

Ethnic, National and Identity Demands in Iran on the Axis of Justice and Development: A Grounded Theory Method Study among Five Major Ethnic Groups

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ABSTRACT

The identity/ethnic diversity in Contemporary Iran has co-occurred with the development of globalization processes and brought about interethnic conflict, Orientation of identity and seeking justice to eradicate discrimination and inequality in achieving social development. This is the issue that the present research has sought to investigate among the Persian (fars), Azeri, Kurd, Arab, and Baloch in Iran. The article has adopted a hybrid qualitative approach (GT), in thirteen provinces of Iran to extract and classify data in the following areas: religious identity and national identity, interethnic cultural borders, ethnic and national movement dead-end, and a peace-oriented approach to resolving the crisis.

Submitted: July 16, 2023

Published: October 31, 2023

 10.24018/ejsocial.2023.3.5.448

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Keywords: Development, Ethnic identity, Iran, Social justice.

1. INTRODUCTION

Iran is a country with multiple identities, and the contemporary governments' failure to provide social development and justly apply social policies has highlighted ethnic convergence or divergence with respect to the social integrity and social consensus of the country as a whole. This has assumed new aspects after the 1979 Revolution and brought about several conflicts.

Conflicts occurring among the collective identities that are there in contemporary Iran revolve around respect for the distinctions and differences in identity. Since the second half of the twentieth century, in fact, globalization processes (The ever-increasing development of media, enhancement of identity awareness, and their capability of manifestation) have sought to be acknowledged, along with the traditional sources of social identity (ethnicity, religion, and nationality), modern gender-based identity-seeking, sexual orientation, lifestyle, pseudo-religious groups, and other factors.

Despite the above multiplicity of identities, the contemporary dominant identity discourse is directed toward unification of the identities, having lost the capability of approving of the present diversity. Justified as an attempt to maintain national unity and the security and political integrity of the country, this approach itself has led to wider gaps among the ethnic groups and between them and the government and to emergence of identity-seeking political movements and groups. Focused on five major Iranian identities, this research has addressed the different aspects of the issue by applying qualitative and hybrid methods to the elite and the public from the ethnic groups. Moreover, the cultural mosaic in the Iranian society, along with the constant, ever-increasing significance of ethnic communities in development and enhancement of social integrity, has highlighted the concern for the basic notions in this research, i.e., justice and development. This is closely connected to the quality of the collective identities of the Iranian ethnic groups and the underlying reasons.

The spirit dominating contemporary human societies demands democracy and development, more prominently observed in multicultural societies, where emphasis has been made on interethnic issues and relations between the participating social groups and the government besides the global requirements.



2. RESEARCH SCOPE

A branch of the Aryan ethnic group that immigrated toward Iran, originally from Southern Russia, gradually entered the Iranian Plateau in the late second and early first millennia BC (Sanie Ejlal, 2005, p. 55). Ever since then, the plateau has always been invaded by various ethnic groups. A number of nationalist thinkers¹ have blamed the Arab for the destruction they have brought about in Iran upon their invasion (Bigdelo, 2001). According to some researchers and historians, however, the components of Iranian identity have been so culturally powerful that it has managed to remain alive and dynamic despite the domestic diversity and multiplicity in terms of identity and culture and the invasions made by foreign identities, and Iranian identity still involves diversity and multiplicity belonging to its variety of constituent discourses. The present identity conditions in modern Iran have been compared appropriately with pieces of cloth of various colors sewn together (Shayegan, 2005). The historical notion of Iranian identity took shape during the ethnic, political, and religious movements in the Sassanid Era, persisted with ups and downs through the Islamic Era, was reborn in the Safavid Era, was manifested as the national identity of Iran in the modern era (Ashraf, 1999), and can be said to have been influenced to date by the three Iranian, Islamic, and Western areas of civilization (Kachooyan, 2008).

Different ethnic groups, including the Lur, Baloch, Turkmen, Azeri, Arab, Kurd, and Persian, live in Iran today, most of whom can be claimed to reside in regions near the borders, culturally linked to groups in the neighbouring countries. This has turned Iran into a heterogeneous country in terms of social structure, where different ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious identities live, with similar groups residing in the neighbouring countries, sometimes turning the borders into sources of crisis. These groups, including the Arab and Kurd in Iraq, the Azeri in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Baloch in Pakistan, can be considered as origins of conflict and crisis (Fuller, 1993).

Despite the status of Persian as the official language, each of the Iranian collective identities has its own language(s), dialect(s), and accent(s). There also exist various religions and religious branches among the ethnic groups along with their similarities from different aspects as well as the official status granted to Shia (Yousofi, 2001, p. 17).² On that basis, the legislator has included articles in the Constitution to acknowledge cultural differences in order to facilitate constant intercultural life. For instance, Article 15 of the Constitution³ asserts that local and ethnic languages can be used besides Persian, and Articles 7 and 64 to 160 directly or indirectly address ethnic groups' and minorities' rights. Moreover, mentions have been made in Articles 24 and 26 of the freedom to establish "parties" and "societies" and that of publications and the press.

The social groups in Iran have usually lived next to each other in peace and with little conflict throughout history. However, conflicts have appeared between them following the emergence of nation-states and extension of identity-seeking movements around the world, on the one hand, and the formation of marginalized ethnic groups and ethnic discrimination on the part of the dominant groups, on the other.

This research has investigated five collective identities: the Persian, the Azeri, the Kurd, the Arab, and the Baloch.

2.1. Baloch

The Baloch reside in south eastern Iran, and have Aryan roots. As the competition between England and Russia has intensified, they have adopted settlements in different countries including Iran, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan (Abdollahi & Hosseinbor, 2002, p. 104).⁴

The relations between the Baloch and central governments have always been accompanied by conflict. In fact, the adopted policies have marginalized this group. A source of conflict is their cultural similarity to the residents of the neighbouring country, which has caused them to prefer foreign television channels to domestic ones. This has also been effective in the enhancement of ethnic identity vs. national identity and of the sense of belonging to the collective identity beyond the borders, leading to the potentials to seek autonomy (Mozafari, 2012).

Since Balochi is spoken in different countries, there has always been little consensus among linguists on its classification, hence the multiple proposals in that regard. Some, for instance, have discussed "Northern and Southern Balochi," while others have identified "Eastern and Western Balochi." There are also recent views that have classified the language into three groups: Eastern, Western, and

¹ Such as Akhundzade, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, Sadeh Hedayat, and Malek al-Sho'ara Bahar.

² The following articles of the Constitution can be referred to in that regard: 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 37, and 38.

³ "The Official Language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian/Farsi. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as textbooks, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian."

⁴ "The Official Language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as textbooks, must be in this language and script. However, the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian." More than 1.3 million of the Iranian Baloch live in Sistan and Baluchistan and other Iranian provinces today.

Southern. Ignoring these somewhat complicated divisions to mention the most important, in fact the best-known varieties of Balochi, we should name the Rakhshani variety, with one of the largest numbers of speakers, in Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan (Tameh, 2017).

All the Muslim Baloch belong either to the Hanafi Sunni majority or to the Twelver Shia minority, and there is no other sect or branch among them. Some of the characteristics that distinguish the Baloch from other ethnic groups are listed below. Clothing made with a particular embroidery technique known as *suzanduzi* is a very popular cultural work and artistic product by Baloch women.

2.2. Azeri

Neighboring the Republic of Azerbaijan, this group has the same linguistic origin as the Turk. The ambition to unite the Republic and the Iranian Azerbaijan and to integrate the territories at the two sides of Aras River has been common as a national dream for pan-Turkism since the Soviet era. Most Azeri speakers reside in south western Iran, in East and West Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Zanjan, and Qazvin Provinces, and there are of course speakers of Khorasani Turkic in Iran. Most of the Iranian Azeri are Shia Muslims, while there is also a group among them known as *Ahle Haqq*.

While adhering to national and religious rites, the Azeri have preserved their own customs in many areas of culture, and the rituals common among them have gained national popularity in some cases. Thus, the mourning processions of the Great Hussainiya of Zanjan, Tabriz, Urmia, and Ardabil are among the best-known groups mourning the Islamic Prophet's family in the month of Muharram. They also commonly practice rituals such as *tashtgozari*, *ta'zieh*, *Shah Hussain guyan*, chest-beating, and self-flagellation, where lamentation is carried out in Azeri. The mourning rituals held at Tabriz Historical Bazaar have also been registered nationally. Moreover, Azerbaijani music is considered as an important part of this people's cultural identity, and Azerbaijani artists have presented unique, creative music, where those who sing their own poems in Azeri are known as the Ashiq. To describe Azerbaijan and its heroes, they sing beautiful poetry accompanied by Azerbaijani music in celebrations and mourning ceremonies, thereby appealing to people. Traditional Azerbaijani clothing is a particular symbol of the Azeri, which has come into existence following long cultural, religious, and other processes involving the ethnic group.

2.3. Persian (Persian/Farsi Speaker)

The Persian constitute Iran's greatest ethnic group, mainly residing in central cities. They are politically dominant; that is, they have gained control over the other ethnic groups as a result of the elements of their identity, including language (Persian), religion (Shia), and other components. Most of the Persian-speakers in Iran are Twelver Shia Muslims, while there are also Persian-speaking Sunni Muslims residing in certain regions near the borders.

The Persian live mainly in large Iranian cities, and culturally dominate areas far beyond Iran. Persian is an Indo-European language spoken in Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In fact, it is the official language in Iran and Tajikistan and one of the two official languages in Afghanistan (alongside Pashto), and it has been the official language of India (before the English colonization).

2.4. Kurd

Following the Arab, Persian, and Turkic, the Kurd constitute the fourth largest ethnic block in the Middle East (Olson, 2002, p. 6). They mainly reside in regions close to the borders of four countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

Kurdish is a sub-branch of the Indo-European family of languages, related to Ossetian, Dari, Persian, Tajiki, Tati, Talysh, ancient languages such as Avestan, Sogdian, Khwarezmian, and Scythian, and many others (Diakonoff, 2004, p. 439). It is an Iranian language belonging to the Northwestern or Southwestern group of the family (Bruinessen, 2004, p. 35). The Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji); Central Kurdish, Southern Kurdish, Gorani, and Zaza varieties can be seen within the geographic range.

According to Vali (2003), Kurdish identity is manifested in differences by which the dominant identity is defined. It signifies by not signifying, and is present by being absent. He regards this identity as a kind of subjectivity without the requirements for representation/signification in history and politics. There are both Shia and Sunni Muslims among the Kurd. If the Iranian Kurdish settlements are divided to two religious partitions, most of the Sunni Kurd can be said to reside in the northern half. There is of course another group of the Kurd, known as the Yarsani (Kaka'i/Ahle Haqq), mostly living in certain cities and villages in Kermanshah Province.

The Kurd adhere to the practice of national and religious rituals. They celebrate Nowruz with utmost glory, and highly value religious customs and feasts such as *Eid al-Adha*, *Eid al-Fitr*, and, particularly, the Islamic Prophet's birthday. In some regions, food is made and distributed for free for celebration of religious feasts, including a particular type of soup-like dish known as *âsh*. There are also ceremonies involving *daf*-playing, prayers, and particular utterances made by the *dervish* or in praise of

the Islamic Prophet and celebration of his birthday. In the Kurd's settlements, various types of Kurdish clothing can be observed, each in a unique beautiful form, slightly different from the others. Traditional Kurdish men's and women's clothing includes headwear and footwear as well as ordinary clothes. The design and application of each of these components vary by season, type of occupation, lifestyle, and ceremony. Although different types of clothing are common in different parts of Kurdistan, such as Hawraman, Saqqez, Baneh, Gogulawa, Gerrus, Sanandaj, Mariwan, and Mahabad, they are all the same in that they cover the entire body.

2.5. Arab

The Arabic-speaking community is scattered over a vast territory in Asia and Africa, including Southern and south western Iran and parts of Khuzestan Province (Amirahmadi, 1998, p. 32). It should be noted that the Iranian Arab mainly follow the same religion as the centre, like the Azeri, not in favor of the ethnic group beyond the borders.

The Arab residing in Iran mostly speak Khuzestani Arabic, a dialect of Mesopotamia Arabic. They are scattered over four provinces, including Khuzestan, Hormozgan, Bushehr, and the southern parts of Ilam, while most of them live in Khuzestan, and are mostly Twelver Shia Muslims. Of course, there is also a Sunni Arab minority in Iran, which makes up a very low percentage.

Like any other Iranian people, the Arab in Khuzestan have their own culture. Following the Arab in the neighbouring countries, they find *Eid al-Fitr* of much greater significance in their public culture, celebrated with a large number of norms, behaviours, and customs. Another ancient tradition common among the Khuzestani Arab is the *Gargee'an* ceremony, held in Ahvaz on the 15th of Ramadan every year. Another highly important ritual commonly practiced by the Arab is the coffee-drinking ceremony involving pots known as *dallah*, which is held with a great deal of formality.

3. AIMS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The Iranian society has long been based upon multi-ethnic, multi-identity life. Some experts argue that any generalizing explanation on a multi-ethnic society will be inadequate if it disregards the ethnicity factor. Given the ever-increasing importance of ethnic communities in formation and enhancement of social consensus, scientific investigation of ethnic groups has received greater attention than before. Along the same lines, many experts maintain that national integrity and identity are rooted in ethnic communities and very old ethnic emotions as primitive nationalism. Ethnic integrity and identity consensus in a multi-ethnic, multicultural society can bring about peace and fill in ethnic gaps. The main problem here, which makes the investigation significant, involves a description and an explanation of the Iranian ethnic groups' collective identity. The efficiency of present-day governments depends on their capability of providing development. In societies with multiple identities, the notion of interethnic justice, as well as development, is of great significance, and this is what the present research is focused on. Thus, formation and extension of a comprehensive understanding of other ethnicities and identities contributes to social solidarity and national integrity. This contrasts the variety of distinctions made among identities, and invites the civil society, open minds, identity and cultural activists, and all who care about peace onto a dynamic field, and attempts to enhance the multiplicity of cultures rather than to eliminate them.

The identity of an individual or a group requires *another identity* to be distinct from. In that case, identity results from distinction, while *distinction* and its denotation are artificial just as identity itself is. Therefore, it is the *other identity* that that is there in the first place, and is responsible for formation or development (Grossberg, 1996, pp. 93–96).

In this research, *identity* has been employed to mean an awareness of who an individual is and of their social belongings, which assumes an external, collective aspect, turning into a basis for sociopolitical relation and action (Jenkins, 2014, pp. 6–20), but is realized mainly through comparison and differentiation between the in-group and the out-group (Brown, 1996, p. 9).

Given the trend in societies toward systems of participative management and the considerations required for observance of citizenship principles and establishment of civic institutions (Faulks, 2000, p. 197), it can be asserted that the significance of the transformation of societies into participative systems observing the above principles is highlighted for two reasons. Firstly, it indicates the individual's self-perception and others' perception thereof in the society. Secondly, it results from the dynamic identity relation between the state and the nation (Oldfield, 1990).

4. ETHNICITY VERSUS NATIONALITY

Ethnicity is a dynamic combination of a real or hypothetical common descent (common historical memory), common ethnic awareness, symbolic elements, and political-territorial belongings within a

social group on which ethnic experience is based (Tiffin *et al.*, 1998, p. 84). Anthony Smith enumerates the following components for ethnic identity: Human population, Common ancestors, Historical memory, Common culture, Specific territory and Correlation and integration of interests.

The words *national* and *nationality* have entered the lexicon of social science following the Industrial Revolution and spread of nationalist feelings. National identity results from an identified unit of land and a state (military-political), characterized as follows by Ernest Renan.

Some scholars have mentioned two groups of elements as the components of a nation, i.e., objective elements (territorial) and subjective elements (mythical, memories, beliefs, and cultures), and have named two basic characteristics and aspects for it (Alamdari, 2004, pp. 27–30). Ahmad Ashraf also lists a number of factors for the formation of national identity (Ashraf, 1999, pp. 139–140).

The relations between the levels of collective identity are controversial today against the attitude of ethnic particularism, and media manifestations have turned them into routine facts (Hall, 1997, 2002). Numerous studies have verified the claim that negative images from ethnic groups contribute to promotion of discriminative attitudes, stereotypes, and myths of distinction and superiority (see, for instance, Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Graves, 1999). The major alternative for meaning (identity) construction in the society involves cultural communities, with religious, national, or regional bases, perhaps leading ethnicity to be influenced by religion, nationality, and locality (Castells, 2010, p. 87).

Investigation of ethnicity and ethnic relations has not appealed to classic theoreticians, and no explicit concern for these relations can be found in the thoughts of sociologists such as Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel.

Three competitive theoretical perspectives on the formation of ethnic and national identity follow. Firmly associated with Anthony Smith, the first approach, known as primordialism, regards national identity as a natural phenomenon, and believes in ethnic cores for nations (Barrington, 2006, p. 13). According to primordialists, evolutionary psychology demonstrates man's successful accordance with the conditions that have taken shape during the prehistoric period (Kaufmann, 2015, p. 194). A fixed cultural formation is assumed there, which has been established by ethnic activists, enabling constant sense-making for generations.

Instrumentalism is the second approach, based on which ethnicity is a resource that is used by the elite for definition of group identity, regulation of group membership and boundaries for making claims, and extraction of resources (Brown & Langer, 2010, p. 413).

The last approach is constructivism. Unlike primordialism, constructivism is focused on processes that help ethnic groups to emerge, containing elements from both the primordialist and the instrumentalist approaches (Brown & Langer, 2010, p. 413). Constructivism argues that national identity is a social construction, like other group identities, including those listed by primordialists as indicators of national identity.

Issues that have been addressed in regard to ethnic groups include political ethnocentrism (Matil, 2004), ethnic identity-seeking, ethnicity politicization with respect to internal colonialism, cultural division of labor (Hechter, 1975), and the role of communication in the development of ethnic awareness (Seyed-Emami, 2000). Theoreticians such as Hans Kuhn and, more regularly, Anthony Smith have analyzed the role of the elite in nationalist movements, considering the extension of the government's control domain and greater tendency toward centralization as a source of appropriate conditions for ideological mobility provided by "scientific intellectuals." John Viruili also regards nationalism as a particular, successful form of modern policy adopted by the elite to divest the dominant class of the power of government (Ahmadi, 2018).

5. DEVELOPMENT

The diversity of theorization about contemporary human, social, and economic changes allowed notions such as the quality of life, participative development, and alternative development to enter the literature on the humanities, where social development can be used as a cover term in terms of quality and content. Sen (2003) defines development as the process of developing real freedom, and regards it as the aim and means of freedom. Todaro (1987) considers development as a multidimensional trend that requires fundamental changes in the social structure, public perception and that of national institutions, acceleration of economic growth, reduction of inequality, and eradication of absolute poverty (Azkia, 2000). According to Peter Donaldson, development involves fundamental political changes made in the social structure, orientations, and institutions for complete realization of the society's objectives (Ghaffari & Niazi, 2007, p. 8). Misera also emphasizes the cultural aspects in his definition of development (Azkia & Ghaffari, 2010). Bernstein argues that the objectives of development include the keenness to overcome malnutrition, poverty, and disease. According to Eisenstadt, development involves activities concerning the transformation from nondemocratic to democratic governance. Huntington maintains that the political development of a system increases

as it switches from simplicity to complexity, from dependence to independence, from inflexibility to flexibility, from multiplicity to unity (Ghavam, 2000, p. 86). Thus, the neglected aspects of development are considered, and the conceptual quality that it involves is highlighted, on which basis progress, improvement, and synonymous notions are taken into account, and local culture is emphasized (Bauman, 2001; Habermas, 2001; Mahrooyan, 2006). Furthermore, development denotes decrease in inequality, poverty, and unemployment and increase in participation and democracy, which requires appropriate conditions and improvement in the quality of life.

6. SOCIAL JUSTICE

It can be asserted that man's most important ideal throughout history is social justice. Injustice has brought about numerous inequalities and intensified wealth gaps and social problems. On that basis, different aspects of social justice have been investigated in the humanities, and several theories have been developed. These include liberalist, neoliberalist, socialist, communitarianist, and religious (Islamic, Christian, and so on) discourses, as summarized in the following discourse analysis by Akhtari and Zolfaghari (2017, pp. 116–119).

When a just action is discussed, an action is meant that is not unjust. When *justice* is modified by the *social* attribute in *social justice*, methods should naturally be sought of establishing social laws and regulations that provide justice rather than lead to injustice. In other words, social justice denotes the observance of equality in legislation and law enforcement. That is, the law should provide all with equal means of progress and welfare. It is the government's responsibility to enforce and practice social justice. Therefore, the government should practice no discrimination against individuals and make it possible for them to make progress and acquire social welfare (Motahhari, 2004, p. 253). Variables effective on social justice include reduction of poverty and deprivation, employment, supply of basic needs (such as accommodation, health, and education), stabilization of prices in accordance with payments, just distribution of income and wealth, establishment of security and discipline, observance of all people's rights, and provision of social security and welfare service.

The following aspects can be considered for social justice: equality, political participation, and economic, cultural, legal, and distributive justice (Poursaeed & Zahiri, 2012, p. 61). Thus, the principles of social justice include (a) supply of the primary needs of all members of the society, (b) observance of everyone's right for equal freedom, (c) provision of everyone with equal access to economic opportunities, and (d) establishment of economic inequality where the poorest classes can maximize their wealth (Hemmati, 2007).

John Rawls' Theory of Justice involves two key principles. The first concerns every individual's equal rights with respect to the broadest freedom in a social institution or participation, and the second principle pertains to exclusion of inequality, unless it eventually benefits all.

7. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results of the research demonstrate that the notion of justice-oriented, development-based identity/ethnicity suggests conditions of performance gap on the government's part. The results often find national consensus dependent on achievement of interethnic justice, the aspects of which are examined below.

7.1. Ethnic Groups' Local Economy

Most Iranians have long made livings through pastoralism and agriculture, until trade and commerce also thrived as jobs in Iranian cities on the passage of the Silk Road through the country.

The central parts of Iran, where the Persian reside, contribute most to the industrial sector⁵. Besides the industrial sector, the agricultural sector involves crops gaining high income such as the pistachio and saffron commonly grown in Central Iran, which therefore owns a large share of the gross domestic product.

The economy of the Kurd settlements of Iran is based on agriculture, pastoralism, and horticulture. Due to their location close to the borders, however, border trade (in its legal form) and occupation as *kolbars* (in the illegal form) have gained popularity there.

The economy of the Azeri settlements is based upon agriculture, pastoralism, and factories and industries such as tractor manufacturing, the petrochemical industry, machinery manufacturing, and the steel industry.

⁵ The industrial shares of the central parts belong to the provinces of Alborz (44%), Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari (39.6%), Isfahan (41.4%), Markazi (40.3%), Qom (43.4%), Tehran (37.3%), and Yazd (47.8%).

The settlements of the Arab are characterized by communication opportunities and maritime boundaries, on which international commerce and trade and maritime transit have thrived in these parts including the port cities having a major share of the countries. Moreover, there are a large number of abundant oil resources in these parts.

In the Baluchistan region, equatorial and tropical fruits are grown, such as dates, bananas, citrus fruits, mangos, papayas, sapodillas, pistachios, and grapes, with their own particular markets. Moreover, the nomads raise camels as an occupation, and alternant industries have also taken shape in some parts.

According to the data obtained in this research, the majority of the political claims made by the Iranian ethnic groups concern the centralized economic policies that have led to the formation of core-periphery relations. A kind of objection has been made in the interviews to the economic and livelihood gaps arising from the core economic policies, where the periphery (Iranian ethnic groups) is believed to have an unjust share of the economy.

7.2 Identity (National-Religious) Justice

Although there are two traces, i.e., national and religious, the justice-oriented approach is focused on different ethnic groups' senses of belonging to the notion of nation and the framework of Iranian national identity.

“Religious orientations are not opposed to national issues. In case of a conflict, however, religious issues are more vulnerable than those pertaining to ethnicity and identity.” (Javadi Hesar, journalist and sociopolitical activist, Personal interview).

As shown in the following charts, the researcher has investigated the amount of interethnic communication. According to the interview results, 53.9% of the elite have stated that they had frequently communicated with other ethnic groups, and 28.9% had experienced less communication. Among the general public, there had been a smaller amount of ethnic communication, where 55.4% have stated a lack of communication, and 37.3% had experienced little.

As commented by many of the participants, national identity involves two basic aspects in Iran: the Iranian aspect and the spiritual (religious) aspect. According to an interviewee: “Iranian culture has two wings: Iranian identity, with thousands of years of history, and Islamic identity, with a history of 1400 years. Both wings should be preserved” (*Ashkan Zare'i, cultural and heritage activist and writer, Personal interview*).

Part of the research results concerns the identity symbols. There are three groups of interethnic Iranian symbols that contribute to integrity. Symbols such as *Nowruz*, *Chaharshanbe Suri*, *Mehregan*, and *Yalda* are ancient. The second group involves religious symbols, including *Eid al-Fitr*, *Eid al-Adha*, *Eid al-Ghadir*, the Islamic Prophet's birthday, and the anniversaries of the Shia Imams' martyrdom. The third group includes government symbols concerning the Islamic Republic Era, exemplified by the ten-day *Fajr* celebration, anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, 13th of Aban (3rd of November), Quds Day, and flag and anthem of the Islamic Republic.

The data suggest that the ancient Iranian ceremonies, festivals, and rituals (Cyrus' birthday, the *Mehregan* and *Sadeh* feasts, etc.) and those of the non-Shia religions and Islamic branches need to be celebrated, as emphasized by the interviewees. Thus, feasibility of these celebrations along the same lines as the Shia religious ceremonies (*Muharram*, *Safar*, *Sha'ban* feasts, etc.) could eliminate the conception that politics is ideological, or that the religious (Shia) view is dominant, and can remove the religious minorities from the society.

7.3 Cultural Aspects of Interethnic Justice

According to the research findings, Persian-speakers typically adopt global and super-local attitudes to define their identity bases, and have reconstructed and even changed most of their conventional characteristics, while the other ethnic groups under investigation, i.e., the Kurd, Azeri, Baloch, and Arab, exhibit greater acceptance in that regard.

The interviewees from the ethnic groups other than Persian have argued that the Iranian central governments following the Constitutional Revolution have not adopted a just approach to the issue of ethnic mother tongues, causing the deprivation of education in the mother tongue by recognizing Persian as the official language.

On that basis in Fig. 1 (Elite) and Fig. 2 (Public), 83.6% of the elite and 60.3% of the general public who had participated in the study have argued that education in the mother tongue is a legitimate, legal right. On the other hand, 16.4% of the elite and 33.7% of the general public had disagreed on its legitimization. However, if a variety of ethnic groups and religious minorities reside in the most important strategic parts of a country and those close to the borders, with people with the same social and cultural backgrounds located across the borders without national governance and influence, any external issue or crisis will easily spread into the country due to their communication and connection

with people there, dramatically reducing the government's capability of monitoring the region. The results obtained from this research also demonstrate that ethnic groups have a constant look at the borders and at the same ethnic groups across them.

Iranian rulers' coercive, suppressive approach to confrontation of the ethnic groups' identity-seeking movements has always caused social rebellions. On the basis of the above, it would make sense for the rulers to consider the identity groups' claims, naturally rising up from the heart of the society, upon the end of a protestant process and to resolve many of the claims through negotiation and interaction, which could be the key to national consensus and integrity if practiced.

7.4. Media Justice

The reality of the national media involves activity in line with cultural monopoly, which is why they can be referred to as the media of governance. The results obtained in this section indicate inappropriate relationships between the government and the ethnic groups. An objection made by these groups, particularly by the Sunni community, the largest religious minority in the country, concerns the lack of religious centers in province capitals, especially in Tehran; however, media programs have approved of the government's performance in that regard.

An analysis of the contents of the media programs from the interviewees' perspective indicates the ethnic groups' overt and covert dissatisfaction with the performance of the media active in the country. According to the participants, the domestic audiovisual media are directed toward assimilation of the Iranian ethnic groups, while the Persian respondents have exhibited somewhat greater satisfaction with the performance of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. Of course, the interviewees have also argued that the provincial audiovisual channels do not perform better than the national broadcasting.

Fig. 1 (Elite) and Fig. 2 (Public) show satisfaction with the provincial and national channel programs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting.

In the conditions of censorship and control of the media, the audience definitely functions as a group of activists, seeking an alternative by searching media with similar orientations. This has been confirmed by the results obtained from the interviews made with the different ethnic groups.

7.5. Exclusion of Cultures

Under conditions of ethnic and cultural diversity, it is the quality of management that specifies whether it should be considered as a threat, or it can be regarded as an opportunity. However, the interests of a particular group within the governments and their inability to manage ethnic-cultural diversity usually direct it toward exclusion.

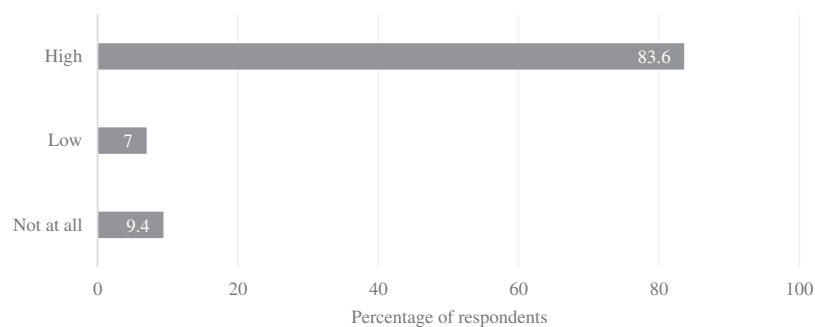


Fig. 1. Religious gaps and discrimination according to the elites.

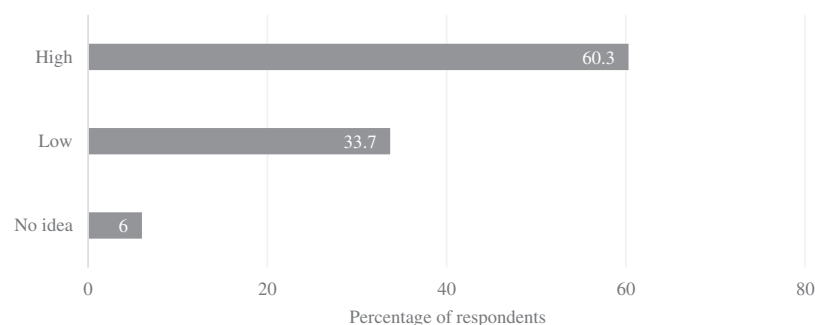


Fig. 2. Religious gaps and discrimination according to the general public.

Part of the data obtained from the research participants has revealed the cultural monopoly that is there with respect to the Persian ethnic group, which has led to the deterioration of the rich Iranian

culture and cultural diversity. This is severely imposed by the Azeri on the Kurd and other social groups in West Azerbaijan Province, to the extent that some participants in this study have used the term “colonization in colonization” to refer to it.

According to Dr. As’ad Ardalan (researcher, university instructor, and social activist from Sanandaj), “*Reza Shah’s policies in 1926 and 1938 caused a ‘Speak Persian’ sign to be installed at schools in Kurdistan*” (personal interview) and the cultural dominance of the Persian along with the attenuation of other cultures has officially continued ever since then. Thus, the policy was officially promoted in mainstream publications and magazines including *Iranshahr*, *Farhangestan*, and *Ayande*.

In 1928, the parliament declared the Iranian ethnic groups’ old costumes illegal, and forced all men except registered clergies to wear Western clothes including “Pahlavi hats.” Eight years later, these hats were replaced by European chapeaus. Reza Shah prescribed the latter hats not only to exclude ethnic identities but also to interfere with the ritual of saying prayers in Islam, which requires the forehead to be rested on the ground. He also changed the names of many cities.

After the 1979 Revolution, the article in the Constitution that grants the ethnic groups the right to read and write in their mother tongues at all levels of education has never been practiced as expected and desired by these groups due to the relevant authorities’ subjective behaviour.

A result of the present research in this area is that there have been three dominant issues over most of the Iranian history: confrontation, exclusion, and ridicule of the ethnic groups’ cultural manifestations. A type of this exclusion is applied by the national media. For instance, radio and television programs fail to reflect the above diversity, and clearly represent one culture as more prominent and honorable. Another type of exclusion is revealed in the failure to allow implementation of ethnic and religious rituals. In fact, the ethnic groups have been encouraged to imagine that there is an attempt to ridicule them culturally and prevent their cultural intergenerational continuity and to value a specific culture instead and apply cultural assimilation for reasons such as easier management and incapability in intercultural acceptance.

Many scholars and experts in social science maintain that the current conditions in the country is anomic, discussing attenuations of social order and integrity (Abazari & Yusuf, 2013). Abdi (2006) was first to seriously raise the problem of social collapse in the Iranian society. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad⁶ and his associates are among others who have recently addressed the issue. They argue that collapse has already occurred in economic, social, political, cultural, environmental, and various other fields. Activists in various fields find the current conditions as improper, which could pose a risk to the future of the country. The results obtained from the present study also confirm the existence of these crises.

According to Dr. Mehdi Feizi (faculty member from Mashhad), “*There are a series of crises and issues, in fact hyper-issues, in the country that are ready to explode like time bombs*” (personal interview).

Since the Pahlavi Era, the central governments have hardly been concerned with measures to earn public trust in such areas, adopting the simplest solution, i.e., confrontation and coercion. Committees have been dispatched in certain cases to regions such as Kurdistan, and there have been negotiations soon after the Revolution with the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan and popular Sunni figures as the Central Sunni Council (Shams). However, such attempts have failed due to the dominant center-based, power-oriented, non-pluralist spirit, and the negotiators from the ethnic and religious groups have been imprisoned or exiled in most of the cases.

It can be found based on the research data that ethnic issues have been the most complicated, at the same time the most influential, socio-political issues in Iran. Enhancement of ethnic identities and movements seems to be one of the most prominent manifestations of socio-political dynamism in Iran in the near future. The involved factors include wider gaps between national and ethnic identity, more serious social, dignity, economic, political, and cultural claims, progressively more developed ethnic organizations, institutions, associations, and centers, severer extremist ethnocentric feelings among some of the elite and intellectual and some political parties, more intense political alienation and separation of the ethnic groups from the political system, and more explicit identity claims upon opportunities for political expansion such as national and local elections (Karimi Maleh, 2009, p. 23).

8. SUGGESTIONS AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Under the present conditions, involving feelings of interethnic discrimination and inequality, enhancement of social trust and social capital in accordance with political loyalty to pluralist national integrity favoring multiplicity has taken precedence over any sort of planning. Moreover, where most of the human resources have been organized based on unspecialized criteria, unable to manage different crises, and national integrity and ethnic solidarity have been reduced to theoretical mottos, void of

⁶ Resalat Newspaper, Issue 9187, Dated 8/4/2018.

social reality, continuous peaceful coexistence no longer makes sense, which implies a more military-like atmosphere dominating the society, particularly the ethnic regions. Evidence suggests that this is being replaced by a spirit of applying rights such as citizenship rights and the rights to social and economic security. In this research, the following suggestions are made in that regard.

8.1. *Realization of Economic Justice*

In the industrial sector, the industrial centralization established at the central provinces can be reduced through foundation of relevant centers such as firms and factories. In the next step, comprehensive laws should be formulated in regard to ban on occupation as a smuggler or a kolbar and social issues rooted in economic difficulties arising from long-lasting centralization, and their enforcement needs to be ensured. In such conditions, there would be less efficient human resource and foreign currency leaving the country's economic market. Moreover, all Iranians could be employed, and their scientific and practical power could be utilized.

8.2. *Realization of Sociocultural Justice*

Today's research in various fields of science indicates the inefficiency of the dominant top-down, centralized policies and perspectives, and the government should contribute less to the management of many local affairs and leave it to the people themselves. This could be realized through independent parties and freedom of thought and action; otherwise, any activity is destined to be inefficient, like the local Islamic Councils, which have turned weaker, more corrupt, and less efficient every day over five terms.

It is suggested that concern for meritocracy be enhanced, different social, cultural, and political activities not be monitored as in a military setting, and local leaders and people be provided freedom to manage their own cultural, social, and religious affairs. Measures that can be taken for realization of social justice include foundation of centers and places of worship particular to the Sunni and each of the present religious branches in Tehran and acknowledgement and encouragement of education in the mother tongue. These both meet the people's innate need and provide them with mental-social health and peace. They also allow the energy of the ethnic elite, local languages, artists, and other ethnic activists to contribute to national production and effort.

Another important issue involves gender discrimination at the governmental level as well as at the heart of the society, pertaining largely to social norms and rules, apart from legal restrictions. Undoubtedly, movement toward balanced, sustainable development requires that the entire potential capacity available in the society be utilized, and it would denote a reduction of the power of national human and non-human resources to neglect part of the population (women). Many of the participants in the interviews have pointed out the issue. According to them, girls and women in the Iranian society are affected by orientations arising from the above sexist attitudes upon equal competition against men in nationwide examinations, recruitment procedures, and appointments for administrative positions (at the levels of ministry, province, and county).

The notion of a second-order citizen or lower has been there among the topics discussed by the interviewees, used by people from the ethnic group societies to express their feelings, and should be regarded as a warning to cultural policy-makers. The following solutions are emphasized in that regard:

1. Comprehensive development of deprived regions with priority given to the ethnic groups and religious minorities
2. Development of participatory planning through utilization of the ethnic groups' diverse cultural capacities
3. Reduction of centralization and redistribution of economic and social opportunities
4. Bottom-up planning and reverse development so that the distribution of resources starts at the border, and leads to the center
5. Reformation of the country's administrative system and managerial hierarchy through delegation of greater power to local managers.

8.3. *Realization of Political Justice*

According to the research participants, Iranian political parties mainly emerge in masses for no longer than two weeks upon elections, and fade away once the procedure is completed. Since they are rooted in particular groups' or individuals' plans for possession of presidential or parliament seats and the like, there is no party in the ethnic regions expressing the people's ethnic claims. Perhaps the most significant reason for the isolation and withdrawal of Iranian parties is the dominant atmosphere focused on security, monitoring, and control imposed by various institutions largely out of the control of the government and the numerous filtering networks active in the country. The most important

possible function of a party can be to express the claims of those with affiliated thoughts through democratic principles and the process of dialogue. When there is no such a procedure in the society, these strategies are replaced by strife and violence, and formation of such an atmosphere can jeopardize the legitimacy of the system. The suggestions made in this research have been made by the participants. On that basis, the government needs to spread the atmosphere involving parties to the ethnic groups as well as activating licensed parties besides abandoning the militaristic atmosphere. Thus, the ethnic groups' claims could be expressed and met in a fully democratic manner simply through the process of dialogue.

All the four ethnic groups under investigation other than the Persian have exhibited dissatisfaction in that regard. The Kurd, Arab, and Baloch have stated that there had been no case of election of those speaking their languages for top political ranks, such as the heads of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, government ministers, governors, and ambassadors throughout the over forty years of the Islamic Republic Era.

8.4. *Realization of Social Welfare*

Definitions provided of social welfare cover both material and spiritual aspects of meeting human needs. According to the data collected in this research, access to hospitals, medical centers, and other necessary services in the field of healthcare in the ethnic regions under investigation has been distributed highly disproportionately and unfairly. In parts of Kurdistan, hospitals are incapable of performing the simplest surgeries and healthcare services, where the patient has to visit the province capitals (Urmia, Tabriz, Hamadan, etc.) for treatment. Of course, a monitoring of patients visiting Tehran hospitals well indicates the conditions of patients who have taken refuge there despite their poverty due to the deprivation in their own regions.

No access to natural gas has yet been provided in regions near the borders, particularly in the villages. Significant disasters have occurred in recent years in schools in Kurdistan and Baluchistan due to the use of oil heaters in the absence of natural gas, which has killed several students and teachers, and the burns will remain forever on many of the students' bodies.

Movie theatres, parks, and leisure time do not make sense near the Iranian borders. Development, industry, and road infrastructures among the minorities and near the borders are extremely horrible, and the roads in those regions have turned into places of murder of the youngsters. It is suggested that the indicators of social welfare be seriously revised with proper management and without ethno-religious discrimination, particularly in the fields of health and education given at least the regional scopes and road infrastructures. Then, the troubles need to be shot and appropriate measures taken to prevent irreparable damage.

8.5. *Role of Mass Media in National Solidarity and Interethnic Media Justice*

The Iranian national, official media are clearly monopolized by the government, engaged in a particular form of religious and political promotion and manifestation. There is a huge amount of censorship in these media, which disables free flow of information. This is an issue criticized by the ethnic groups under investigation, who consider it as a source of discrimination in contrast to ethnic convergence and national integrity and solidarity. According to the research interviewees, this type of ideological manifestation censors Iranians' cultural richness and common historical and social background, pursuing assimilation policies that lead to the politicization of cultural issues, and undervalue the ethnic groups' cultural behavior. This discriminative perspective has caused an increasing tendency to use Western and online media, playing a fundamental role in that regard. It is suggested that the issue be addressed openly to help admit the private sector into the field and allow each political party to possess different media. Provision of such access will lead to healthy competition and return of public trust to the national media.

8.6. *Provision Made for Proximity of Religions in Iran*

Part of the research findings suggest that religious thought could be left out of the official political system, replaced by an adoption of the conditions of secular government. Thus, any identity preference or privilege could be eliminated, causing the feeling of oppression against different religious identities to fade away and making provision for utilization of human talents with a multiplicity of knowledge and expertise.

9. CONCLUSION

The major social issue concerning the topic under investigation here is the sociopolitical gap that has caused justice-based claim to take shape among the ethnic and social groups in the Iranian society. The changes in Iran's living and economic conditions, arising from the dominant ideological management,

can be regarded as a pivotal issue, on which the ethnic groups' other claims have been based. Furthermore, these conditions result from the type of management applied to the country's social capital, which has been confronted with decline for decades, and other challenges have originated from.

Given the above model, unequal economy has taken shape based on the ethnic, center-periphery, and religious variables in the Iranian society, and accounts for the conditions of development, which has realized most of the claims made by the ethnic groups under investigation in regard to the phenomenal orientation of the study. A major part of the heavy industry, including steel and car companies, is located in Persian-speaking provinces such as Alborz, Isfahan, Markazi, and Semnan, to which the largest amounts of economic revenue belong.

The Azeri (particularly those residing in East Azerbaijan Province) are the second most affluent ethnic group following the Persian in terms of gained economic revenue. Despite these conditions, the Azeri are no more satisfied with the government than the other groups. Their feelings of inequality have been expressed in the following two terms. Firstly, they compare their economic conditions to that of Persian-speakers, arguing that the Azeri-speaking provinces hold a very insignificant share as compared to the central provinces, such as Isfahan, Semnan, Markazi, Qom, Alborz, and Tehran. The second point involved in this ethnic group's dissatisfaction with the government is the belief in the covert fact that most of the industries available in the region have been established in the previous system of government.

In Iran's Kurd settlements, from the cities in southern West Azerbaijan Province to Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and Ilam, factories, workshops, and industrial towns have developed very little in the industrial sector. There is a high unemployment rate in the region in spite of the young, educated human resources, who have to immigrate to Persian-speaking provinces, Tehran in particular, in order to earn a living or to work at bricklaying workshops in East Azerbaijan Province and other regions. Moreover, occupation as a *kolbar* has spread dramatically in the absence of official employment in the region, involving even unemployed youngsters with high academic degrees.

The Iranian Arab are scattered in the Khuzestan, Bushehr, and Hormozgan provinces. International commerce and business has thrived in the region on the oil-richness of their settlements and the presence of important port cities in the Southwest and South. Therefore, labor force from other regions is admitted besides the local workforce. The occupation of the non-Arab there has caused a feeling of inequality and dissatisfaction with the government among the residents.

It can be concluded that the feeling of inequality and dissatisfaction has taken shape among the ethnic groups in the past, along with an assumption of the government's role in its development and persistence, and it has risen every day. The relevant research data suggest that the Baloch suffer the worst economic conditions and the severest dissatisfaction, and regard this mainly as a consequence of their dual ethnic-religious difference from the government. Other reasons for the inequality and dissatisfaction include the underdevelopment of the industrial sector, drought and water scarcity, illiteracy and lack of education, little possession of managerial occupations and provincial and national administrative positions, and remote, marginal geographic location. The consequences include increase in occupation as smugglers, social harm, and religious and ethnic extremism.

Two major scenarios have been presented for Iran in this study: social stability and social capital decline. If the current conditions persist, social capital will decline in various aspects, leading to social, economic, political, and cultural collapse. In the second scenario, however, social stability will be achieved, and it can therefore be referred to as the favorable scenario, depending on fundamental reforms in the economic, political, social, cultural, educational, medical, and other infrastructures and superstructures in association with the country's governmental institutions and ethnic groups.

Upon acceptance of the current conditions, the inequality and dissatisfaction will persist, and the interethnic gaps will continue to expand. The wider social, ethnic, and religious gaps in this scenario will cause the social system to collapse and enmity and conflict to occur among the social groups. As a consequence, the young generation will leave the country, particularly the elite, and the human resource crisis will persist.

In the second scenario, i.e., the favorable, futurist scenario, Iran will be in stable, sustainable cultural, social, economic, and political conditions. According to the obtained results, the country's eventual future trend will be known within the three years to come, specifying which of the above scenarios will be realized. Iran's overall prospect in the favorable conditions can be shown as follows.

Iran will be a country characterized by ethnic and religious diversity, from which national unity and solidarity originate. Political and cultural decisions will be made so as to develop interethnic relations based on national reconciliation. The political system will abandon the hierarchical social system and citizen-ranking in domestic policy-making by accepting ethnic identity as parallel to national identity. Moreover, national determination will take shape to fill the gaps and resolve the dominant discrimination.

To realize the above prospect, operating strategies have been formulated and proposed in various social, cultural, political, and legal fields based on the results of the interviews with the research participants.

As suggested by the participants, it is establishment of a government with the power to ensure enforcement of the pending Constitution articles that can provide a way out of the above dead ends and crises.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all fieldwork staff of research project “From Border to Border, *Comprehensive research study on identity and ethnicity in Iran*”, and in particular and Ismail Yazdeanpour and Danica Issell for help with selecting materials and for help with translation and proofreading. Finally, I am grateful to all of the research participants who generously gave their time and effort.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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