Matters of Authenticity

Nationalism, Islam and Ethnic Diversity in Iran

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CHAPTER SIX

Matters of Authenticity: Nationalism, Islam and Ethnic Diversity in Iran

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During a ceremony in 2010, cameras caught Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in a somewhat awkward situation: he was tiptoeing to place a *keffiyeh* around the neck of a tall man on a podium. The checkered *keffiyeh* scarf, recognized as a Palestinian national symbol in most of the world, is seen by Iranians as an insignia of the hard-line *Basij* militia. The absurdity of the scene lay in the fact that the man on the podium was dressed not as an Islamist storm trooper, but as a soldier of the ancient, pre-Islamic Achaemenid dynasty. The ceremony marked not only the return of an important antique relic to Iran – the so-called Cyrus Cylinder – but also an important shift in ideological discourse. Ahmadinejad's clumsiness in bestowing the *keffiyeh* seemed to suggest his unease not so much at the presence of the foreign guests attending the ceremony but rather with the potential reaction of the wider domestic audience - in particular those of his Islamist supporters who would be shocked by the scene. Yet Ahmadinejad's *keffiyeh* bestowal did little to cover what was a blatant show of nationalist pride, unprecedented in Iran's thirty years as Islamic Republic.

Since its establishment in 1979, the Islamic Republic's relation to Iranian nationalism has been a sensitive topic. An underlying tension between national interests and ideological religious goals has not only made Iran's foreign policy seem arbitrary at times but has also caused

ideological disputes on its domestic scene. Yet as Ahmadinejad's show revealed, segments of the post-Khomeini ruling elite have embraced overt nationalism as part of their ideological discourse, despite the seeming theoretical contradictions between nationalism and Islamism. However, as Ahmadinejad's tiptoeing seemed to indicate, the decision to embrace nationalism in such a public position is not without its complexities. With international pressure over Iran's regional and nuclear ambitions, and with a protest movement that took shape in the aftermath of the 2009 Presidential elections, the centrality of national identity and its contentious relations to nationalism, Islam and democracy have become ever more pronounced in the discussion of Iran's future.

This is evident in Iranian public debate, in state rhetoric and in opposition discourses. The secular and liberal nationalist opposition continuously challenge the regime's legitimacy by accusing it of sacrificing Iran's national interests on the Islamist altar. The regime responds with the argument that Islam is key to Iran's national identity. At the same time, the question of 'Iranian-ness' has been further complicated since the late 1990s by growing ethnically framed mobilization and a budding movement for minority rights.¹ Roughly half of Iran's population is made up of non-Persian-speaking minorities, many of whom have co-ethnics outside Iran.² The Islamic revolutionary promise of equality for all has not materialized, and minority activists today demand political and cultural rights from what is seen as a Shi'i Persian-dominated center without respect for minorities. The issue of minority rights is thus tied up with questions of both democracy and national identity – and in extension, Iranian nationalism.³

In the present chapter, these interrelated issues are analyzed with a focus on the representation of nationalism and ethnic diversity in the contemporary official literature of the regime. Through this analysis, a nuanced picture of the regime-sanctioned ideal for national identity and unity emerges, which complicates specific claims put forward by secular-nationalist opposition (that the Islamic Republic is unpatriotic and anti-nationalist in nature) and by ethno-political

proponents (that the Islamic Republic is Persian-chauvinist or racist). This more nuanced reflection on the ideals of Iran's current leaders is central to the understanding of where the Islamic Republic is heading, more than thirty years after the revolution.

The National Constant

The 1925-1979 Pahlavi regime partially adopted a European-inspired nationalist doctrine formulated by late nineteenth century Iranian intellectuals. This secular state nationalism aimed to modernize Iran along Western lines, and it idealized Indo-European-speaking Iranians as "Aryans" and pre-Islamic empires as symbols of superiority to be emulated in modern Iran.⁴ In this worldview, the Persian language and culture was the primordial foundation of the Iranian nation and the quintessence of Iranian-ness. Non-Persian minorities and tribes were often seen as a potentially subversive and separatist element and an obstacle to modernization, which should be subdued and assimilated. Sometimes, the issue of ethnic diversity was distorted to fit a myth of homogeneity or conveniently "forgotten" in dominant narratives on national identity.

Despite the abolition of the monarchy, the Islamic Republic that Ayatollah Khomeini and his allies brought into existence after the revolution of 1978-1979 naturally inherited the Western-inspired nation-state framework of the Pahlavi regime. Khomeinism has been defined by Ervand Abrahamian as a "flexible political movement expressing socio-economic grievances, not simply a religious crusade".⁵ Yet, the state rhetoric that developed in the Islamic Republic would draw upon Shi'i mythology, Islamic notions of justice, support for anti-imperialist struggles and expressions of solidarity with Third World countries. Instead of glorifying pre-Islamic times, the new symbolic ideal was the pure Islam of the Prophet Mohammad's time, and instead of looking to the "Aryan" brethren in the West, the new state would focus on the *Umma*, the world community of

Muslim believers. In the idealist vision of Khomeini and his followers, the Islamic Revolution would not only encompass Iran, but also extend to the entire Muslim world.

However, this notion of exporting the revolution (*sodur-e engelab*) met with obstacles already in the new regime's infancy. Firstly, neighboring Iraq's 1980 attack on Iran reminded the ideologues that their revolution was first and foremost a national rather than an international project. The war was initially presented in Iran as a defense of Islam against blasphemy, and not a war of nationalisms.⁶ However, many Iranians inevitably understood Iraq's attack in nationalistic terms, and as the war dragged on for eight years, the leaders of the Islamic Republic relied increasingly on appeals to the Iranian public duty to mobilize and defend the homeland. Furthermore, while the revolution had inspired many Muslims across the world and provided Iran with some allies such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, the differences between Iran and its neighbors prevented the revolution, as an Iranian, Shi'i phenomenon, from spreading into Arab, Sunni lands. The export of the revolution did not find many clients in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Caucasus or Turkey either.

At least since the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11 the politically active Iranian clergy have expressed nationalistic sentiments. Indeed, nationalism in Iran has traditionally been intertwined with religion even though, historically, the focus of the ulama's rhetoric was on 'freedom/independence' (*azadi va esteqlal*) rather than on "nationhood" itself.⁷ Such was also the rhetorical focus of the revolutionary clergy at the time of the 1978-79 revolution, and in order to distance the new revolutionist political order from the old and from its secular rivals, it rarely utilized explicitly nationalist symbolism during the Islamic Republic's early years. Yet, the traumatic experience of the Iran-Iraq War and the need for national unity during testing times of regional and minority upheavals changed this. In the words of Suzanne Maloney, "Iran's experience

... reveals that identity is not infinitely malleable, especially when survival of the nation itself is at stake”.⁸

Thus, while Khomeini continued all his life to advocate a pan-Islamist utopia of a de-territorialized *Umma* united in brotherly love, he also had to rely – as the national leader of a nation-state with a nationalistic oriented population – on the cultural constant of (often Persian-centrist) Iranian nationalism.⁹ Khomeini and his followers thus supplemented the articulated pan-Islamic idealism with more subtle tones of nationalism, and with nation-oriented policies that have been described as ‘realist’ by several scholars.¹⁰ This increased reliance on strong, entrenched nationalist sentiments in the Iranian public coincided with a gradual change in domestic and foreign policies. After Khomeini’s death in 1989, Iran went through a period of economic reconstruction, international rehabilitation and pragmatism under President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and then, from 1996-2005, a period of reformism, rapprochement with the West, and a relaxation of social and cultural politics under Mohammad Khatami. Ahmadinejad’s election in 2005 marked a creeping militarization and the ascendancy of a new ruling faction that called for a return to Khomeini’s vision of social justice.

Yet, despite the ideological and factional differences between Rafsanjani, Khatami and Ahmadinejad, their presidencies have had one factor in common, namely the gradual emergence of overt nationalist symbolism in state discourse. For example, as Hooshang Amirahmadi observed of Hashemi Rafsanjani’s presidency,

“In early 1995, no less august a figure than Rafsanjani ordered the Islamic Republic News Agency to establish a newspaper called “*Iran*.” Not “Islamic Iran,” just “*Iran*.” Large advertisements for the newspaper – comprised of the three-color Iranian flag with no Islamic logos – adorned Tehran’s walls and billboards. In keeping with its name, the newspaper itself displays a similar pattern. It is telling

that the first issues of *Iran* reached the stands at the same time [that] the government banned *Jahan-e-Islam* (the world of Islam), a leading pan-Islamist newspaper.”¹¹

During Khatami’s presidency, Iran witnessed a blossoming of civil society movements, opposition activity and cultural-artistic life. Among the currents that re-surfaced were secular-nationalist (*melli-gara*) and religious-nationalist (*melli-mazhabi*) groups such as the National Front, The Freedom Movement and other small organizations. Although most such groups were officially outlawed, Khatami nonetheless tried to appeal to their sympathizers and to voters with similar nationalistic tendencies. As scholars have shown, *iraniyyat* (Iranian-ness) re-emerged, in the reformist government’s discourse, as a main pillar of national identity alongside *eslamiyyat* (Islamic-ness).¹² This “Islamist-Iranian” discourse did not aim to replace Islam but to enhance the national constant in order to strengthen a political order that was increasingly challenged by rival political and cultural trends.

The “Cyrus of Our Times”

During the Islamic Revolution, many observers feared that Islamist radicals would bulldoze the ruins of Achaemenid royal residences at Persepolis. Considering the latter as a symbol of *jaheliyyat* (pre-Islamic ignorance) and of centuries of monarchic despotism, some clerics allegedly called for the demolition of this 2,500 year-old World Heritage site. Yet today, the pre-Islamic legacy is once again openly utilized in state discourse. During a visit to the province of Fars in 2008, for instance, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei – Khomeini’s successor and current Supreme Leader – praised Persepolis as a source of pride for all Iranians.¹³ In a similar vein, during Ahmadinejad’s first term as President, the head of the Iranian Cultural Heritage Foundation suggested institutionalizing a National Kurosh Day as a way to co-opt the popularity of spontaneous celebrations at the pre-

Islamic King Cyrus' grave.¹⁴ When the so-called "Cyrus Cylinder" returned to Iran on loan from the British Museum in 2010 – the ceremony referred to in the beginning of this chapter – Ahmadinejad gave an emotional speech hailing the ancient relic as a symbol of Iranian justice and human rights throughout the world.¹⁵ After this event, the head of Iran's Cultural Heritage Foundation praised Ahmadinejad as "the Cyrus of our times."¹⁶ As Iran scholar Ali Ansari had already noted in 2007 when Ahmadinejad appeared at press conference in Tehran with his visiting Russian counterpart against a backdrop of Achaemenid symbols:

"[f]ew would have dared to exploit the symbolism as explicitly as Ahmadinejad — an unambiguous statement that Iranian nationalism, always a staple of the social consciousness, had returned to the political stage."¹⁷

Indeed, although he is known for his anti-Imperialist, Islamist and messianic statements on the international scene, Ahmadinejad is also an Iranian nationalist. Phrases like "the Great Nation of Iran", or describing Iran as "the dearest country in the world" are regular features in his speeches,¹⁸ he has called Iranians the inheritors of pre-Islamic heroes "Rostam, Arash and Farhad"; his supporters have dubbed him a descendant of The *Shahnameh*'s national savior "Kave the Blacksmith";¹⁹ and, to the great consternation of his hard-line allies, Ahmadinejad has paid his respects to the widow of a secular-nationalist minister from Mohammad Mosaddeq's pre-revolutionary cabinet.²⁰ Finally, capitalizing on and in response to the global Iranian outrage over the 2004 map published in the *National Geographic*, which referred to an "Arabian Gulf," Ahmadinejad's government also instituted a National Persian Gulf Day, celebrated to this day.²¹

This increasing reliance on a nationalist rhetoric that is particularly aimed at those in the middle-class who have otherwise been disillusioned with the regime, peaked with statements by Ahmadinejad's controversial key adviser and confidant, Esfandiyar Rahim-Masha'i at a meeting for expat Iranians in August 2010. During the speech, Masha'i argued that in order to promote "the

truth of Islam to the world, we should raise the Iranian flag,” that “without Iran, Islam would be lost,” and that “from now on, we must present to the world the School of Iran [*maktab-e Iran*]”.²² These words, which seemed to privilege Iran over Islam, unleashed a torrent of critique from prominent clerics, high-ranking military figures and conservative intellectuals that otherwise supported Ahmadinejad.²³ The critics argued that Rahim-Masha‘i’s statements were blasphemous deviations from the revolutionary path and threats to national security. The President nonetheless defended his adviser.²⁴

The gradual emergence of explicit nationalism in official regime discourse can of course be traced back to the revolution, but it arguably picked up speed after the death of Khomeini. Today, the “Islamist-Nationalist synthesis” predicted by at least one scholar many years ago²⁵ has come full circle. As Haggai Ram has explained, the classic portrayal in Western scholarship of the Islamic Revolution as the “ultimate defeat of nationalism at the hands of radical Islam” is thus erroneous.²⁶ Simplistic dichotomies and the contraposition of “Islamic identity” and “national identity” (and, in some works, “radicalism”/“fanaticism” and “pragmatism”/“rationalism”), has served, in the words of Ram, to present nationalism in the Islamic Republic as a “deviation” rather than an “integral part” of official doctrine:

“[n]ationalism was transformed into a kind of false consciousness, an unnatural growth with which the Iranians had to come to terms, a pragmatic ‘compromise’ they were compelled to strike in light of changing realities”.²⁷

As already indicated, this chapter is instead premised upon the view that nationalism has always been an inherent part of the ideology and politics of the Islamic Republic – just as in practically all other modern nation-states. What has changed is the Ahmadinejad government’s “rediscovery” and employment of overt, tangible nationalist imagery and rhetoric that at times even resembles pre-revolutionary secular symbolism and the tendency to glorify pre-Islamic times (*bastan-gara‘i*). This

change allows a president such as Ahmadinejad to identify with both the pre-Islamic King Cyrus and with Khomeini's revolutionary Islamism at one and the same time. The question is, of course, whether this change in rhetoric also signals a potential future transition in the very structure of the Islamic Republic. To understand this question, we must explore how the establishment seeks to explain and justify the synthesis of Islamism and nationalism through the prism of Khomeinism.

Challenging and Reinventing a Patriot

A wide range of Iranian political forces contest the definition of nationalism. While nationalist symbolism is now an obvious part of state discourse, it is certainly also a main staple of counter-discourses. A standard approach of the secular-nationalist opposition is to present Khomeini, the founder and icon of the Islamic Republic, as unpatriotic and anti-nationalist. For example, quotes such as the following have been attributed to Khomeini:

“What is Iran? Iran is nothing but some mountains and some plains, some earth and some water. A true Muslim cannot love a country – any country. For his love is reserved only for his Creator. We do not worship Iran, we worship Allah. For patriotism is another name for paganism. I say let this land burn. I say let this land go up in smoke, provided Islam emerges triumphant in the rest of the world.”²⁸

While the source of this citation is dubious and the quote, itself, most probably fabricated,²⁹ it is noteworthy as an example of the claim typically forwarded by critics of the Islamic Republic: that Khomeini and the Islamists have never cared for Iran as a nation or a homeland, and that all that matters to them, instead, is the *Umma*. Such claims are not limited to polemical writing: they can also be discerned as an underlying idea in much scholarly and journalistic writing. In one example from a biography of Khomeini, we are told that the Ayatollah,

“leaving the airport in 1964, had asked his minder, a SAVAK colonel, whether he knew that he was being exiled because he had defended the honour of his homeland. Now, as he re-entered Iranian airspace, he was asked what emotions he felt after nearly fifteen years of exile. ‘None!’ he replied bluntly. For a man who felt himself permanently imbued with the love of God, a homeland did not mean much. For mystics and puritanical Muslims, it is the *Dar al-Islam*, the House of Islam, not the *patria*, which is all-important.”³⁰

There are, indeed, several quotes in the official collection of Khomeini’s speeches that support this anti-nationalist image. One such quote is his slogan-like 1980 statement that “[t]hose who say ‘We want to revive nationhood’ are standing in opposition to Islam ... Islam is opposed to nationhood.”³¹ Khomeini repeatedly called nationalism a “source of misfortune” for Muslims and an imperialist tool to destroy the *Umma* from within.³² He actively combated nationalists of all colors, and he dismissed pre-Islamic symbolism and ethnic/national chauvinism as forms of paganism. Taken together these statements give the impression of Khomeini as someone utterly uninterested in and even opposed to nationhood and nationalism.

Khomeini is sometimes portrayed, in secular-nationalist discourses, as a traitor to Iran who preferred Arab to Iranian culture. Thus, some secular critics – in particular ultra-nationalists, pan-Iranists and royalists – tend to describe the rulers of the Islamic Republic as *tazi-tabar* (being from Arab descent) or as *Zahhak* (a mythological ‘Arab’ enemy of Iran from The *Shahnameh*). In this kind of popular political imagination, Khomeini is sometimes presented as being of British-Indian descent - and therefore an agent of British colonial interests.³³ The legitimacy of the Islamic Republic as an authentic political system in the service of the nation, an image that the Islamic Republic has always been keen to project, is thus challenged. This challenge is a key reason why

the Islamic Republic's propaganda machine has been engaged in recent years in re-introducing Khomeini as a patriot in his own right.

In 2004 and 2006, two works appeared in Iran that serve as interesting examples of current official portrayals of Khomeini: one by Ali-Mohammad Baba'i-Zarech on the "The *Umma* and the nation in Imam Khomeini's thought," and the other by Yahya Fowzi Toyserkani on "Imam Khomeini and national identity."³⁴ Published by the Center for Documents on the Islamic Revolution – a state-run press whose head is appointed by the Supreme Leader – the books arguably represent 'the official line' of the regime. Generally, the Center publishes books that focus on the history of the revolution, commemorations of the Iran-Iraq War martyrs and other Islamist and Pan-Islamist themes. The two books by Baba'i-Zarech (henceforth BZ) and Toyserkani (henceforth YT) differed somewhat in topic, message and audience as they dealt directly with issues of Iranian nationalism and nationhood. To understand why the Center would publish these books, we must look at the timing of their publications.

In this period, the US-led "War on Terror" raged in Iran's neighboring countries, Iraq and Afghanistan, and in response to a changed geopolitical reality, the Islamic Republic underwent domestic militarization and two dual (but not mutually exclusive) trends towards *osulgara'i* ('fundamentalism', referring to an ideological return to the Khomeinist tenets of the revolution), and nationalism. In the case of the latter, Iran's political leaders sought to muster support even among skeptical or disapproving segments of the population. One way to achieve this was to recast the image of Khomeini and his ideology in a more nationalistic light. These two books can thus be read as an attempt to bridge the gap between the ruling elite and Iranian citizens in the middle-class, many of whom have been born after the revolution, and arguably feel alienated from the pan-Islamist rhetoric. The embedded problematic in both books is how to legitimize nationalism without betraying the revolution's Islamist tenets. The writers are engaged in a tiptoeing balancing act:

while on one hand, they must stay true to Khomeini's religious message, on the other, they have to downplay radical pan-Islamist views that would contradict nationalist imperatives and offend patriotic readers.

The points that are of most interest and will be the focus of analysis here, are those sites of apparent ambiguity, paradox and contention in the ideological message conveyed in the books. The first is the authors' defense of the Iranian nation-state as a unique, continuous, and permanent territorial entity – despite Khomeini's vision of a global united *Umma*. The second is the authors' legitimization of a patriotism or nationalism³⁵ - despite Khomeini's confessed rejection of nation-based ideology. The third is an essentialist notion of national identity very similar to those of secular nationalists – despite Khomeini's rejection of secular symbols as the basis for national identity.

Demarcating Authenticity

First, there is the discussion of territory. Both authors try to smooth over the inherent theoretical contradiction between the united global *Umma* and the demarcated nation-state by way of the concepts of *esalat* (authenticity) and *asil* (authentic). Baba'i-Zarech claims, on one hand, that in Khomeini's view, national borders do not have *esalat*, that is, “authenticity” and “validity”; such borders are not *asil*, meaning that they are not “genuine” or “authentic” (BZ, 97-8). The only *asil* border is that of the *Umma*, which separates, through faith and belief, the *Dar-ol-eslam* (the Islamic realm) from the *Dar-ol-harb* (the rest of the world)(BZ, 100-101). However, on the other hand, Baba'i-Zarech claims that, according to Khomeini, borders are necessary to human life (*lazeme-ye zendegi-ye bashari*), natural (*tabi'i*) and accepted by Islam (*be rasmiyyat shenakhte mi-shavad*)(BZ, 103).

Baba‘i-Zarech assures his readers that Khomeini did not want to abolish borders, and that there is no reason for dissolving nationalities and races to achieve “Islam’s united world government” (*hokumat-e vahed-e jahani-ye eslam*)(BZ, 94). Indeed, we are told that Khomeini never wanted to merge the Muslim nations into one (BZ, 169). The conclusion is that borders – geopolitical borders dividing states as well as ethnic and linguistic borders dividing people – are somehow natural and necessary facts of life that will exist forever, even if they are not authentic or essential - and even if an Islamic world government came into being. The demarcation between the acceptable and the unacceptable is thus an elusive concept of authenticity. According to the authors, Khomeini declared that since “the boundaries of the nation are the boundaries of Islam,” the “defense of the Islamic countries is one of the [Religious] Prescripts (*vajebat*)” (ibid). Thus, when Khomeini promised that he would not allow “one inch of Iran’s soil” to fall into enemy hands, he was in fact defending Iran as an extension of Islam (BZ, 169).

The second point of ambiguity pertains to the discussion of *mihan* and *vatan* (homeland), as opposed to *mellat* (nation)³⁶ and *melliyyat* (nationhood or nationality) – and the interrelated question of nationalism and patriotism. Baba‘i-Zarech argues that whereas *mellat/melliyyat* is a “new matter whose history does not extend beyond a couple of centuries,” *mihan* and *vatan* are supposedly older concepts, and that “homeland” signifies something that is “as old as human kind” (BZ, 74).³⁷ He argues that

“[w]ith the appearance of Islam, and with the tendency towards this world-encompassing religion, the Iranian people did not let go of the sacred values of loving the homeland, nor did they equate propagating the Islamic values and promoting the religion with destroying this natural sentiment ...” (BZ, 40).

While Baba‘i-Zarech refrains from using the actual term ‘nationalism,’ he does use the phrase *mehr-varzi be vatan* or “love of the homeland,” which he deems “natural” and

even a “sacred value” (*arzesh-e moqaddas*), thus lending a sacrosanct air to a patriotic sentiment that allegedly predates Islam. Such a statement seems to contradict Khomeini’s rejections of national chauvinism and pre-Islamic ignorance mentioned earlier. However, Baba‘i-Zarech explains the difference as follows:

“Interest in the country [*‘alaqe be keshvar*] or love of the homeland [*hobb be vatan*] is not incompatible with Islamic ideology [*ide ‘olozhi-ye eslami*]; it is an idea nurtured in the womb of Islamic ideology, and it is something other than nationalism [*nasiyonalism*]. In other words, one must recognize a difference between love of the homeland [*mihan-dusti*] and nationalism [*nasiyonalism*]. [D]uring the Islamic Revolution, it was thus love of the homeland, and not nationalism [*nasiyonalism va melli-gara ‘i*] that supplemented Islamic ideology.” (BZ, 73).

This “love of the homeland” is not in itself an *ideology* but an *idea*, Baba‘i-Zarech maintains, even though nationalism as an ideology *can* also be used for ‘homeland-loving’ purposes (BZ, 74).

To detach and retrieve the idea of a homeland (*vatan*) from a potentially secular context, Toyserkani similarly refers to Khomeini’s statements such as Islam “honors the homeland” and that “love for the homeland” and “defending the country” are “issues beyond doubt” (YT, 185). In fact, according to Toyserkani, what Khomeini rejected was Western nationalism: based on ignorance and employed by enemies, such nationalism will place Muslims in opposition to each other (YT, 178). This is why Khomeini declared that the concept of “nationhood” should not be confused with “paganism” (*gabriyyat*). Hence, even though Khomeini opposed using the concept of nation as “pretext for ideologies of ethno-nationalism, racism or nationalism,” he nonetheless saw it as a potentially “constructive factor,” and stated that “we will make any kind of self-sacrifice for the nation, but in the shadow of Islam” (YT, 177).

The authors' main point here seems to be that the meaning of *mellat/melliyyat* has changed from signifying "religious community" to "nation"/"nationhood." Caught in the destructive maelstrom of Western colonial modernity and deprived of its original religious meaning, it has become the basis for the "negative" nationalist ideology of imperialists, liberals and secularists. "Love of the homeland," on the other hand, amounts to patriotism in its pure and positive sense since it can be defended as part of an Islamic context, the writers argue.³⁸ It appears that the only clear distinction between negative and positive nationalisms is in Khomeini's opposition to specific, domestic political currents and to Western ideologies more generally. Nonetheless, Khomeinism is presented in the official literature as a historically authentic, homegrown and ideologically / religiously justifiable patriotism.

Identifying Authenticity

The third point of ambiguity and contention relates to national identity or spirit. Both authors explain that in Khomeini's view on identity, only Islam can be *asil* and *zati*, or authentic and constitute an intrinsic marker of identity – all other markers of identity, including national and ethnic ones, are *arzi*, or extrinsic and non-essential. Khomeini, they explain, argued that Islam is the "authentic basis and key to Iranian national identity," from which would rise "a national self-confidence" (YT, 186). In short, Khomeini did not view Iranian identity as something that could exist *sui generis* without being grounded in a deeper, authentic Muslim identity.

Yet Baba'i-Zareh nonetheless suggests that *iraniyyat*, Iranian-ness – the 'secular' part of Iranian national identity, so to speak – *can* have *esalat* as long as it is confirmed through *eslamiyyat* (Islamic-ness). Indeed, despite their precarious geographical location, constant cultural exchanges and numerous crises, the Iranian people, he argues, have always "risen to guard Iranian identity, and in this way, the Iranian spirit has protected its authenticity [*esalat*]" (BZ, 193). Hence,

Iran as a nation – specifically, Iran as a spiritual rather than material concept (*mafhumī rowhani*) – has *esalat* (BZ, 168).

Toyserkani similarly argues that Islam was “flexible” when it came to nations, languages, races and cultures, and actually facilitated rather than complicated the continuation, after the Muslim invasion, of indigenous Iranian culture from pre-Islamic times (YT, 100). Furthermore, on its next level of refinement, the Iranian “spirit” found in Shi‘ism “the best way to acknowledge and protect authentic/pure Iranian characteristics” and thus guard local traditions, revive the Persian language and create a national government in the Safavid period (YT, 101). The fusion of “genuine Iranian culture” (which originated in pre-Islamic times) and Islam, argues Toyserkani, created an “Iranian-Islamic culture” that brought out, rather than suppressed, the basic essence (*jan-maye*) of national identity (YT, 187).

The authors thus seem to circumvent Khomeini’s fundamental premise that only Islam has *esalat*, and that Islamic identity, alone, is *asil*, with factors such as blood, race, color, politics and geography playing no important role in shaping the true identity of a society (YT, 167, 196). The authors’ arguments are not only markedly different from the radical Islamist perspective that deemed everything pre-Islamic as ‘ignorance’ (*jaheliyyat*), but also in their praise for an Iranian national spirit, which is pure (*asil*) and possesses *esalat*, they even echo essentialist views similar to those of secular nationalists.

This tendency can also be seen in Toyserkani’s statement that Khomeini not only “accepted nation and nationhood as grand, collective units,” but that he also saw “some of the constituent elements of a nation, such as racial and linguistic differences, as natural facts and as necessary to the Order of Creation [*nezam-e afarinesh*]” (YT, 176). We are thus told explicitly, and in clear contradiction to the statement presented earlier, that Khomeini was *not* opposed to nationhood. Indeed, with the idea that the “nation” is part of “Creation,” the authors provide

justification for a state-defined, clerically-sanctified Iranian nationalism. This nationalism is embodied in Islam, Shi‘ism and Khomeini’s vision of the Islamic Republic. The ideal to aspire to, of course, is Khomeini, the ultimate Islamist patriot: the authors point to the *vali-ye faqih*, the Islamic jurisprudent ruler, or Supreme Leader, as the “best defender of territorial integrity and national values” of Iran (BZ, 170).

Both authors argue that Khomeini operated with a combination of idealism and realism in his policies – even when it came to identity politics (YT, 131). So we could arguably conclude that Khomeini’s view on national identity was instrumental or tactical: part of a shrewd balancing act between far-reaching idealist goals and utopian visions for humanity and the *Umma* on one hand, and “pragmatic” short-term goals, national interest and popular patriotic sentiments on the other. Yet, the balancing act is portrayed in the official, ideological literature as the sign of a natural equilibrium, and not of cold calculations.

With these exclusivist territorial notions and nationalist essentialism, a critic cannot help wondering what became of revolutionary, internationalist statements such as “the Islamic Republic belongs to all Muslims” (BZ, 220). However, there appears to be an even more urgent and critical question: whether the Iranian state can even be said to belong to all Iranians.

A Chauvinist Republic?

Compared to its neighbors, Iranian society has historically been endowed with a relatively strong sense of unity despite (or because of) its ethnic diversity. Nonetheless, modern Iran has also experienced periods of regionalist and even sporadic separatist activity, often during times of political chaos and frequently spurred by foreign power meddling. Domestic political changes, developments in neighboring countries as well as trans-national and global political and cultural

trends are all factors that have stimulated a growing ethnic awareness and ethno-political activity since the late 1990s.³⁹

From 2005 to 2007, Iran witnessed ethnically framed unrest in border provinces populated by Azeri, Kurdish, Arab and Baluch minorities. In response to these emerging national security threats, Islamic Republic officials resorted to a two-pronged nationalist rhetoric.⁴⁰ On the one hand, this rhetoric glorified Iran as an ancient nation, praised patriotism and vilified minority activists and organizations in terms very similar to the Pahlavi secular-nationalist discourse, namely as subversive “Internal Others” or as naive compatriots led astray by foreign plots to destabilize Iran. On the other hand, the rhetoric ostensibly aimed at national unity by means of officials praising the country’s ethnic diversity and the role of minorities in national epics and particularly in the defense of Iran’s territorial integrity. While they condemned the violence, they also recognized socio-economic problems in areas inhabited by minorities.

There is reason to assume that some radical ethno-political organizations have indeed been sponsored by foreign powers.⁴¹ However, Tehran’s allegations against discontented minorities have been disproportionate and used as a pretext for a violent clampdown on the opposition. The result has been an intensification of the crisis as discontented minority members find a voice in ethnically framed organizations and spokespersons who claim that minorities – for various historical, political, religious, social and economic reasons – feel marginalized and discriminated against. When the state represses such organizations and spokespersons – including nonviolent human rights groups – and conflates their demands with anti-Iranian subversion, the result is radicalization.

There are indeed many examples of state policies that discriminate against minorities. The political system is based on Shi’i Islamic authority, and therefore partially exclusive of all other religious denominations in Iran (such as Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism) and all other

sects of Islam (most importantly Sunnism, to which some six million Iranians adhere). Even though the Iranian constitution states that “[a]ll people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; color, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege,”⁴² there are in fact several barriers in the political system for non-Persian, non-Shi’i Iranians. Accordingly, ethno-political proponents complain that minorities are not sufficiently represented in the political system, and that they suffer from socio-economic marginalization.

The restrictions on minority languages arguably constitute the most visible legacy of discrimination against non-Persians in contemporary Iran. Article 15 of the constitution states that non-Persian languages are permitted in public education and mass media. Yet they are still not taught in public schools, and most of them are either not studied at all, or dealt with only in a few small university departments.⁴³ Minority language media suffer from repression, censorship and intimidation, and only at intervals are minority journalists and authors not affiliated with the state permitted to publish in their own languages. Furthermore, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity is seldom treated in school textbooks,⁴⁴ and in the academic literature, minority languages are often reduced to mere “dialects.” All of these conditions are symptoms of a tendency to neglect or reject the existence or significance of non-Persian ethnic identities.⁴⁵

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the juridical, political, social, cultural and economic barriers that minority proponents describe, and it suffices to state that the scope and intensity of minority activism and unrest are signs of a growing political awareness and discontent. Rather than rejecting or defending the views of minority movements, this section of the chapter will focus on how the state discourse of “multi-ethnic harmony” seeks to counter the challenges of minority activism. This is clearly a question of great importance to the topic of nationalism and the discussion about what should constitute “Iranian-ness” – yet it is also an understudied question that deserves more research attention.

The core argument put forward by radical ethno-political proponents is that despite all its assertions of multi-ethnic harmony and equality, the Islamic Republic is essentially Persian-centric.⁴⁶ One proponent, the Canada-based scholar and activist Ali-Reza Asgharzadeh, claims that “under the Islamic rule, racism and xenophobia continued to flourish in Iran, just as they [did] under the previous Pahlavi regime.”⁴⁷ To Asgharzadeh, even the late 1990s reformist discourse on pluralism and diversity was merely meant for “external consumption.”⁴⁸ Indeed, it is a mainstay of the radical ethno-political discourse to designate the Islamic Republic as Persian-chauvinist or “Farsist,” claiming that the ruling elite seeks to assimilate or eradicate minorities, and force upon the population a vision of a uniform, ethnically homogeneous and essentially Persian(-ized) Iranian-ness with no room for diversity.

Discourses of Unity, Perils of Diversity

The official ideological literature, however, actually *emphasizes* that Iran is a multi-ethnic society. In Toyserkani’s work, for example, Iranians are described as a “heterogeneous conglomerate” that came into being through successive waves of migration, war and political-economic rivalries, and is characterized by “racial and ethnic diversity” (YT, 67). History, Toyserkani states, has endowed Iran with a mixed population of “Aryans and non-Aryans, Greeks and Macedonians, and other groups such as Black Africans” (YT, 68). Furthermore, he emphasizes that various ethnic groups, including Arabs and Turks, have ruled Iran throughout history, and that each of these groups contributed to Iranian national identity and culture (YT, 70-1). Toyserkani concludes that

“... in the present circumstances, one cannot deem race, blood or ethnicity to be important and fundamental factors in Iran’s national identity ... [E]ven though Iran today is made up of different ethnic groups, there is no specific ethnic group that

constitutes [Iranian] identity and basically, this [ethnic] factor does not enjoy an important standing in the national identity of Iran” (YT, 71).

Khomeini’s sparse statements on the topic of diversity play a crucial role in the official literature’s message of multi-ethnic harmony. According to this message, Khomeini did not reject ethnicity but rather described it as “a starting point”, an intermediate level, on man’s road to perfection (YT, 134). In the end, Islamic identity will override the significance of other identity markers such as ethnicity. In short, Khomeini’s Islamism – and therefore also ideal Iranian nationalism – is *not* opposed to ethnicity as a concept, but does not deem it important. Nonetheless, Toyserkani also accepts a potential contradiction between ethnic and national identity:

“If we acknowledge family, ethnicity, society, nation and the *Umma* as markers of collective identity, some will naturally be interpreted on the surface as homogeneous and others as heterogeneous ... Since the emphasis on elements that make up an ethnic identity stands in opposition to national identity, these differences conclude in a natural heterogeneity [*na-hamguni-ye tabi‘i*] in identities. One of the markers of ethnic [identity] is an emphasis on the racial or lingual element, which is different from other ethnic groups; and on the other hand, in national identity, emphasis is on common, national features, and no attention is paid to ethnic elements” (YT, 166).

The existence of such heterogeneity and of various ethnic and national identities was “necessary and essential,” “natural facts” and part of “historical and social reality” (YT, 166, 175). Indeed, ethnic identities are “acceptable to Islam” as long as they are not turned into “radical sentiments” (*ta‘assobat*)(YT, 131-2). Khomeini used Islam to iron out these differences so as to minimize the risk of radicalism. He stated that in “Islam, race is fundamentally not an issue”; that the co-existence of various ethnic identities “has never been an issue” (YT, 178); and that “in Islam ...

there is no separation between two Muslims who speak two [different] languages” (YT, 181). This view on diversity was, according to Toyserkani, based on Khomeini’s understanding of the Quran and the Islamic philosophical notion of “unity within diversity, diversity within unity” (*vahdat dar ‘eyn-e kesrat, kesrat dar ‘eyn-e vahdat*) (YT, 166).

Another relevant Khomeini quote is from his historic “Speech to the People of Kurdistan,” in which he attacked ethnicity-based ideologies as harmful to Islamic unity:

“[T]o the inhabitants of Kurdistan[:] you ... should not be fooled by these small groups. They have created an instrument against Islam! The instrument of racism[:] the project of separating Kurd, Lor, Persian and so on from each other, and of bestowing on each an independent entity for themselves. This is what Islam has come to destroy[:] these walls; Islam has come to ... place all of you and all of us and all Muslims under the banner of ‘There is No God But God,’ and in unity, to be together, breathing together and bringing forth Islam.” (Khomeini quoted in YT, 180).

Surely, the underlying message in this speech is a response to separatist guerilla organizations (what are referred to as “small groups”) among the Kurds. However, apart from separatism, it is also addressed to the broader and deeper problem of racism, which is seen as the gravest threat brought about by ethnically framed ideology. Khomeini summed this up in the term *nezhad-bazi* (‘the race game’): when a Turk wants to pray in a “Turkish” fashion, an Arab demands that “Arabism should govern” and an Iranian claims that “the Aryan race must rule instead of Islam” (YT, 181). Islam came to destroy this “race game,” Khomeini proclaimed, and those who tried in modern times to revive the game by looking “2,500 years back in time” to Iran’s pre-Islamic splendor were “reactionaries” (ibid). It is thus in an attempt to counter the latent Persian-centrism of Iranian

nationalism and the threat of ethnically framed minority mobilization, that the official ideological literature presents this notion of Islam as a progressive answer to regressive, racialized thinking.

According to some radical voices in the minority movement, the ideology of the Islamic Republic aims to promote cultural or even racial and ethnic homogeneity, if not an Aryan supremacy. However, the official literature of the regime analyzed above seems to suggest otherwise in that it puts forward distinctly non-racial and non-ethnic definition of national identity.⁴⁹ Referring to the sparse (and admittedly vague) references in Khomeini's speeches, the literature depicts Khomeini's views on national identity as ethnically inclusive but ideologically exclusive. Islam is presented as the ultimate tool to combat discriminatory, reactionary ideologies that are by-products of "Western" modernity and imperialist schemes. The enemy, so to speak, has never been, the non-Persian, the non-Shi'i or the non-Muslim minorities, but rather those who seek to abuse these communities for political and ideological goals contrary to those of the Islamic Republic. The threat is ideology, not ethnicity.

All this can of course be dismissed as deceitful propaganda; a smokescreen to cover the essentially intolerant nature of the current regime.⁵⁰ However, it is also possible to argue that even though discriminatory policies have persisted in the Islamic Republic and continue to harm Iran's minorities, Khomeini's vision – at least in its professed idealistic core and on its articulated rhetorical surface – *can* accommodate ethnic diversity. The message of the official literature discussed in this chapter, regardless of whether we reject or accept it as truthful, is tolerant of minority rights. By reinterpreting Khomeini, the authors are formulating an Iranian Islamist-nationalism that can, at least nominally, include ethnic diversity while excluding ideological pluralism. The actual and increasingly evident problem, however, is that the line between minority awareness and that which can be labeled subversive activity is subtle and ambiguous; the state can brand, condemn and repress any and all proponents of minority rights as traitors and political

enemies. This is something of which some Kurdish, Baha'i and Baluch communities – to mention a few – are painfully aware. Since the late nineteenth century, Iranian nationalism has favored and idealized Persian language and culture, and thus the increased emphasis on nationalism in the current state discourse opens up the professed idealism of the regime to accusations of ethnic bias and discrimination.

At the ceremony marking the return of the “Cyrus Cylinder” in 2010, there was a group of people dressed in the traditional clothes of various ethnic groups of Iran. Indeed, ethnic groups are today very present in regime rhetoric, in election campaigns, in military parades and so on. Yet it remains to be seen if the Islamic Republic's leaders can successfully maintain the discourse of multi-cultural harmony while at the same time relying ever more on nationalist narratives. More importantly, it remains to be seen if the state can and will translate “Unity Within Diversity” into actual policy.

Conclusion and Perspectives

The discussion about the compatibility of two of the most important ideologies in the Muslim world, Islamism and nationalism, is far from over. The universalism of the concept of *Umma* as opposed to the particularism of that of the nation have been called “intensely contradictory” by scholars.⁵¹ However, the official literature presents the contradiction as reconcilable: the particular interests of Iran can be defended as an extension of the universal goals of Islam; indeed, Khomeinism is an authentic, religiously sanctioned patriotism, and ‘love of the homeland’ is a natural, essential ingredient in the symbolic material that legitimizes the regime. No matter how scholars and politicians scrutinize or question such claims, the analyzed literature squarely asserts that despite inherent contradictions, nationalism and Islamism have already entered a harmonious symbiosis. This, of course, does not mean that the implications of this fusion remain uncontested.

As this chapter goes into press, a conflict between Ahmadinejad and his supporters on the one hand, and Khamene‘i and the main body of conservatives on the other, is apparently escalating. A key issue of contention is whether Ahmadinejad’s advisor Masha‘i has committed treason by resorting to such blatantly nationalist rhetoric described above. The circle around Masha‘i – and in extension, Ahmadinejad – are now called ‘the deviant current’ by high-ranking clerics, conservative politicians and Revolutionary Guard commanders, many of whom used to support Ahmadinejad. Indeed, the Supreme Leader’s representative to the Revolutionary Guards have threatened to intervene militarily to stop the ‘deviant current’, which he has deemed to be the gravest danger in the history of Shi‘ite Islam.⁵² However, despite the possible outcomes of these inter-factional battles, the issue of nationalism will continue to play an important role on the political scene and in any future government.

In the examined literature, the key underlying ideological clash is between particular secular-nationalist and Khomeinist ideas of the “nation” (*mellat*) and the “homeland” (*mihan*). However, this framework for discussing nationhood fails to take ethnic diversity into full account. Are the Kurds, Baluch and Azeris, for example, to be seen as nations within the nation-state? And if so, what are their national rights? The authors argue that they represent an egalitarian philosophy in which religious and national identity subsumes the ethnic factor. However, one could also see this argument as a way to proscribe the topic of diversity and to deny minorities the right to define their own identities. The idealist rejection of racism surely rings hollow when it is not followed up by real action. By accepting ethnicity as “reality,” one must also face the political dimensions of the social construct we call ethnic identity. The attempt, in the regime literature, rhetoric and action, to separate “ideology” from “ethnicity” is problematic if not self-contradictory.

In other words, while we cannot rule out that the ideal of the Islamic Republic could in theory be seen as a grand narrative of equality and unity, the Iranian state cannot have respect for

cultural diversity without freedom for political pluralism. The inescapable fact is that though Khomeini rhetorically championed ethnic equality, he did not in effect grant the minorities the same rights as their Shi'i, Persian-speaking compatriots. Surely, the balancing act of accommodating ethnic diversity while securing national unity and territorial integrity is a truly formidable and complex task. Yet, unless the Islamic Republic supports and secures the cultural and political rights of minorities, and unless it pays attention to the underdeveloped areas of Iran's periphery, it will fail at attaining the standards on freedom, equality and security professed during the revolution.

Indeed, there is good reason to fear that members of the minority communities will, as we have already seen, turn to violence and radical ideologies, even if regime ideologues can point to ethnic inclusion as allegedly inherent in Khomeini's vision. The emerging phenomenon of ethnically framed mobilization may force the Iranians, once again, to face the question of national identity.

¹ This article was part of a PhD project on the politics of ethnic and national identity in post-revolutionary Iran at the University of Copenhagen. I would like to thank Drs. Claus Pedersen, Nikki Keddie, Don Watts and Negin Nabavi for valuable input. In particular, I thank Dr. Frida Hastrup for her critical comments and suggestions.

² For general information refer to: Touraj Atabaki, "Ethnic diversity and territorial integrity of Iran," *Iranian Studies* 31, no. 1 (2005): 23-44; Nikki Keddie, "The Minorities Question in Iran," in *The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons, Old Conflicts*, ed. Shireen Tahir-Kheli and Shaheen Ayubi (New York: Praeger, 1995), 85-108; Massoume Price: *Iran's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005); and Nayereh Tohidi: "Ethnicity and Religious

Minority Politics in Iran,” *Contemporary Iran: Economy, Society, Politics*, ed. Ali Gheissari (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 299-322.

³ For an in-depth analysis of nationalism and the question of ethnic minorities in post-Khomeini Iran, and for the conceptual and political problems with using ‘Persian’ to denote a particular ethnic group or type of nationalism, refer to Rasmus Christian Elling: *Minorities in Iran: Nationalism and Ethnicity after Khomeini* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, forthcoming).

⁴ See for example Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran: Updated through 1978*, rev. ed., (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979); and Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, “Cultures of Iranian-ness: The Evolving Polemic of Iranian Nationalism,” in *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Politics*, ed. Nikki Keddie and Rudi Mathee (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 162-181.

⁵ Ervand Abrahamian: *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3.

⁶ Shahram Chubin, “Iran and the Persian Gulf States,” in: *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*, ed. David Menashri (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 73-84.

⁷ Cottam, *Nationalism*, 135, 145; David Menashri, “Khomeini’s Vision: Nationalism or World Order?” in *The Iranian Revolution*, ed. Menashri, 40-57.

⁸ Suzanne Maloney, “Identity and Change in Iran’s Foreign Policy,” *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, ed. Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 88-116, 90. [Please confirm the page numbers. Would you like just p. 90 to be mentioned, or the page numbers of the entire article?][I guess both since it is the first time I mention this article and since we need to specify the exact page on which the quote appears (p. 90) – right?

⁹ Shireen Hunter: *Iran After Khomeini* (New York: Praeger, 1992). Hunter notes that “strongly negative reactions to certain aspects of the [Islamist] cultural policy” made the regime “realize that

excessive anti-Iranianism would damage its base of support among the Iranians.” On Khomeini’s vacillations between nationalist and pan-Islamist imagery, see: Menashri, “Khomeini’s Vision.”

¹⁰ See notes 8, 9, 10; also see David Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society and Power* (London: Routledge, 2001); and Mehrdad Mashayekhi, “The Politics of Nationalism,” in *Political Culture in the Islamic Republic*, ed. Samih K. Farsoun and Mehrdad Mashayekhi (London: Routledge, 1993), 56-79.

¹¹ Hooshang Amirahmadi, “From Political Islam to Secular Nationalism,” *The Iranian*, January 11, 1996. <http://www.iranian.com/Jan96/Opinion/SecularNationalism.html>.

¹² Shabnam Holliday, “The Politicization of Culture and Contestation of Iranian National Identity in Khatami’s Iran,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 7, no. 1 (2007): 27-45.

¹³ *Fârs* (news agency), ‘Be mafakher-e tarikhi-ye qabl az eslam niz be ‘onvan-e neshane-ha-ye honar-e irani etfekhar mikonim,’ www.farsnews.com, May 7, 2008.

¹⁴ *Shahab* (news agency), “Masha‘i: ijad-e ruz-e ‘Kurosh’ dar taqvim-e rasmi-ye jomhuri-ye eslami,” www.shahabnews.com, November 23, 2008.

¹⁵ Press TV (news website), “Ahmadinejad hails Cyrus Cylinder,” www.presstv.ir, September 12, 2010.

¹⁶ *Tabnak* (news agency), ‘Hamid Baqa‘i: Ahmadinezhad Kurosh-e zaman ast!,’ www.tabnak.ir, September 19, 2010.

¹⁷ Ali Ansari, “Iranian Nationalism Rediscovered,” in *the Middle East Institute Viewpoints: The Iranian Revolution at 30* (Washington D.C.: The Middle East Institute, 2009).

¹⁸ Presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran (website), “Mosahebe ba ra‘is-jomhur hengam-e ‘azimat be New York,” www.president.ir, September 13, 2005; “Artesh dezh-e mohkam-e defa‘ az ‘ezzat-e mellat-e Iran ast,” April 17, 2008; *Shahab* (news agency), “Ahmadinezhad: bar asas-e nazarsanji-ha mellat-e Iran ‘aziz-tarin mellat dar jahan ast,” www.shahabnews.com, November 20,

2008. Despite these expressions of pride in Iran's ancient past, it should not be forgotten that historians and archaeologists around the world - including Abdollah Shahbazi, Kamyar Abdi and others - have criticized Ahmadinejad's government for neglecting and mistreating Iran's cultural heritage.

¹⁹ See *Entekhab* (news agency), "Ahmadinezhad: az nasl-e Arash, Rostam va Farhadim," www.entekhabnews.com, May 10, 2009; *Iran* (daily), "Harandi: Ahmadinezhad az tabar-e kave-ye ahangar ast," www.iran-newspaper.com, June 10, 2009. The *Shahnameh* is considered Iran's national epic and was composed by the poet Hakim Abolqasem Ferdowsi around 1000 AD.

²⁰ *Asr-e iran* (news website): "Enteqad-e organ-e ayatollah Mesbah az didar-e Ahmadinezhad va hamsar-e doktor Fatemi: Mosaddeq va vazirash kha'en budand!," www.asriran.com, April 17, 2008. The widow, Parivash Fatemi (Sotuti), was among the first victims of the power struggle between Ahmadinejad and Khamene'i when she was allegedly arrested together with other key supporters of Masha'i in May 2011 – apparently accused of spying for Great Britain. See: *Khorasan* (news website) via *Digarban* (news website), "Khorasan: hamsar-e doktor Fatemi jasus-e britaniya ast," www.digarban.com, May 15, 2011.

²¹ For an example of the nationalist rhetoric utilized to mark this day, see IRNA (website), "Ruz-e melli-ye khalij-e fars," <http://www2.irib.ir/occasions/khalijefars/khalijefars%20Day.htm>, no date (retrieved July 2, 2009).

²² *Esteqamat* (news website), "Matn-e kamel-e sokhanrani-ye Masha'i dar ekhtetamiye-ye hamayesh-e iraniyan," www.esteghamat.ir, August 16, 2010. Among Masha'i's many controversial statements, one that is of particular relevance to the present topic was when he proclaimed in 2004 that "the age of Islamism is over." See: *Jahan News* (news website), "Masha'i: dowre-ye eslamgara'i be payan reside ast," www.jahannews.com, August 20, 2008.

²³ See for example, *Parsine* (news website), “Pasokh-e daftar-e Ahmad Khatami be Rahim-

Masha‘i,” www.parsine.com, August 7, 2010; ‘*Asr-e Iran* (news website), “Firuzabadi: ezharat-e

Masha‘i jorm ‘aleyh-e amniyyat-e melli ast,” www.asriran.com, August 10, 2010.

²⁴ *Shafaf* (news website), “Emruz Iran yek maktab ast,” www.shafaf.ir, August 7, 2010.

²⁵ See Hunter, *Iran After Khomeini*, 92-100.

²⁶ Haggai Ram, *Iranophobia: The Logic of an Israeli Obsession* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), 46.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁸ Amir Taheri, *Nest of Spies: America’s Journey to Disaster* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 269.

²⁹ Based on a private listserv discussion in the period between November 5 and December 3, 2008. Among those who refuted Taheri were Profs. Ervand Abrahamian, Shaul Bakhash and Marsha Cohen.

³⁰ Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999).

³¹ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahife-ye emam: majmu‘e-ye asar, bayanat, mosahebe-ha, ahkam, ejazat-e shar‘i va name-ha*, vol. 12, software ed. (Tehran, 2003), 274.

³² *Ibid.*, vol. 13, 78.

³³ For examples of this kind of rhetoric, refer to websites of ultra-nationalist organizations including www.tondar.org, www.hambastegimelli.com, www.paniranist.org and www.marzeporgohar.org.

³⁴ ‘Ali-Mohammad Baba‘i-Zarech, *Ommat va mellat dar andishe-ye emam Khomeini* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 2004); Yahya Fowzi Toyserkani, *Emam Khomeini va hoviyyat-e melli* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 2006). The two writers are not introduced in the books, but from Internet searches it appears that both are scholars. Toyserkani graduated with a PhD from Tehran University in 1998 and was, at least by 2008, Assistant Director of Research at The Imam and Revolution Institute and a faculty member at Imam Khomeini International

University, Tehran. No specific information about Baba‘i-Zarech could be found from Internet searches. All quotes are translated from the Persian by me.

³⁵ In this chapter, ‘nationalism’ denotes particular political ideologies centered on the nation, and ‘patriotism’ denotes more elusive popular sentiments of attachment to the *patria*. This choice is based on how the words *mihan* and *mellat* are used in the two works under discussion; in none of them is there a clearly defined role for the state.

³⁶ For a discussion of nation (*mellat*), see Ludwig Paul, “Iranian Nation” and Iranian-Islamic Revolutionary Ideology,” *Die Welt des Islams* 39, no. 2 (1999): 183-217.

³⁷ It may be that by *lafz-e qadimi* Baba‘i-Zarech meant “an old concept.” However, *lafz* generally denotes “word,” which makes it a problematic statement. *Vatan* probably entered Persian at the same time as *mellat*; both are Arabic words used in the Quran. Even if *mihan* and *vatan* are older words, it remains to be explained how their antiquity qualifies them over *mellat*. Indeed, one could interpret this statement as Baba‘i-Zarech’s defense of pre-Islamic authenticity, which would complicate the Islamic justification for “loving the homeland.”

³⁸ For other examples of “positive” and “negative nationalism,” see Khamene‘i quote in Menashri, “Khomeini’s Vision,” 51.

³⁹ See notes 2 and 3; see also Hamid Ahmadi, *Qowmiyyat va qowm-gara‘i dar Iran* (Tehran: Nashre Ney, 1999).

⁴⁰ Rasmus Christian Elling, “State of Mind, State of Order: Reactions to Ethnic Unrest in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 8, no. 3 (2008): 481-501.

⁴¹ For two Western journalistic reports alleging US support for, among others, ethnic and sectarian-based militant groups in Iran, see Seymour Hersh, “The Iran Plans,” *The New Yorker*, April 17, 2006; and ABC News, “The Secret War Against Iran,” *ABC News Blog*, April 3, 2007.

⁴² *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Article 15.

⁴³ Despite governmental promises and an unprecedented May 2009 ruling by the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, it does not seem that this has changed. See Rasmus Christian Elling, “A step in the right direction for Iran’s forgotten languages,” *CUMINet Blog*, <http://cuminet.blogs.ku.dk/2009/08/19/>, August 19, 2009.

⁴⁴ Golnar Mehran, “The Presentation of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ in Postrevolutionary Iranian School Textbooks,” in *Iran and the Surrounding World*, ed. Nikki Keddie and Rudi Matthee (Seattle: Washington Press, 2002), 232-253.

⁴⁵ See Elling, *Minorities in Iran*, forthcoming.

⁴⁶ See for example, Alireza Asgharzadeh, *Iran and the Challenge of Diversity: Islamic Fundamentalism, Aryanist Racism, and Democratic Struggles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Ali Al-Taie, *Bohran-e hoviyyat-e qowmi dar Iran* (Tehran: Shadegan, 1999); and Zia‘ Sadr-ol-Ashrafi, *Kesrat-e qowmi va hoviyyat-e melli-ye iraniyan* (Tehran: Andishe-ye now, 1998).

⁴⁷ Asgharzadeh, *Iran and the Challenge*, 109.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 112, 114.

⁴⁹ In the words of Ahmadinejad, “Iran no longer signifies a geographical [entity], a nationality, an ethnic group or a tribe, but rather a *way* and a *school of thought*” (Ahmadinejad quoted on *Shafaf* website, “Emruz Iran yek maktab ast.”)

⁵⁰ Indeed, there are also examples of literature from state-run research institutes that contain views more similar to Persian-centrist secular nationalism. For a critique of this literature, see Elling, *Minorities in Iran*.

⁵¹ Maloney, ‘Identity and Change in Iran’s Foreign Policy,’ 102.

⁵² *Journalist Club* (news website): ‘Zol-Nur: Sepah dar surat-e lozum bara-ye moqabele ba jariyan-e enherafi vared mi-shavad’, www.yjc.ir, June 6, 2011; *Mehr* (news website): ‘Enheraf-e jadid az hame-ye enheraf-ha-ye tarikh-e shi‘e khatarnak-tar ast’, www.mehrnews.com, June 6, 2011.