹⁶ cf. Azadeh Kian, *Les Ambiguïtés du Nationalisme Iranien*, p. 1.

and large through oral transmission to the next generation. The school is therefore not used as a state educational institution with a teaching position for learning a language of the ethnic minorities. Cultural politicians in Iran believe that if they allow ethnic minorities to speak their own language alongside the official language, existing national values for cohesion would be at risk. Possible cooperation with ethnic members from neighboring countries, e.g. Iraq (Kurds) or Azarbaijan (Azaris), could lay the foundation for secession from the Iranian state.

Due to the constant wars and conflicts in the region of West, South and Central Asia, the Iranian government thinks that the least concessions to ethnic minorities at its western and eastern borders are endangering national integrity. There have long been efforts and considerations for a new division of West Asia.¹⁷ It can be assumed that the ethnic minorities of Iran, as glocal (local and global) actors, have less power over their project than that one attributes such control to them. In general, Iran has a geographical orientation towards western Asia rather than central Asia in the past and current century. Although, the historical, linguistic and other roots of Iran lie in Central Asia.¹⁸

The history of ideas and the politicized authority of interpretation of the Iranian nation have not only militant opposing critics. The opposite of this, the affirmation of Iranian nationalism against efforts by outside forces, was frankly propagated by personalities from ethnic minorities. Mehdi Bazargan, a former Iranian statesman, saw the Iranian nation and the Iranian nation-state in danger. In a last interview in 1994, Bazargan commented on the ethnic minorities in Iran, "Everywhere in the country, at all its corners, there is someone who cooks his soup. It is Kurdistan on one corner, Azarbaijan on the other corner, and Chuzistan in the south. There is a risk of complete disintegration."¹⁹

By explicitly naming certain ethnic minorities, which in this case are primarily located on the entire western border of the country and on all other political-territorial borders either, Bazargan referred to the breakup of the Iranian nation-state. In one of his last interviews, Bazargan did not give explicit reasons for the peril to the nation-state. But it is consensus that denying the rights of ethnic minorities in Iran can catalyze anti-national aspirations. The denial of their rights ultimately leads to separation efforts from the existing Iranian nation-state, which could have a fractional effect,

On the other hand, those who are concerned with the geographical integrity of multi-lingual Iran are cautious not to exclude and alienate such ethnolinguistic groups as Azaris, Kurds and Baluchis, by highlighting the Persian language as the foundation of Iranian national identity.²⁰

In retrospect, there is a suspicion that the Iranian leadership at all possible levels did not pay enough attention to the multinational status of Iran in the form of its ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, neither before nor after the Islamic revolution 1979. Therefore, to make a case and roughly speaking about the nation-state and its cultural policy: consequently, decision-makers often lack impartial and human rights oriented, and long-term policymaking. Iran, like its two western and eastern neighbors, Iraq and Afghanistan, has been inhabited and populated by all existing minorities for centuries. Although, the situation in Iran is not much ethnonationalist and tribalist (such as in the southern, southeastern and along the entire eastern part of Afghanistan bordering Pakistan), the Iranian leadership at all levels should be prepared for possible vulnerabilities. The appearance of social, ethnic, religious and western lifestyles and

¹⁷ cf. Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, *Plans for Redrawing the Middle East: The Project for a "New Middle East"*.

¹⁸ cf. Edward Wastnidge, Siddharth Saxena and Roy Allison, *Central Asia in the Iranian geopolitical imagination*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Navid Kermani, *Iran*, p. 38.

²⁰ Ahmad Ashraf, *The Crisis of National and Ethnic Identities in Contemporary Iran*, p. 163.

phenomena that seek to open up in a post-revolutionary phase should not be countered with the prevailing surveillance and security methods.²¹ Only the political, cultural and social freedom, that should be legally endorsed, will enable an ordinary Iranian to be recognized as a responsible citizen with an individual and at the same time Iranian 'collectivist' tradition.

IRANIAN CULTURAL POLICY

At this point, the interposed question can be raised as to whether the Iranian nation-state itself is determined by some activities of nationalism: This politically motivated applied nationalism, which even represents only parts of the Persian ethnicity, language and civilization, authorizes cultural policymakers in their efforts to practice a top-down approach. In this context, can nationalism be grasped as a universal idea?²² To better understand this cultural-political antagonism - universal vs. particular - this leveling system includes a correlation between authority and cultural policy,

1. Seizure of cultural and instructional sovereignty by or for a selected ethnic group,
2. By favoring this ethnicity,
3. Launch of that ethnicity and its culture e.g. through jurisprudence, educational institutions or media,
4. Formation of a nation based on ethnically oriented cultural policies favored by a written tradition,
5. Unstoppable dynamism of nationalism across the nation-state,
6. Initiation of an ethnic and cultural process to create a collective identity at the national level.²³

The result of the sketch is considered heuristically, which discloses the attempt of marginalization of other ethnic groups and their local traditions. It appears that the modern Iranian concept of nation and the resulting nationalism represent only a part of the entire Iranian nation, namely the Persians, despite a visible partiality with regard to the representation of the de facto members of the nation. An equivalent can be drawn from this by using the example of the 'cultural hegemony' that Marcus Banks observes in Great Britain, "Thus 'British' national identity is really only about and for the English. It is their values, their language and institutions that are promulgated."²⁴

For Iranian nationalism, the important question is whether the consideration of a single ethnic group cannot end in a dead end (especially in the age of glocalization, cosmopolitanism on the outside and the post-revolutionary phase on the inside).

In the fourth decade of its existence after the 1979 revolution, Iran is - especially after September 11, 2001 - a relatively stable political nation-state. One of the various possible reasons might be for this status quo that Iran does not wage open wars with terrorist and other groups' à la Daesh (Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, from 2014) or the Taliban on its territory.

Nevertheless, the ethnic, religious, denominational and linguistic diversity of Iran as a status quo shouldn't be forgotten. Events such as the collapse of the former Soviet Union can pose a threat to Iran's national integrity,

²¹ cf. Pejman Abdolmohammadi, *The Revival of Nationalism and Secularism in Modern Iran*, p. 7.

²² cf. Alam Saleh and James Worrall, *Between Darius and Khomeini*, p. 74.

²³ cf. Homayun Alam, *Ethnische Minderheiten im iranischen Film von 1980 bis 2010*, p. 101 (This model is based on the ideas of the author. It represents a model that would like to critically examine the current Iranian nation-state and the identity it creates, both historically and linguistically).

²⁴ Marcus Banks, *Ethnicity*, p. 159.

The formation of the Islamic Republic with ambiguous national and ethnic policies - which has coincided with the fall of the Soviet empire and rising national aspirations among numerous ethnic groups throughout the world - has exacerbated the ethnic tensions and ideological conflicts among the advocates of various modes of national and ethnic identities in Iran. This situation of a deeply divided society is likely to lead to greater tension around the problems of national and ethnic identities in Iran at the turn of twenty-first century."²⁵

EXCLUSION FROM THE NATION

In the general and global perception, Iran is equated with all Persian attributes (Persian Empire and civilization, language, literature, nation, carpet, kitchen or the Persian cat).²⁶ In many scientific publications, Iran is referred to as 'Persian' and its neighbors as 'others'. It should be noted that in the 20th century Iran compared to the other two countries (Tajikistan and Afghanistan, with Persian as the national language) played a strong role in the production, reproduction, translation and reception of literature, and sciences. These are important reasons that Iran intends to be perceived externally as a Persian cultural nation, which is part of the truth. At the same time, the inter and intracultural ethnic and linguistic unity of minorities evolved to a lesser extent internally. As a result, the current Iranian nation, which is equated with Persian, belongs to those who obey the rules in accordance with the cultural policy orders. In addition, religion is entangled with politics in the current Iranian state system. The conclusion suggests that the current Iranian nation-state is not only orienting itself to the secular government of the Shah, Persian (cultural policy), but also expanding its political orientation to include the factor religion.

In the time of the Safavids (1501-1722), Shia was systematically imposed as the state religion.²⁷ In the centuries that followed, there were many political changes, so that Iran suffered a loss of territory as a 'local empire'. This led afterwards to the formation of new nation-states, which from this time on carries different names. The idea of transnationality through ethnic, religious and linguistic connections is also more pronounced amid the ethnic minorities in Iran than among ethnic Persians.²⁸

Nevertheless, the roots of Iranian nationalism in the 20th and 21st centuries can be understood in an alternation between the 'Iraniyat' in the time of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (Shah) and the current political leadership with the preferred 'Islamiyat' designing the concept of 'Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist'.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi envisioned himself, once he was installed by the CIA as 'King of Kings', in the historical genealogy of Iranian ancient kings during his reign (1941-1979). Accordingly, he was the self-appointed representative of an at least 2500 years old imperial conception of history.²⁹ Through his homogeneous draft of the Persian version of 'Social Engineering' and the associated myth formation, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi hoped, that he could rule over a homogeneous people. He intended to form an identity, which transforms the ethnically, linguistically and religiously heterogeneous Iranians into immediate descendants of the old Persians, thereby giving the Iranians a Persian and consequently homogeneous significance. In this antiquated and historicized enterprise the Iranian nation is not only chosen, but it has the sole ownership of the Persian achievements in for example affairs of state, culture and genie. Thus, the Persians from the contemporary Iranian territorial nation-state ranked alongside their ancestors of today's Greeks (Hellenes) and Italians (Romans) according to their politico-civilizational

²⁵ Ahmad Ashraf, *The Crisis of National and Ethnic Identities in Contemporary Iran*, pp. 163-164.

²⁶ cf. Alam Saleh and James Worrall, *Between Darius and Khomeini*, p. 90.

²⁷ cf. Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Iran: An Old Civilization and a New Nation State*, p. 26.

²⁸ cf. Alam Saleh and James Worrall, *Between Darius and Khomeini*, p. 86.

²⁹ cf. Ali M. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*, p. 167.

self-image. A past golden age was revitalized: after that, the educational institutions, cultural policy and media served as body parts of the system. Negative and socio-politically valued, dissenters, left-wing thinkers, writers and intellectuals had no room within the absolutist secular Shah system. Viewed in a positive and anthropological way, people in the time of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi claimed that in fact social freedoms existed: This pointed out generation should receive a comprehensive ethno-nationalist, ideological blown up identity and its corresponding concept of nation.

The almost 35 million Iranians in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s should believe in the idea of an invented Persian nation, which was exclusive and of timeless beauty. What happened to them as 'half' citizens and individuals had far-reaching consequences in the exclusion of two understandings of the concept of nation. First, it was about contemporary Iranian, Asian, and glocal history; second, the intellectual history of the Islamic Middle Ages was touched, if at all, superficially from an Iranian heroic perspective. Through this biased or rather engineered understanding of history, the Iranians experienced their presence and immediate environment through the eyes of the Shah and his entourage in particular, in science, cultural policy, and likewise the oil economy.

The generation that is socialized in the Iraniyat of the Shah in the cultural and political system assume that they were in an Iran with a 2500 years old, tried and tested, and as a result civilized, unrivaled world region.³⁰ Despite the 1979 revolution, this view largely persisted in the perception of the people. Successively, this self-image of the national subjects or Iranian citizens, triggered by the state, did not fully die out. During the upheaval of the 1979 revolution, the actors of this generation took definitely their narrative luggage with them. They were able to continue to live out their injected nationalism in the small circle of the family, in the neighborhood, and in daily interactions.

The arrival of refugees from Afghanistan for example, who fled to Iran from the invasion of the USSR in 1979 indicates that the Iranian nation-state and its citizens were unprepared for their eastern neighbors. Once again, this litmus test showcased the afghan refugees were judged as the 'others': they were asked questions at the social level whether they followed the same Iranian (Persian) history, myths, and as well as the same Persian poetry and culture.³¹

INCLUSION IN THE NATION

In democratic and civic oriented nation-states, the identity of individuals is treated, discussed and mostly renegotiated seriously at all levels of the social environment. This allows people, who migrate to a democratic country like Germany and apply for citizenship, and to consider themselves as a part of the society. The law grants newcomers the right to integrate into society, the desired community, and ultimately the nation through the obtainable citizenship law.

In the Iranian case for contrary, to keep the critical tone, the judiciary, executive and legislature lack basic rights to obtain citizenship. Becoming an Iranian citizen is almost impossible. Iranian citizenship is exclusive and only becomes valid or inclusive through paternal connection to a male Iranian.³² It can only be claimed through a male parent. Furthermore, the name of the father is in the identity papers: This refers to the patriarchy, that the exclusively male descent is documented legally. This means that a person can only prove her or his descent through the Iranian father in order to obtain Iranian citizenship.

Even Iranian experts and parts of the Iranian civil society from home and abroad consider this political and legal inclusion in the nation by the father to be obsolete, and

³⁰ cf. Azadeh Kian, *Les ambiguïtés du nationalisme iranien*, p. 1.

³¹ cf. Homayun Alam, *Menschen- und Flüchtlingsrechte im Iran*, p. 234.

³² cf. Jason E. Tucker, *Exploring Statelessness and Nationality in Iran*, p. 6.

therefore outdated. The same relationship occurs when an Iranian male marries a foreigner. This means that in this particular case citizenship is inclusive and is due directly to the married female foreign person. The reverse is the case: no citizenship is granted if an Iranian woman marries a foreigner. The children of an Iranian and a foreigner are not included in the Iranian citizenship context, but excluded.³³ The legal treatment according to the international 10th December 1948 human rights act of newcomers as refugees from neighboring countries or those ones who intends to become Iranian citizens look as if a mission impossible. But then again, what and how were the terms and conditions in former times evolving an Iranian native identity through the Iranian statehood before the modern idea of nation-state? What does legacy from the political Iran and the Iranian cultural sphere within the scope of civilizations, thoughts, sciences or just languages imply for contemporary Iranians?

Both the 1250 year old written language history of New Persian from the Iranian cultural sphere - and not only from today's Iranian nation-state - and the oeuvres of the Iranian poet philosophers are inclusive in nature. These masters of their time came from the Iranian language, culture and civilization: Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent, Herat, Balkh, Khujand, Nishapur, Gandsha, Bagdad, Lahore and Delhi. They were presented as absolutely Iranian to the world, their surrounding neighbors and the Iranian nation in the era of the nation-state. Their worldly accomplishments were given a political boundary, which is at this instant called 'dislocative nationalism' in research. This means that in Iranian educational institutions their origin was not, not adequately or not properly named: The term Iran in its accurate history was or still is not defined in parts of Iran with the special reference to the Iranian cultural sphere.³⁴ It is often claimed that Iran, as an 'Aryan nation', deserves to be located in Europe, both territorially, and in terms of civilization.³⁵ This dichotomy - political reductionism and historical simplification - of an understanding of Iranian history could mean nothing other than educating a nation according to a political ideological desire that culminates into nationalism.

Today, historians of the Iranian linguistic and cultural sphere - Iranians, Afghans and Tajiks - have not managed to present an objective, valid, geographically concrete, transnational and inclusive history that have for example a rational and emotional impact to mass education institutions. Many shortcomings in the mutual understanding of Iranian history can be resolved among scholars of ancient and contemporary Iranian studies. But, the results and achievements of scholars in publications or online held conferences rarely reach the depths of native educational institutions (Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan), diaspora cultural associations (USA, Canada, Australia and Western Europe) and diverse domestic and foreign social media forums. The ultimate goal should be at long-term to execute at best a 'cultural collective remembrance' in which the conception of history sheds light on an inclusive, depoliticized and impartial notion of Iran.

From a critical point of view, it arises to the question who at the present has the authority to interpret and define Iran from the disciplines of the humanities, cultural and social sciences? Hasn't Iran been defined enough? Is not a historical-critical definition of a civilizing concept of the country - including much more than contemporary Iran - appropriate in the face of ethnic, denominational, linguistic and modern living environments as identity supporting? From a philosophical and historical perspective an intercultural publication in German made an attempt to depict the ethnonational origin. This publication traces the scientific contribution and ongoing influence of thinkers from the Islamic Middle Ages in a different way than previously done.³⁶ Many of today's researches compare for example present-day Iran (political-cultural) with another Iran in earlier centuries (civilizational-historical). It is becoming apparent that Iranian historians of

³³ cf. *ibid.*, p.7.

³⁴ cf. Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*, p. 197.

³⁵ cf. Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Iran: An Old Civilization and a New Nation State*, p. 21.

³⁶ cf. Hamid Reza Yousefi, *Einführung in die islamische Philosophie*, p. 23.

the 20th century did not critically examine the past of Iran in their writings. In the present, this attitude has partly improved, since historians and social scientists have replaced a mythical reading (belief) with facts (knowledge).³⁷

The predicament is largely that Iranian diplomats, such as Fereydoun Adamiyyat, in the 20th century without any academic knowledge, tried for example to comment historically on the Iranian concept of nation.³⁸ By disregarding scientific methods, a nostalgic Iran towards potential readers was designed, which had more anachronistic, reductionist, exclusivist, mythical, simplistic and heroic traits.

CONCLUSION

From different perspectives, the aim was to pursue an Iranian concept of nation, a supposed nationalism and an Iranian identity, whether they were scientific, historical, social, economic, imperial, political, cultural-political, linguistic or personal paradigms. A certain reading of this topic - Iranian nationalism and Iranian identity - can hardly be declared complete or completely objective by a few criteria. Rather, the question to be asked is whether an investigation into Iranian nationalism and national identity of Iran in its horizontal and vertical orientation (e.g. individuality, collectives, gender relations, city, provinces, glocalization, transregionalism, media, social networks, etc.) can be carried out by diverse variables. This multiperspective reading and approach could not even gain more importance than this article tried to suggest.

Iran's historiography has used certain aspects of Iran's history and past to design an authentic and heroic identity. However, the reception and the current reading either have revealed that Iran was introduced to its future readers by self-proclaimed historians with little professional knowledge. Rather, this historiography, which resulted into exaggerated nationalism in many phases of modern Iran, was the reconstruction of a golden-age-past, which lasted for 25 centuries. In the present, this consciousness that has been made, should instill in every Iranian in the 20th century so that national pride can be created.

How people get into a new community and how they are expelled from it is always a question with diverse approaches, courses and exits. In the Iranian context, it has inter alia to do above all with the citizenship act, which excludes large sections of society through its exclusivity and ex parte preference for the male gender. The inclusion of people in a nation-state primarily includes the same rights or citizenship rights, e.g. the locals to concede.

The Iranian nation, which has a heterogeneous composition, does not differ significantly from its neighboring nations and the region around western, southern and central Asia: We only think of the same languages, religions, and everyday social cultures that one can detect in Iran and its surrounding area. Territorially embedded in West Asia, but bordering Central and South Asia, Iran is bounded and equally populated by Turkish, Russian, Arab, Pakistani, Persian-Afghan and other nations. Only in a balanced - i.e. Democratic, civic and inclusive relationship - Iran can assert itself in the long-term economically, culturally and religiously with its many ethnicities, languages and religions, and neighbors.

³⁷ cf. Ali M. Ansari, *Myth, History and Narrative Displacement in Iranian Historiography*, p.10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.15.

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